

Understanding Feedback- an example

Feedback is a vital learning tool that is essential to your improvement and development. It's important to use the feedback you receive to improve your future assignments. We call this **feeding forward**.

Types of feedback

Not all your feedback will be written comments on an assignment. There are many types of feedback at university – formal and informal – and course lecturers and tutors (if any) will use different ways to help guide you to improve your work.

Feedback may be verbal in tutorials or lectures, or it could be delivered to a whole group by email or by making hand written comments on your assignment/ submission

Seek and reflect on feedback

Being an independent learner means not only using the feedback you're given directly, but also being on the look-out for and actively seeking feedback whenever you can.

Review and reflect on any feedback you receive, then make an action plan to feed it forward to your next assignment.

A well-structured piece of academic work that flows in a logical way is much easier to follow and understand. If a piece of work has issues with structure and coherence course lecturers and/or tutors will often make comments such as:

- "Where are you going with this?"
- "Unclear, illogical."

- "Introduction of concepts seems rather random."

What to look for

If you receive this type of feedback, then revisit your work and look at the overall structure, the structure of the paragraphs and how you transition or signpost to guide people between points.

Introductions and conclusions

Academic work needs a clear introduction, setting out what it hopes to cover, and a conclusion summarising the main points.

Check what you are being asked to cover in your introduction and conclusion; for example, some introductions should detail the content and structure of your work, whereas others might be broader. Some conclusions should state nothing new whereas in others you may be able to leave the question open. Follow guidance in your module handbook or from your course lecturers or tutors.

Structure and paragraphs

Within the body of a piece of work, bring together similar concepts or arguments, discuss these and then develop them into the next idea. In this way, you can build your ideas from one to another and make connections, rather than jumping around.

Use a paragraph for each of your ideas or topics: state the idea, back up your claim with evidence (usually references) and then explain its significance to your overall argument. Keep your paragraphs a similar length for consistency.

Transitions and signposting

Signposting from one idea to the next is essential: it explains how a piece of writing is ordered and helps the reader understand the flow of your argument.

Words such as "however", "on the other hand" or "likewise" help the reader to know how your next paragraph relates to the last one.

How to feed it forward

To improve the structure and coherence of your writing:

- Check your module handbook and marking criteria for any guidance on the assignment structure.
- Organise your ideas into themes, perhaps using a mind-map.
- Make a plan for the structure and stick to it.
- Bring key ideas together to focus your writing, using one paragraph per idea.
- Signpost from one idea to the next.
- Review your introduction and conclusion.

Critical writing considers different viewpoints and forms its own conclusions. If a piece of work has issues with criticality and argument, course lecturers and/ or tutors will often make comments such as:

- "Explain the direction of your argument."
- "More critical reflection and deeper analysis needed."
- "Too descriptive."
- "More evidence needed."

What to look for

If you receive this feedback, then revisit your work and check that:

- you have drawn conclusions and not just provided information
- you have critically analysed and presented various arguments and weighed up the evidence for each
- you have developed your argument by considering all the evidence and drawing your own conclusions.

Analysis vs description

To make your writing more analytical and less descriptive, make sure you draw conclusions rather than just give information.

Descriptive writing states facts, explains a theory or lists details. Analytical writing identifies the significance of ideas, evaluates their strengths and weaknesses, weighs one piece of information against another or shows the relevance of links between them.

Critical thinking

Thinking critically about information you find involves analysing all the arguments and weighing up the evidence for them. Can you spot any flaws in the argument? How does it compare with others? Does it contain bias?

Questioning the information in a critical way goes beyond asking: What? Where? When? Who? These questions will give you descriptive answers.

Instead ask yourself: How? Why? What if? So what? The “So what?” question, in particular, will help you to really evaluate the information.

Developing an argument

Your argument will develop from your responses to the ideas you are reading about.

Consider all the evidence and draw your own conclusions from it. Then present both sides of the debate along with your thoughts, linking together the different elements.

Work towards a conclusion by weighing the evidence and showing how certain ideas win out and why others are rejected.

How to feed it forward

To improve the criticality and argument within your writing:

- Check the module handbook and marking criteria for guidance on how to critically appraise sources.
- Ask yourself "how?", "why?", "what if?" and especially "so what?" each time you read a text.
- Incorporate a range of views in your writing and say what you think about them.
- Make your viewpoint clear.
- Review your writing and ask yourself: does it only describe and explain, or is it really analytical?

