

Feedback Guidelines by “*Quality Matters*”

One of the most important outcomes of a QM review is the feedback a faculty course developer receives about his or her online course. A course reviewer’s comments and recommendations should be **constructive, specific, measurable, sensitive, and balanced**.

Peer reviewers should not only make recommendations for changes, but they should also comment on the strengths of the course and features or activities that worked especially well in the online environment.

Constructive Try to offer solutions, not just identify problems.

Specific Include a specific example of what is being recommended.

Measurable Suggest ways that the instructor or instructional designer will know a recommendation has been implemented.

Sensitive Keep recommendations and comments on a positive note. Avoid the use of negative language. Use phrases like:

You may want to consider....

In my course, I

It would be helpful if....

It appears that....

You might indicate....

It might be useful to

I had a clear sense of...; however, I was confused about....

I'd like to suggest....

Balanced Point out strengths as well as weaknesses.

Giving and Receiving Feedback

Compiled by IDD staff

Team-based learning involves an energizing, collaborative flow of ideas and supports a "give and take" that has the potential to be intellectually invigorating. This assumes that all discussants are prepared to accept and offer constructive criticism, to question and be questioned. Intellectual disagreements and conflicts that do not involve sarcasm or personal attacks are necessary in order to formulate strong intellectual argumentation skills and improve understanding, and should be encouraged. Yet, such environments may also be somewhat intimidating, especially when asked to provide criticism to one's peers.

Use the following suggestions as a resource when providing feedback to your students or peers, as well as when preparing feedback tips for your students.

Tips for Giving Feedback

Be specific: Clearly relate your comments to the assignment goals, but don't simply provide the correct answer. Leading questions and observations will be more constructive than precise directives on what to do.

Be critical: The main point of feedback is to help students/peers improve their work. While it is important to be respectful and encouraging, being overly "nice" and "congratulatory" may miss an opportunity to help authors make substantive improvements to their work.

Be respectful and encouraging: While being critical is necessary to improve understanding, it is important to accomplish this without involving personal attacks or discouraging free expression. Do recognize and highlight positive aspects of the work and use these as constructive examples and a gateway to your critical comments.

Be thorough: Ideally, your feedback will make direct connections among specific aspects of the author's work and the original assignment's goals, directions, etc. Make sure you are clear on the goals, expectations, and implications of the original assignment/project. Read the response several times and take notes on unresolved questions, items that require more clarification, and specific requests for feedback made by the author.

Tips for Composing a Feedback Message

Value the work: State what you like about the work so far and identify the connections you see between the work and the assignment goals.

State concerns: Clearly identify aspects of the work that are off-topic, speculative, not directly informed by the assigned resources, redundant, and/or not-well-written.

Suggest solutions and prompt improvements: Share specific ideas that will help improve the work, point to specific places in the assigned resources that need to be (re)consulted/(re)addressed, and, if possible, offer examples. If student authors share a dilemma, guide them accordingly, without giving away the answer. Rather, ask questions that will guide them in discovering the answer.

Give the work a *positive reading*: Constructive criticism of a work manifests itself in what peer review circles refer to as a “positive reading” of the work. As a reminder, positive reading entails:

- i) agreeing/disagreeing with points raised and articulating the reasons for the reaction,
- ii) enhancing points of agreement by including additional information/clarifications and by fine-tuning their presentation, and
- iii) following up on points of disagreement by suggesting alternatives.

Tips for Receiving Feedback

Seek it: Resist the temptation to be so overly protective or critical of your work that you avoid feedback before final completion/submission. Rather, recognize the potential for improvement through collaboration and offer your work to others for early criticism.

Guide it: For early drafts, think about and be as explicit as possible on the type of feedback you are after and on the specific aspects of the work you would like commentary. For later drafts, offer questions that guide and most importantly encourage constructive criticism.

Let it sink in: After you receive feedback, take time and mull it over. Try to go past feeling defensive, a reaction that seems to often accompany reception of criticism, and see if/how the feedback you received can help you improve your work.

Value it: Anyone who has provided feedback, as an instructor, an informal/formal collaborator, or a formal peer reviewer, is well aware of the amount of time it takes to read and provide thoughtful commentary to someone else’s work. Good feedback (see the “tips for giving feedback,” above) is a gift from the sender to you and should be approached as such. Even if you don't agree with (or like) the feedback, try to accept it in the spirit in which it was given and recognize its potential to improve the quality of your work and, with it, your confidence and enthusiasm.

Follow up on it: In the words of instructional designer Larry Porter, "Feedback does not assume that the giver is totally right and the receiver wrong; instead, it is an invitation to interaction." Ask your colleagues/instructors for further clarification as needed, brainstorm ideas with them, and debate the pros and cons of any revision ideas.