

Understanding Feedback

Reading or listening to tutors' comments about your work, can be disheartening, embarrassing, and generally feel quite difficult. But however it makes you feel, it is important to remember that the feedback that you have been given is for one sole purpose: not to put you down, but to help you see the areas of work that you have done well in and the areas that you need to improve on.

Read the feedback carefully making a note of the areas where you have done well and the areas that you need to improve on. After you initial reading of the comments, read them again alongside the actual pieces of your work that they refer to. So if a comment states that your assignment's introduction was "powerful" or "clear" or "woolly"; read the introduction for yourself to make sure that you understand why the comment has been made. If after doing this you are not clear about any comment that you have received you can either contact the tutor to ask for clarification, but please be aware that many tutors will be on leave during the summer months. Or, alternatively, you can attend a re-assessment drop-in where someone from the Student Achievement Team will be able to go through the feedback with you, explain what it means and advise you on what you now need to do.

Typical feedback comments and what they mean.

"You hide behind quotations": Although it is important to include quotations in your work it is also important that you do not rely solely on them. Remember it is your piece of work and the quotations used should be used to support your argument. Your voice and your arguments should be heard in the assignment. Do not let your assignment become merely a means for showcasing other people's work and expertise. Your tutor wants to know what you think about a particular topic, not just what other people have thought or think.

"Your reference list is light-weight": This means that you have not used a large and/or varied enough range of resources. Your reference list should include a wide range of relevant sources: primary and secondary, general and specific. Do not rely just on books and avoid including a number of general introductory texts. Assignments are as much about your ability to research as they are about your ability to write. Failure to use an adequate amount of sources is often due to students not being confident in using the library. If you are not sure how to locate the books or journals that you need, speak to your academic liaison librarian. They are an excellent source of information and are there to help you. They have an office on the first floor of Peirson library.

"You need to pay attention to spelling and grammar": This comment can feel petty but it is not. Accurate spelling and grammar are important aspects of academic writing. In the rush to meet deadlines proof reading is often neglected but it is an invaluable tool for spotting and correcting mistakes.

"You have failed to address the question": Make sure that before you start researching and writing that you are clear about what the question is asking you to do. Make a plan of how you intend to answer it and stick with it. Sometimes students start off well in their assignments but then deviate by including unnecessary or irrelevant information. Return regularly to the question to check that what you are reading or writing is relevant to the question.



“Plagiarism is evident”: A common assumption made by many students is that to avoid accusations of plagiarism all one needs to do is reference any quotations that are used in their work. Whilst this may be part of what you need to do, it is not all. You will also need to reference ideas. So for instance you may want to argue in your work that children diagnosed with dyspraxia are less likely to be selected to play in team games at school than children who are not dyspraxic, but you need to remember that there are other scholars who also share the same opinion. To avoid plagiarism you will need to declare that there are other scholars who share the same view and cite who they are. You do not have to cite all of them, but you must make reference to at least one or two.

“Poor or sloppy referencing”: This is usually given to students whose work demonstrates that they can correctly reference their work but who fail to do so on every occasion. It is often a sign that work has been rushed or that when making notes only part of the information needed for correctly referencing has been taken. E.g. place of publication of a book or the page numbers of a journal are missing etc. Always make sure that when you are taking notes that you include everything you will need to correctly reference your work. This will also enable you to quickly locate the source again should you need to.

“Failed to use the correct conventions”: This usually refers to the format of the work that you have produced. Make sure that your work is written in the required font size and format, that it is correctly spaced and that it is of the required length. Guidance on conventions should be available from your course or module handbook. If you are not sure how to do things like change margins, space lines or count words, pick up a copy of the Basic I.T. booklet from the library or download it from the study skills web page.

“Your argument lacks depth”: Often a sign that students do not fully understand the subject that they are writing about or that they do, but can not be bothered to go into greater detail. For your argument to be persuasive you will need to be able to demonstrate that you have considered other possible explanations etc, but that you have chosen your particular stance because of alternative evidence that supports your argument. Remember that you need to be able to demonstrate not just what you think, but why you think it.

“Your essay lacks structure”: Here the content is usually good but the structure is poor. It often indicates that a plan has not been used and that the writing merely follows the direction of the thoughts as they occur in your head. Whilst these thoughts may be excellent they will need some structure to hold them all together and to make sure that they all follow each other in a logical manner. Ideally each paragraph should include one new item of information and the reason why it follows on from the previous paragraph should be evident.

“A reasonable attempt”: This indicates that you are on the right lines but that the standard of your work needs to be improved. It is often a comment given to second year students who submit work that in their first year would have given them a reasonable grade. As you progress on your course you will be expected to demonstrate a greater knowledge of your subject and the ability to be able to write in a style that reflects the level of your course.