Language and style

Using an academic voice will give your writing clarity and authority.

If a piece of work has issues with language and style, course lecturers or tutors will often make comments such as:

- "Did you proof-read?"
- "Get sentence structure right."
- "Avoid bland quotes – paraphrase."
- "Work on your synthesis skills."

What to look for

If you receive this feedback, then revisit your work and check that you have:

- used formal language
- written in the correct voice (first or third person)
- paraphrased and quoted correctly
- proofread your work for spelling and grammar.

Language and voice

Academic writing has a formal tone and avoids slang, colloquialisms or shortened forms of words. However, it need not be wordy or difficult to understand: being clear and concise is key.

Academic arguments are not usually presented in the first person (using I), but use more objective language, logic, and reasoning to persuade (rather than emotional or personal perspectives). This may not apply, however, if you are asked to write a reflective report based on your own thoughts and experiences.

Paraphrasing, summarising and using quotations

Use other people's work in your own to provide evidence and to support your arguments. You can do this by paraphrasing, summarising or using

quotations, but make sure in each case you demonstrate your understanding of the other work and how it fits with your argument.

When paraphrasing, make sure you do not copy text, even small amounts. You must express the ideas in your own words. All sources used must be cited within the text and then referenced fully at the end.

Grammar, spelling and proofreading

Proofreading your work can often help you catch mistakes with spelling and grammar.

Often in our writing, we consistently make the same mistakes, so think about feedback you have had previously or look at other assignments which have been marked, then focus on these issues when checking your work.

Eliminate any small errors, typos or inconsistencies by reading your final draft a number of times; this will help make your work seem professional and polished.

How to feed it forward

To improve the language and style of your writing:

- Check the module handbook and marking criteria for guidance on the type of academic writing required.
- Develop your academic voice, using short, clear sentences and formal, but not over-complicated language.
- Use evidence to make your points, paraphrasing or summarising other people's work where relevant.
- Look back to see what spelling or grammar mistakes you make regularly and focus on these when proof-reading.

- Read your work aloud slowly to check that it makes sense.

Feedback on understanding and content:

Your assignment should demonstrate your understanding of the topic and address the question/task comprehensively.

If a piece of work has issues with understanding or content, tutors will often make comments such as:

- "Rambling - stay in touch with the question".
- "Demonstrate your understanding of the question better".
- "Key concepts not clearly identified".
- "Be ruthless with irrelevant material".

What to look for

If you receive this feedback, then revisit your work and check that:

- your assignment addresses the task
- you have stayed on topic
- you have analysed and answered the question
- you have demonstrated understanding of the topic
- you have read widely, including material not on your reading list
- you have not over-quoted particular sources.

Addressing the task

Ensuring your assignment addresses the task at-hand may seem obvious, but often there are a range of requirements you need to fulfil and a clear set of expectations.

Your assignment brief and the marking criteria are there for you: follow these carefully to make sure you do not lose marks by going off track.

Before you start writing, analyse the assignment title carefully. What type of assignment is it – an essay, a report, a literature review?

What are you being asked to do – analyse, compare, discuss? Are there specific aspects or viewpoints of the topic you need to address?

Analysing and answering the question

As you plan your work, look at each section of content and make sure it is relevant and clear. Stay on track and don't go off on a tangent; no matter how good your writing is on a different topic, it will not get you marks if it doesn't address the task.

As you edit your work, ask yourself: Have I answered the question? Have I drifted from the main point? Remove anything that that is not relevant to the topic or to your argument.

Demonstrating your understanding of the topic

Read and refer to the recommended readings both to build your understanding of the topic and to show your interpretation of different viewpoints. Look beyond your reading list: find and refer to relevant additional sources to demonstrate deeper knowledge, but make sure these are authoritative, up-to-date and relevant.

Don't over-quote sources, but show that you understand by paraphrasing or summarising them and comment critically on them.

Read your work out loud to make sure it is clear and to the point. Ask yourself: will it make sense to someone else reading it?

How to feed it forward

To improve the understanding and content shown in your writing:

- Read the assignment brief really carefully, highlighting the key requirements.
- Check the marking criteria so that you understand where marks will be awarded.
- Analyse the assignment title.
- Make a clear plan for your assignment so that you answer the question and do not go off track.
- Read widely to build your understanding.
- Show your understanding by using evidence from other sources to make your points.
- Paraphrase or summarise other sources, rather than using lots of quotes.