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# Analyzing Student Feedback

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Student feedback can be an excellent way to find out how a class went, but how do you interpret the data you get? While collecting feedback is important, it is only the first step in the evaluation and improvement process. In this post, we review some strategies for interpreting and analyzing student feedback.

## Sources of Feedback

Course evaluations are a great source of student feedback, but there are other ways to find out what your students thought about their learning experience. Learning Innovation offers [resources and consultation](#) to help you pick the right way to collect feedback based on your goals. Don't overlook grades as a source of feedback; if there are specific assignments or exam topics that students struggled with, that is valuable feedback about where you can make revisions.

## Contextualizing Student Feedback

Most instructors know that student feedback, especially feedback given on official course evaluations, is [significantly correlated](#) with instructor characteristics such as age, race, gender, and and perceived sexual orientation. One way to [mitigate this](#) is to tell students why their feedback is important and how it will be used.

[Research](#) has also found an association between student feedback and course performance. Students who earn higher grades are more likely to give positive course feedback while students who under-performed are more likely to be critical. Contextualizing student feedback can help you evaluate whether students are genuinely expressing frustration about something in your class or frustration about their performance in your class.

## Analyzing Feedback

While reading through your student feedback can suggest some initial areas for improvement and highlight things that worked really well, you should explore your data systematically to ensure that the key findings don't get overlooked. Looking only at average scores or long comments gives you little information about consensus opinions. Three strategies for analyzing your data are:

1. **Look for points of divergence** – if you have high ratings across several domains but one is low, that likely indicates an acute aspect of your class where students struggle. Alternatively, lower scores across many areas could reflect course policies or practices that make learning more difficult generally.
2. **Focus on trends and not single points in time** – If you see a relative change in feedback from one semester to the next, look for specific things in your class that changed, such as assignments, pedagogies or topics.
3. **Segment your data** – when possible, separate your data to find places where specific groups may be having different experiences, such as students with prior experience in a subject finding the course material too easy. This also lets you analyze whether negative feedback is related to student performance (e.g., only students who performed poorly gave negative feedback).

## Making Changes

Once you have collected and analyzed your feedback, the last step is to do something with it. While you should certainly try to address acute problems like unclear assignments or particularly confusing lessons, not all discomfort is problematic. Researchers have found that [discomfort can be a part of the learning experience](#) when managed and facilitated in ways that promote self-reflection and growth. So if your students say that your class pushed them outside of their comfort zone, that's probably a good thing.

Finally, keep in mind that all instructors – even the best – get negative and even personally hurtful student feedback. Most students are never taught how to give constructive and productive feedback on a learning experience, so they sometimes miss the mark when they are asked to do so. Ignore feedback that is either unhelpful or inappropriate; it can be helpful to [partner with an experienced colleague](#) when reading your feedback. Learning Innovation's team of consultants can also work with you to analyze your student feedback and focus on constructive information.

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