FIVE TIPS for DESIGNING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK STRATEGIES

In online courses, regular feedback on student work improves student engagement and enhances student learning. Providing feedback is also a form of communication that increases instructor presence and can build community among students.

Below are five tips for designing and providing feedback to students that is timely and effective and strategies for making feedback a sustainable part of faculty workload.

1. EFFECITVE FEEDBACK IS PLANNED FEEDBACK. *When designing assignments, design how and when you will provide feedback at the same time.*

Too often, instructors design an assignment but fail to design how and when they will provide feedback and what form that feedback will take.

Strategies:

1. Build in the time it will take to provide feedback when you design the assignment sequence.
2. Decide when you will provide it.
3. Be mindful of due dates and when your feedback will yield the biggest return on investment (ROI) for students. Make that the target feedback date.
4. Design the feedback tool at the same time: individual comments, group comments, rubrics, checklists, etc.

2. TEACH FEEDBACK LITERACY. *Teach students how to use the feedback you provide.*

Don't assume your students possess "feedback literacy," or a grasp of what they should do with the comments they receive. "Using feedback" is not the same thing as knowing how to "benefit from feedback."

Strategies:

- Spend time explaining where to find the feedback and how students should use it.
- Require students to submit a reflection about the feedback so that you know they have read it.
- Ask students to submit revisions plans BEFORE they revise a project so that you know they understand the feedback.

3. PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FEEDBACK THROUGHOUT THE STEPS OF A MAJOR PROJECT. *Don't assume all feedback must be summative and arrive at the end of the project. Small comments made at various stages of a project make a big difference.*

In a face-to-face course, instructors have class time to convey general feedback about student work, and they have repeated opportunities to do so. This type of common feedback process is easily lost in an online course.

Strategies:

- Have students submit small responses at milestone moments in the project: a potential topic, a list of sources, an outline, etc..
- Provide one or two sentence comments or even comments directed to the entire class to provide feedback that helps students move forward.

4. FEEDBACK CAN COME FROM STUDENTS. *Create multiple opportunities for student (peer) feedback.*

While students look forward to instructor feedback, they also learn from providing feedback *to their peers*. Students may resist the feedback they receive from peers, but if the activity is planned and students are guided, they can learn as much if not more from *giving feedback* than in receiving it.

Strategies:

- Students can provide feedback to each other in a formal, guided peer review
- Students can comment on each other's ideas in collaborative learning activities such as discussion forums, wikis, and blogs. Comments in Google Docs can also facilitate this type of peer feedback).

5. FEEDBACK SHOULD BE TIMELY but NOT ALWAYS INDIVIDUALIZED. *Be strategic about levels of feedback you will provide, such as individual, group, and/or class.*

Providing feedback on student work is a labor-intensive endeavor. While there are times when instructors need to comment on individual student work, feedback need not be so customized throughout the course.

Strategies:

- For individual comments, use tools that make commenting more efficient, such as TextExpander or the built-in macro tools in Windows and Macs.
- Create a bank of commonly used feedback comments to use
- Provide feedback to groups rather than individual students where appropriate
- Provide feedback to the entire class where appropriate
- Not all feedback needs to be written. Consider audio/video feedback as well.

IMPORTANT: Providing good feedback is much easier if you have a well-designed assignment and the instructional scaffolding to prepare students to respond to it.

Providing feedback on subpar student work always takes longer and is unsatisfying, so begin with clear instructions for the assignment and carefully design the scaffolding so that students have what they need to succeed.