# Feedback: What It Is and How to Use It Effectively in a Digital World

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#### **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic presented the challenge of simultaneously moving towards hybrid and blended teaching provision, and designing assessments that, whilst still meeting the learning outcomes, were appropriate for the new learning environment. This allowed for speeding up the process of completely rethinking the purpose and format of assessments as well as the most useful way to deliver good quality feedback. This paper discusses the implementation of a more inclusive form of digital feedback in the Psychology Undergraduate (UG) Program in this new digital teaching and learning environment.

Keywords: Digital Feedback, Feedforward Feedback, Rubrics, Assessment



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#### Introduction

The purpose and function of feedback is to ensure consistent practice and promote its use as an aid to students' learning in both short- and long-term, encourage the development and use of both academic and transferable skills rather than simply focusing on the assessment content, and to increase students' reflection and awareness of learning processes by allowing for metacognition (Gibbs & Simpson, 2005; The Higher Education Academy, 2013). While feedback tends to focus solely on the students' current performance, it is crucial to include a feedforward element which allows a shift in focus from the here-and-now to what is ahead. Feedforward presents constructive guidance on how to improve, promotes future development and enhancement in subsequent assessments, irrespective of type or topic (Hattie, 2009; Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

What do students want from feedback? According to the National Union of Students Charter on Assessment and Feedback (2010), students want feedback to be delivered on time, not be exclusive to particular assessments (e.g. in some Higher Education (HE) institutions feedback is not provided for exams); to be able to have face-to-face, individual discussions on the feedback provided for their assessments; and to be involved in the decision making of how the feedback is delivered.

There are many different forms of feedback, which are not necessarily provided in the traditional way (i.e. linked to an assessment); all of them valid but not always considered by students as 'feedback'. Specific, targeted, feedback from the marker such as written summative comments on an assessment, in-text annotations on an assessment, indication of performance against various criteria on a marking grid (i.e. rubric matrix), written feedback using a feedback template form, oral feedback, etc. Feedback from people other than the marker such as students commenting on each other's work (i.e. peer-feedback), students' own evaluation of their work (i.e. self-feedback), and academic skills advisors from their own HE institution. Informal feedback consisting of 'in-the-corridor' conversations with academics, comments from academics within the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), reference to assessed work as part of a teaching session. Automated feedback including tests/quizzes within the VLE and self-assessment tasks. Generic feedback, which could be in the form of whole group feedback, answer sheets, or coverage of assessment topics within teaching sessions.

### **Our Solution**

The challenge was to design assessments that would still meet the learning outcomes but were adequate for the new, online learning environment.

In the Psychology UG Program, a rubric template was created for each year that is adaptable to each individual assessment, not too specific and not too general. The goal was to provide good quality feeding-forward feedback. This rubric consists of four sections (Figure 1): (i) A rubric matrix that includes the relevant criteria for that assessment against the different grade descriptors from 'outstanding' (A\*/90-100%) to 'unacceptable' (F/below 30%). This allows students to clearly understand where they are in the assessment (i.e. what they have done so far and what they will need to do in order to achieve a higher grade on that specific criterion); (ii) Written feedback with three strengths and three areas for improvement, which need to be sufficiently detailed to allow the student to understand what they did well (so they can do it again), and what requires improvement (including clear guidance on how to achieve that); (iii) A statement that includes the name and contact of the marker and how relevant it is to contact

them (whether it is critical or a 'nice to-do'); and (iv) Further sources of support that are applicable to the students' work (highlighted from a list of available support at the HE institution).

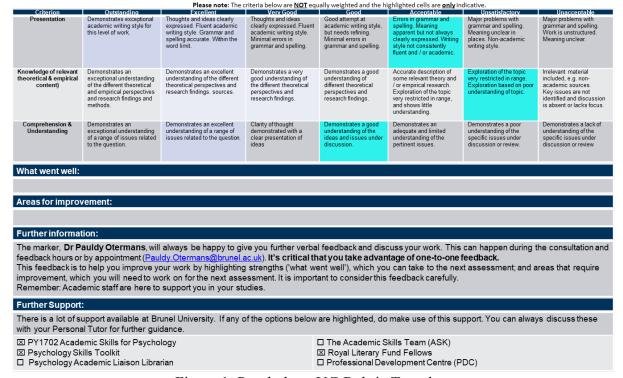


Figure 1: Psychology UG Rubric Template

In addition, the Psychology UG Program includes teaching sessions specifically on the topic of feedback to increase awareness amongst students on what feedback is, what to do with it, and where to go for further guidance and support.

## **Conclusion**

The next steps for 2021/22 include revising the rubric template based on student and staff feedback, as well as any advances in the existing body of knowledge. The teaching sessions on the topic of feedback will continue to be delivered and will now also include a section on the rubric.

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