



## Cheat Sheet: How to Give Feedback to Get Results

Teachers spend hours providing thoughtful feedback but rarely see it lead to meaningful academic progress. In fact, studies have shown that in more than 1 of 3 instances, feedback can actually hinder performance. This is because feedback can induce a lot of anxiety for students and trigger perceptions of threat and mistrust in their brains. As a result, students often dismiss feedback or shut down altogether.

EAB examined research from the fields of education, business, and neuroscience to understand what teachers can do to make their feedback more actionable. Below are six simple principles that teachers can apply right away to reduce perceptions of threat and increase the impact of their feedback.

### **Principle 1: Limit Feedback to the 2-3 Most Critical Skills**

Teachers should not provide feedback on all content—only on what matters most. Narrowing feedback helps students process it without overwhelming their cognitive loads, which allows students to home in on their most influential development areas and can save teachers a lot of time. To implement this principle, communicate the 2-3 critical skills in advance of the assignment or assessment, and provide students concrete examples for how to improve upon those skills.

### **Principle 2: Allow Students 1-2 Opportunities to Apply Feedback Before Grading**

Separating feedback from a score encourages students to thoughtfully review feedback and not dismiss it. This principle also holds students accountable to applying feedback and signals that learning is an ongoing process. First, ask students to attach their original version to the final submission. Then, assign a score based on how thoroughly students applied feedback.

### **Principle 3: Focus Feedback on the Student's Work, Not the Student**

It's so important to depersonalize feedback by making sure it addresses the project and not student qualities. This prevents students from shutting down, increases the specificity of feedback, and promotes objectivity, which is key for ensuring trust between teacher and students. To apply this, avoid personal statements in favor of objective observations. For example:

- Say: "This paragraph needs additional evidence" or "Your essay flows well with transition statements."
- Not: "You need to be more persuasive" or "You are an excellent writer."

### **Principle 4: Avoid "Sandwiching" Critical Comments Between Positive Ones**

Many teachers look for a way to soften constructive or critical feedback by "sandwiching" it within praise. But doing this can trigger students to prepare for critical statements every time they're told something positive. This can also lead to overpraising, which makes positive statements seem disingenuous, hindering student trust and academic engagement. It's best to deliver critical feedback on its own and in the context of learning goals. To soften a critical statement and still maintain a positive tone, try asking it as a question or pointing to a helpful resource instead.

### **Principle 5: Explicitly Connect Feedback to High Standards**

Each time you provide feedback, explicitly convey two sentiments: high expectations and confidence in students' potential. Specifically, include a note like this one: "I'm giving you this feedback because I have very high expectations, and I know that you can reach them." This assures students that the critical feedback is linked to the teacher's high standards (not bias) and a genuine belief that students can achieve those standards. Though it sounds simple, on average, 79% of students who received this message attached to their feedback chose to apply it and revise their work.

### **Principle 6: Prompt Students to Seek Feedback on Assignments**

At the end of each assignment or assessment, simply pose the following question to students: "What two areas do you feel you need most help with?" Consider providing some examples in the beginning until students feel comfortable naming specific skills. And then be sure to address these skills when providing targeted feedback. By asking for it themselves, students are likely to feel an increased sense of ownership over feedback and have lower anxiety about receiving it.