

*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 meta-cognition (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).

**Please note:** The criteria below are **NOT** equally weighted and the highlighted cells are **only** indicative.

Criterion	Outstanding	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Adequate	Unsatisfactory	Unacceptable						
<b>Presentation</b>	Demonstrates exceptional academic writing style for this level of work.	Thoughts and ideas clearly expressed. Fluent academic writing style. Grammar and spelling accurate. Within the word limit.	Thoughts and ideas clearly expressed. Fluent academic writing style. Minimal errors in grammar and spelling.	Good attempt at academic writing style, but needs refining. Minimal errors in grammar and spelling.	Errors in grammar and spelling. Meaning apparent but not always clearly expressed. Writing style not consistently fluent and / or academic.	Major problems with grammar and spelling. Meaning unclear in places. Non-academic writing style.	Major problems with grammar and spelling. Work is unstructured. Meaning unclear.						
<b>Knowledge of relevant theoretical &amp; empirical content)</b>	Demonstrates an exceptional understanding of the different theoretical and empirical perspectives and research findings and methods.	Demonstrates an excellent understanding of the different theoretical perspectives and research findings. sources.	Demonstrates a very good understanding of the different theoretical perspectives and research findings.	Demonstrates a good understanding of different theoretical perspectives and research findings.	Accurate description of some relevant theory and / or empirical research. Exploration of the topic very restricted in range, and shows little understanding.	Exploration of the topic very restricted in range. Exploration based on poor understanding of topic.	Irrelevant material included, e.g. non-academic sources. Key issues are not identified and discussion is absent or lacks focus.						
<b>Comprehension &amp; Understanding</b>	Demonstrates an exceptional understanding of a range of issues related to the question.	Demonstrates an excellent understanding of a range of issues related to the question.	Clarity of thought demonstrated with a clear presentation of ideas	Demonstrates a good understanding of the ideas and issues under discussion.	Demonstrates an adequate and limited understanding of the pertinent issues.	Demonstrates a poor understanding of the specific issues under discussion or review.	Demonstrates a lack of understanding of the specific issues under discussion or review						
<b>What went well:</b>													
<b>Areas for improvement:</b>													
<b>Further information:</b>													
<p>The marker, <b>Dr Pauly Otermans</b>, will always be happy to give you further verbal feedback and discuss your work. This can happen during the consultation and feedback hours or by appointment (<a href="mailto:Pauly.Otermans@brunel.ac.uk">Pauly.Otermans@brunel.ac.uk</a>). <b>It's critical that you take advantage of one-to-one feedback.</b> This feedback is to help you improve your work by highlighting strengths ('what went well'), which you can take to the next assessment; and areas that require improvement, which you will need to work on for the next assessment. It is important to consider this feedback carefully. Remember: Academic staff are here to support you in your studies.</p>													
<b>Further Support:</b>													
<p>There is a lot of support available at Brunel University. If any of the options below are highlighted, do make use of this support. You can always discuss these with your Personal Tutor for further guidance.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PY1702 Academic Skills for Psychology</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> The Academic Skills Team (ASK)</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Psychology Skills Toolkit</td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Royal Literary Fund Fellows</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Psychology Academic Liaison Librarian</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Professional Development Centre (PDC)</td> </tr> </table>								<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PY1702 Academic Skills for Psychology	<input type="checkbox"/> The Academic Skills Team (ASK)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Psychology Skills Toolkit	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Royal Literary Fund Fellows	<input type="checkbox"/> Psychology Academic Liaison Librarian	<input type="checkbox"/> Professional Development Centre (PDC)
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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.

## References

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