

Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick's Seven Principles of Effective Feedback

Nicol, D. and Macfarlane-Dick, D. (2006) Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: A model and seven principles of good feedback practice. *Studies in Higher Education* 31(2), 199-218.

Here we review the Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick principles in more detail and suggest ways in which feedback practices could be enhanced in line with these. This framework offers a useful tool for reviewing your current practices and highlighting areas which could be enhanced.

1. Effective feedback helps clarify what good performance is – e.g. goals, criteria, expected standards

This principle emphasises that students can only achieve a learning goal if they understand it, take ownership and can assess progress. Evidence suggests there are often mismatches between tutor and student conceptions of goals and assessment criteria.

Ways that you could enhance feedback practices in line with this principle include:

- Providing clearer definitions of requirements within ILOs and assessment criteria;
- Providing students with exemplars with attached feedback;
- Increasing discussion and reflection about grading criteria in class;
- Involving students in assessment exercises where they mark/comment on other students' work using defined criteria;
- Workshops where students in collaboration with academics design their own assessment criteria for a piece of work.

2. Effective feedback facilitates the development of self-assessment and reflection in learning

This principle is centred on the idea that learners need to focus more on the gaps between their current performance and their personal aims. Curricula should provide students with opportunities for structured reflection, self-monitoring and judging progression to goals. Direct involvement by students in assessing their own work is shown to enhance learning and achievement.

Ways of enhancing feedback in line with this principle include:

- Students requesting type of feedback they would like to receive when handing in work (eg. Written, oral, audio);
- Students identify strengths/weaknesses in own work in relation to criteria before submitting for teacher feedback;
- Incorporating peer feedback to support development of self-assessment skills;
- Students reflect on achievements and select work in order to compile portfolio.

3. Effective feedback delivers high quality information to students about their learning

Good quality feedback helps students enhance their own performance. Feedback needs to be relevant to both the assessment task and to student needs. Be aware that students can receive too much feedback making it difficult to know what to act upon.

Ways of enhancing feedback in line with this principle include:

- Making sure that feedback is provided in relation to predefined criteria;
- Providing feedback soon after submission;
- Providing corrective advice not just information about strengths and weaknesses;
- Limiting the amount of feedback so it can be used by students;
- Providing feedback online so it can be accessed whenever required.

4. Effective feedback encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning

Feedback should not be seen as a one way process, but rather a dialogue where the student has opportunity to engage tutor in discussion about feedback. Peer dialogue around feedback can also be very useful giving students alternative perspectives, strategies and approaches.

Ways of enhancing feedback in line with this principle include:

- Reviewing feedback in tutorials;
- Asking students to find feedback comments that they found useful and explain how they helped;
- Having students give each other feedback on work in relation to published criteria before assignment submission;
- Peer feedback in group projects.

5. Effective feedback encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem

External feedback can have positive or negative impact on motivational beliefs and self-esteem. Frequent high-stakes assessment can lower the motivation to learn and leave students focussed on passing the test rather than learning goals. Feedback which focuses on the learning goals themselves leads to higher achievement.

Ways of enhancing feedback in line with this principle include:

- Ensure that feedback is supportive;
- Allocating time to allow students to rewrite selected pieces of work;
- Drafts and resubmissions;
- Providing marks on written work only after students have responded to feedback.

6. Effective feedback provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance

David Boud (2002) argues that unless students are able to use feedback to improve work, for example, by redoing the same assignment, it will not be possible to know whether feedback has been effective. He argues, as does the Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick article, that re-submissions should play a much more prominent role in learning.

Ways of enhancing feedback in line with this principle include:

- Increase opportunities for re-submission;
- Tutors to include action points alongside normal feedback provided – identifying what students should do next time to improve performance;
- Involving students in identifying own action points in class based on feedback received.

7. Effective feedback provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape teaching

Good feedback helps academics to develop and tailor their teaching or elements of the curriculum according to students' learning needs. Good feedback is a useful tool for teachers as well as students.

Ways of enhancing feedback in line with this principle include:

- Having students request the type of feedback they would like to receive when they submit an assignment;
- Having students identify where they are having difficulties when they submit assessed work;
- Embedding quick evaluation strategies at key points in teaching.