

Efficient and Effective Feedback: Lesson Study Investigating Feedback on Students' Writing

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The Lesson: Students get feedback on a first draft of a significant writing assignment, they prepare revision.

Four goals:

1. Make giving feedback on writing efficient.
2. Improve the quality of feedback / make it useful.
3. Make feedback consistent with expectations.
4. Develop a process conducive for pedagogical growth.

Course: BUS 230 Business and Economics Research Methods and Communication

- *Semester-long research project*, involving (1) developing a research question, (2) literature review, (3) collecting data by developing and administering a survey, (4) data analysis, (5) written and oral presentation.
- Students work in groups of size 3-5.

Focus of analysis:

- Early - middle semester
- Students have just turned in first draft of the introduction / literature review section of their final paper.
- Scaffolding assignments already completed:
 - Refining their research question
 - Annotated bibliography
 - Informal research proposal

Feedback design:

- End comments, as opposed to margin comments or local corrections.
- Minimal feedback that guides self discovery.
- Feedback sets priorities for students.
- Letters (about one page) are written to each group.
 - Thank students for the effort on this significant project.
 - Commend students for aspects of the paper done well.
 - Makes suggestions for revision priorities.

Efficient Feedback:

- Developed a database of pre-prepared comments
 - Comments are 1-3 sentences.
 - Created over 50 to choose from.
- Entered them all into text-expanding software
 - Software: Breevy for Windows, TextExpander for Mac.
 - Each comment is mapped to a quick keystroke.
 - Even the body of the letter is assigned a keystroke.
 - Keystroke the body of the letter + Keystroke 3-5 comments.
 - An entire letter can be written in a couple seconds with 4-6 keystrokes.
- Comments are aligned to seven learning goals:
 1. Clearly state the purpose of the research
 2. Ask all the relevant questions
 3. Provide relevant background information
 4. Use existing evidence to motivate your research
 5. Introduce your reader to how you answer your research question
 6. Communicate your message in a clear and meaningful way
 7. Communicate effectively by not distracting the reader with grammar and spelling errors

Benefits of this Feedback Design:

- Giving feedback is fast
- Feedback is consistent with expectations that are communicated to students.
- Feedback can be improved upon. Conducive to pedagogical growth.

Observations:

1. Many students resisted feedback
 - Some students postponed doing meaningful work.
 - Some students ignored feedback and discussion prompts
 - Some students regarded the paper as complete
 - Even students that identified significant revision ideas concentrated on local corrections.
2. Many students already identified shortcomings
 - They knew the problem, but not how to address it
 - Maybe comments could get revision thought processes going:
 - Suggest a brainstorming exercise
 - Pose questions: Answer students with a question
 - Need to complement letters with face-to-face consultations
3. Comment-specific observations
 - Students did not understand comments on purpose
 - Students reported a specific purpose early in intro, nonetheless spoke to multiple purposes.
 - Students brought up background information that addresses issues not related to purpose.
 - Students stated a purpose that was not appropriate.
 - Student perceived some comments as contradictory.
 - Good organization, difficult to follow.
 - Discussion prompts in Spring 2013 may make valuable feedback.
4. Some successes!
 - Discussed paper as one connected product, individual components speaking to one purpose
 - Several comments were well understood:
 - Improve organization, consider making an outline.
 - Improve quantity of citations and background evidence.
 - Improve transitions.
 - Introduce your methodology.
 - Grammar / spelling issues.

Example Feedback Letter:

Dear Members of Group 1,

I have reviewed the first draft of your introduction. ***I think the following aspects represent the strongest qualities in your writing***, and I encourage you keep these qualities in mind so that you retain them as you re-write for your final draft:

CITING LITERATURE: You do a good job citing literature in your paper. Your citations helped the reader understand the background and the importance of the issues your paper addresses. Your use of citations support your narrative, as it should.

I think the following aspects of your paper could be improved. Please consider these carefully and try to identify what in your paper you should rewrite to improve these aspects:

PURPOSE: More clearly state in the introduction exactly what the purpose of your paper is. In one or two sentences, describe compactly, yet precisely what your paper will accomplish - what question will you answer.

ORGANIZATION: What is the argument or story you are trying to tell? Outline or list the major points in order and make sure all your paragraphs are organized this way.

Thank you for the effort you put forth on this significant project. Please let me what questions I can answer or what I can do further to help you improve your paper. I look forward to reading your final draft.

Sincerely,
James Murray