



## Career Guide

[Career development](#) > How To Give and Take Constructive Criticism (With Examples)

# How To Give and Take Constructive Criticism (With Examples)

[Indeed Editorial Team](#)

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Giving and receiving constructive criticism can be difficult. Whether you're performing an annual review or implementing an employee recognition program, giving and receiving constructive criticism can be crucial to the growth and development of your organization. Here are some strategies for delivering constructive criticism that will help you give and receive actionable feedback.

In this article, we discuss what constructive criticism is, how to give it effectively, and what not to say when giving criticism and receiving constructive criticism.



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## What is constructive criticism?

Constructive criticism is feedback that provides specific, actionable suggestions. Rather than providing general advice, constructive criticism gives specific recommendations on how to make positive improvements. Constructive criticism is clear, to the point and easy to put into action.

## What are the benefits of constructive criticism?

Constructive criticism can be a part of implementing improvement strategies to help employees set and achieve their work goals. It can also create a positive atmosphere where the staff is comfortable asking questions, requesting assistance and offering their own feedback and ideas. Ultimately, constructive criticism can provide ways for your employees to better understand your expectations and how to meet and even exceed them.

Related: [A Guide To Giving Constructive Criticism](#)

## 5 tips for giving constructive criticism

Delivering constructive criticism can be an effective starting point for implementing improvement plans, setting objectives for developing skills and increasing overall growth in the workplace. Consider the following strategies for giving direct and actionable feedback:

- Consider using the sandwich method.
- Use the “I” language strategy.
- Focus on the action or behavior.
- Include specific positive praise.
- Provide actionable feedback.
- Use empathy

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### Consider using the sandwich method

The sandwich method delivers constructive criticism in three distinct layers. With this strategy, an evaluation or employee review begins with a compliment. The employee has done well before discussing which aspects of their performance need improvement. The critique is then concluded with another specific praise.

Using the sandwich strategy can be an effective way to deliver actionable feedback to your employees. Consider approaching your employee review or meeting with the sandwich

strategy by opening your conversation with praise about a success, high work ethic or met objective. Focus on offering productive advice and plans for improvement and offer your assistance before closing your conversation.

**Tip:** Consider writing out your feedback by listing what your positive praise will be, the area of improvement you will focus on and another specific praise for something done well or above expectations.

**What to say:** *"The opening of the presentation gave a clear overview of what KPIs you plan on covering this quarter. However, the supporting outline of how the KPIs would be tracked seemed to be missing some key information like the target objectives and strategies that would be applied. If you revise your outline to include one to two specific objectives that the team will set and what strategies they will use to monitor progress, it would help to flesh out your project plan. The overall structure of your argument is strong, though, and by including the information we discussed, I feel like it would be a stronger presentation."*

**What not to say:** *"The supporting outline of how the KPIs would be tracked seemed to be missing key information so it was confusing. The overall structure of your argument was strong but it wasn't convincing because of the missing information."*

## Use the "I" language strategy

Using phrases like "I think," "I feel" and "I'd suggest" makes sure that the person receiving the feedback understands that the criticism is them as a person. It also reinforces your point of view and helps the person see the situation. This will make it easier for them to reflect on their own behavior from himself and see where you are coming from.

When you use "I" statements to deliver constructive criticism, the chances for miscommunication are eliminated. Your personal outputs affect your role and how it fits into the bigger picture. This language offers a way to open communication and keep the conversation.

**Tip:** When using "I" language, focus on how your colleague's actions affect their job responsibilities, both positively and negatively. Make sure to include opportunities for improvement and offer your mentorship.

**What to say:** *"I loved your idea for a new product implementation, however, I felt like the plan outline would be clearer if there were some concrete examples of the strategies we would use to carry out production."*



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**What not to say:** "Your plan outline has to have some concrete examples of the strategies we would use."

Read more: [Active Listening Skills: Definition and Examples](#)

## Focus on the action or behavior

When delivering constructive criticism it is important to focus on the specific action, outcome or behavior that you would like to see improve. For example, if one of your employees is not meeting call quotas for daily or weekly objectives, you would focus on what plan of action could be taken to help your employees increase their productivity and meet their quotas.

