University of Worcester

Using feedback to improve your work

Why use feedback?

Imagine you have made a speech at a wedding or family event, how would you know that you had done it well? Generally, people will tell you after your speech whether they enjoyed it and which bits they enjoyed the most. This is feedback, without it, it is difficult to judge your performance, with it – you can identify both your strong and weak points, and importantly, improve your performance for next time.

So, if you were then asked to make another speech, you could include the aspects that people praised, and work to improve anything that people did not enjoy. By using the comments and feedback from your first speech, your next speech would be better.

What is feedback?

Feedback in the academic realm can take many forms, but each can be used to improve your performance. Some of the different types of feedback include:

- Written comments from your tutor, usually attached to your assignments
- Verbal comments from your tutor associated with your work
- Generic feedback from tutors covering particular strengths/weaknesses found in the work of a particular student group
- Comments from other students about your work (peer feedback)
- Your own comments and reflections on your work (self assessment & feedback)

How can I use feedback to improve my work?

1   First of all, collect it! A large proportion of marked coursework is never collected – this means you are missing out on a great opportunity to get your tutor's personalised advice and guidance which is focused on you and your work. Remember, if your tutor identifies any weak points in your work, these points are not about you, but your work. Your tutor is simply trying to help you to improve your performance.

2   Read the feedback in conjunction with your essay/assignment to see how your tutor's comments relate to your work, then:
      - Highlight any strong points
      - Make a note of any areas where the tutor has suggested improvements
      - Discuss with your tutor any elements of the feedback that you are not clear about.

3   Having read the feedback from your last piece of work, you might find it useful to ask yourself the following two questions:
      - What did I do well in this assignment that I should continue to do in my next piece of work?
      - What one thing do I need to do to improve my future work?

4   The next step is to think about and plan how you will improve. You could do this by talking to your lecturer or personal academic tutor, or perhaps by doing some background reading on the subject/topic or by attending a study skills workshop that focuses on the skills that you need to improve, such as essay writing or referencing.

The checklist overleaf is designed to help you to think about how you use your tutor's feedback. You can use it to help you to make the most of feedback in the future.

Reflecting on tutor feedback on your essay/assignment

Please tick one or more comments as appropriate	This is what I did	I would have liked to do this, but didn't manage it	I didn't think this was necessary	This was just not possible for me	I'll do this next time	This did not apply in this case
I read the tutor's comments carefully.						
I read my essay again to see how the tutor's comments applied.						
I noted things I needed to do before the next assignment.						
I looked back again at the assignment brief to see the extent to which my essay had complied with it.						
I looked forward to the next assignment to see which tutor comments might apply to my preparation for the next one.						
I followed up tutor advice on further reading.						
I used the feedback to check up on the things I did best in my essay, so I can build on my strengths in my next essay.						
I followed up tutor advice on my own writing practices.						
I shared my feedback with one or more other students to see how the commentary on my work compared with theirs.						
I considered aspects of my approach on which I would especially ask for feedback next time.						
I asked my tutor for further clarification on comments which I didn't understand.						
I identified any feedback comments which I felt were unjustified, so that I could find out more about them from my tutor in discussion.						

Taken from 'Making feedback work' by Phil Race, available at http://www.phil-race.com/files/feedbackcom.doc [accessed 20.02.08].