I Evaluate Students and Give Feedback

Do you grade students on their performance and offer feedback on how they can improve?

What you choose to evaluate in your courses and how you critique students' work can have an impact on their learning as well as long-term learning practices and study and work habits[i].

Research has shown that getting the right kind of feedback helps students stay engaged. Feedback is most constructive when it is relevant, accessible, consequential and timely[ii]. Further, providing feedback that guides students toward mastery, rather than toward a fixed conception of performance, helps sustain motivation[iii].

Whether you are grading papers, lab reports, tests, exams or other assignments, all students can benefit from evaluation and feedback that is clearly communicated.

Tips on Evaluation

- Identify and clearly express the essential course content

- Recognize there is flexibility, or multiple methods in the way that students can express understanding of the essential course content

- Clearly communicate all deadlines, assignments and expectations well in advance

- Ensure ample time between assignments for students to receive feedback; consider the time required for your students to complete assignments and for TAs and yourself to mark and return assignments

- Consider having multiple means of student evaluation: e.g. exams, presentations, papers, etc; there may be more than one appropriate way of meeting and measuring learning objectives

- Design course assignments so that they are integrated; long-term projects that build skills and understanding through a series of smaller cumulative assignments are most beneficial for student learning

- If you use multi-part assignments, make sure students are required to build upon past work

- Consider involving students in self and peer assessment on both learning processes and outcome; use accessible online conferencing, e-mail or file exchange to organize peer review of assignments

- When grading written work, use rubrics to ensure consistency of assessment criteria and feedback

- Use accessible web-based practice exercises/quizzes with automated marking for students to self-assess their understanding; give explanations for correct and incorrect responses

- Use an exam review game to demonstrate the type of questions that will be asked; give students feedback on how well they have learned the material

- Use e-mail or the course website to facilitate the submission and return of assignments

- If you post grades, use Courselink

- Avoid allowing external factors such as penmanship to affect your grading

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Tips on Giving Feedback[iv]

- The most accessible and useful feedback is frequent, timely and specific

- Allow students to contact you by more than one method: office hours, e-mail, phone (during office hours), if they would like more in depth feedback or would like to discuss their performance

- Feedback that is typed and delivered electronically by e-mail or through the "track changes" feature of Microsoft Word is accessible to students with perceptual disabilities. Comments written on a paper copy of an assignment are inaccessible to many students with a range of perceptual disabilities.

- Provide informative and prompt feedback on both the student's demonstrated strengths and areas for improvement; ensure the privacy of this feedback

- Encourage mastery of material and the use of specific supports and strategies in the face of a challenge

- Provide feedback that is substantive and informative, rather than comparative or competitive

- Identify patterns of errors and wrong answers, and demonstrate how to incorporate evaluation into positive strategies for future success

- Consider allowing students to turn in components or drafts of large projects for feedback before the final project is due[v]

- Give explanations for correct and incorrect responses if you're giving computer-generated feedback, or using accessible web-based practice exercises, quizzes with automated marking for students to self-assess their understanding

- Help students set up study groups or set up an accessible online forum for students to collaborate, share and conduct peer evaluation of each others' work, either formally or informally

- Meet with students who don't do well on graded work to see if there are strategies for overcoming the problems identified

More resources on evaluation and student feedback:

National Centre on Universal Design for Learning, Checkpoint 8.4: Mastery-Oriented Feedback.

DO-IT Centre at the University of Washington, Universal Design of Instruction (UDI): Definition, Principles, Guidelines, and Examples.

University of Toronto at Scarborough, Universal Instructional Design: Creating an Accessible Curriculum.

To obtain this document in an alternative format, please contact:

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[i] National Centre on Universal Design for Learning. Checkpoint 8.4: Mastery-Oriented Feedback.
[ii] *Ibid*.
[iii] *Ibid*.
[iv] Selections taken directly from the Guelph UID Project, A Faculty Workbook, the National Centre on Universal Design for Learning, *ibid,* and the University of Toronto at Scarborough, Universal Instructional Design: Creating an Accessible Curriculum.
[v] Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology (DO-IT) Centre at the University of Washington. Universal Design of Instruction (UDI): Definition, Principles, Guidelines, and Examples.