Similarly, when focusing on the action and improvement you would like to see occur, consider using non-specific language such as "the numbers," "the performance" or "the project" rather than "your numbers," "your performance" and "your project." While it is always important for employees to accept accountability, consistently delivering criticism that emphasizes "you" rather than the situation can sometimes lead to less morale and productivity overall.

**Tip:** Consider writing out the specific items or actions that you would like to address and see improve before delivering your constructive criticism

**What to say:** "Your presentation went well, I appreciate the effort you put into it and the evidence for your request to increase your department's budget for new hires."

**What not to say:** "Your presentation did not go well, and I don't think it's good enough for new hires."



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## Include specific positive praise

Offer specific praise for an employee's positive performance, such as meeting or exceeding expectations or another success or achievement. This helps employees to focus on the tasks and responsibilities at hand and strive to meet or exceed above standards. Then, they can apply those strengths to plans of improvement you may implement for weaker skills or performance. Additionally, praising your employees often and when merited can increase employee morale and motivation.

**Tip:** Consider focusing on two exceptional actions for every one critique you deliver when implementing constructive criticism.

**Example:** “The speech was exceptionally strong and well written. However, I felt like it could have been more effective had there been more emotion in it. You spoke very well and steady, especially through your introduction and closing, though with more emotion and tone the audience would have been more engaged.”

**What not to say:** “Your speech had no emotion. I found it hard to pay attention and my mind kept wandering.”

Related: [The Importance of Positive Feedback and How to Deliver It to Others](#)

## Provide actionable feedback

When implementing constructive criticism, it is important to offer feedback that your employees can put into action immediately to achieve new objectives and improve their performance, productivity, skills or other areas. Consider discussing strategies that both you and the employee can use to work toward improvement.

For instance, if employee productivity is low, you could create a daily checklist or spreadsheet to outline urgent tasks, important tasks and nice-to-have tasks. Then, employees can be held accountable for moving through their task lists and making sure expectations are met by initialing, writing checkmarks and having managers monitor the improvement. Likewise, you may consider setting incentives for meeting quotas or exceeding standards.



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**Tip:** Focus on one improvement area at a time and move those development plans into action.



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**What to say:** “Although tasks are being completed on time, the quality of work is not what it needs to be. Let’s figure out how we can improve quality without impacting our timelines. What would you feel if we typed out an improvement plan for each task? That way we can monitor how you are moving forward and make sure management, then the outline can allow us to move forward with confidence.”

**What not to say:** “Just because we’ve moved on to the next project doesn’t mean the quality of work can suffer. You need to figure out how to deliver the same quality work on a shorter deadline.”

## Use empathy

An important key to constructive criticism is empathizing with the person who is receiving the feedback. Put yourself in their position and think about how you would want to hear the criticism and what specific words would be most helpful to you.

**Tip:** Consider what would be helpful to the other person.

**What to say:** "I thought your presentation today included a lot of important metrics that I hadn't considered before and it helped me understand our company's financial health in a new way. But I was confused by two of the new metrics you introduced in the revenue projection and it would help me to see the exact formulas you used so I can understand the role these metrics are playing in our revised budget."

**What not to say:** "Your presentation was confusing and you introduced a lot of new numbers that didn't make sense to me so I can't trust your final projections."

**Read more:** [Empathic Skills: Definitions and Examples](#)

## Constructive criticism vs destructive criticism

There are key differences between criticism that helps someone improve and criticism that is only discouraging. Here are some main points to remember:

- Constructive criticism encourages someone to improve
- Destructive criticism discourages someone from improving
- Constructive criticism is specific and includes solutions
- Destructive criticism is vague and confusing
- Constructive criticism is delivered in a respectful manner
- Destructive criticism often includes harsh language



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## How to receive constructive criticism

It's important to show colleagues and supervisors that you are open to learning new things and doing things in a different way. Being able to graciously accept criticism will make other people feel comfortable in giving you feedback and will help you grow in your career. Keep these things in mind when receiving feedback:

- Don't take criticism personally
- Don't get defensive
- Listen to what the other person is saying
- Don't interrupt the person speaking
- Ask questions if you're unclear about something that was said
- Use empathy to hear the other person's point of view

**Read more:** [Steps To Handle Criticism at Work ↗](#)

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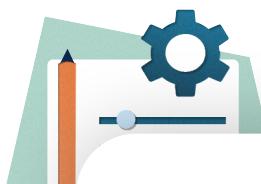
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