

Class Notes: The Four Elements of Effective Feedback

Effective feedback isn't just about giving information; it's about guiding learners toward improved performance. Only about one-third of feedback results in positive change, so how we give feedback matters.

These four elements make feedback purposeful, actionable, and learning-centered.

1. Specific

- What It Means:
 - Feedback should clearly point out what needs improvement and how to improve it.
- Why It Matters:
 - Vague praise ("Good job") or criticism ("That was wrong") doesn't guide improvement.
 - Learners benefit from knowing exactly what behaviors or decisions need to change.
 - Examples:
 - Not helpful: "You need to do better in your reports."
 - Helpful: "Your report was missing the conclusion summary. Try adding a one-paragraph recap at the end."

2. Prioritized

- What It Means:
 - Focus feedback on the most critical areas, especially in complex or performance-heavy tasks.
- Why It Matters:
 - Too much feedback can overwhelm learners.
 - Prioritizing helps learners focus their energy where it matters most.
 - Examples:
 - Choose 3–5 key comments rather than correcting everything.
 - Consider:
 - Stage of learning (e.g., beginner vs. advanced)
 - Urgency (e.g., safety, legality)
 - Transferability (can this be applied broadly?)

3. Timely

- What It Means:
 - Give feedback at the right moment, depending on learner readiness and task complexity.
- Why It Matters:
 - Immediate feedback can prevent reinforcement of errors.
 - But learners also need space to recognize and fix mistakes on their own.
 - Tips:
 - Intervene only if:
 - Learner doesn't notice the error
 - Multiple failed attempts have occurred
 - Early-stage learners may need quicker feedback than more experienced ones.

4. Balanced

- What It Means:
 - Include both affirming (positive) and adjustive (constructive) feedback, without relying on the “feedback sandwich.”
- Why It Matters:
 - Positive feedback tells learners what’s working and should be repeated.
 - Constructive feedback guides what needs to be changed and ideally, how.
 - Frame it like this:
 - “Keep doing [X] because it’s working well.”
 - “Adjust [Y] by trying [Z] for better results.”

Final Thought

Effective feedback helps learners self-correct, self-direct, and grow. As instructors or peers, we must be intentional about how we deliver it.