Feedback toolkit: 10 feedback resources for your students

August 2012

The Higher Education Academy
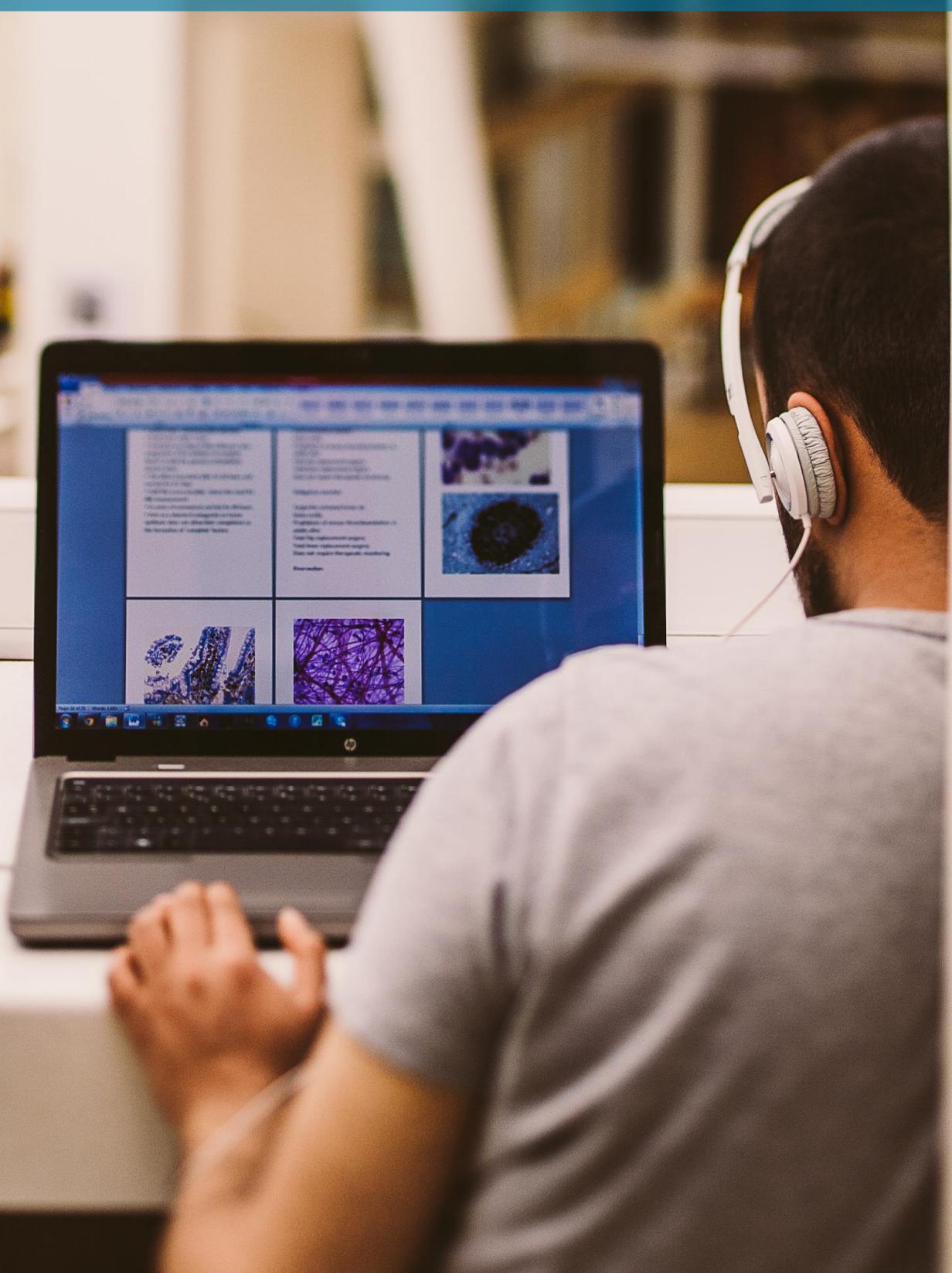
31 July 2012

Feedback: A student guide to using feedback - Hepplestone *et al.*
http://evidencenet.pbworks.com/f/guide+for+students+FINAL.pdf

This resource, written by a student to give the student's voice, builds on the findings of the project 'Technology, Feedback, Action!: The impact of learning technology upon students' engagement with their feedback'. It reflects the implementation of key findings from that project within assessment and feedback practice of Sheffield Hallam University, engaging students with reading about, and reflecting on, the rationale for particular feedback practice, such as returning feedback ahead of the grade and thinking of feedback as feedforward. It includes a useful, clear and simple Action Plan which could be used to encourage students to build on their feedback to enhance their work.

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28 July 2012

Giving and Receiving Feedback: A Guide to the Use of Peers in Self Assessment - Boud 1994

http://www.iml.uts.edu.au/assessment-futures/elements/Giving-and-Receiving-Feedback.pdf

Although taken from a resource published some time ago, this short, 3 page, document for students gives a useful summary of 'do's' and 'don'ts' for effective peer feedback, and relates the key points to personal experience of receiving feedback. It could provide a useful guide for students who have reservations how to go about giving feedback to their peers, or indeed about the prospect of receiving feedback from their peers.

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19 July 2012

Feedback - Make it work for you! – Advice for students

http://www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/documents/StudentFeeback_makeitwork.pdf

ASKE resources - ASKe (Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange) was a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) based in the Business School at Oxford Brookes University.

In common with the 3 Steps format of other ASKE resources, this leaflet has at its core 3 elements of student activity with respect to feedback: Get ready for feedback, Understand feedback and Use your feedback, each of which is expanded by a number of bullet points giving actions or approaches students can adopt. These are accompanied by points highlighted under the heading 'What is feedback' embracing different areas of focus for feedback, types of feedback, sources of feedback, and benefits of good feedback, as well as comment on three 'Feedback Myths', and an overall exhortation to consider feedback as advice and remember that as such it is there to be of use.

Whilst developed in collaboration with the Oxford Brookes Student Union, as with all ASKE resources, it is designed to be generally applicable across the sector and is expressed clearly

and simply, and indeed, politely – for example advice on receipt of handwritten feedback which is difficult to decipher students are advised to alert the tutor to the fact that their writing is illegible.

If your institution has a similar document developed with the local students union, you might want to use that; if not, you may well find this very useful, particularly for few students and students from different international contexts.

University of Hull / Hull University Union Feedback Leaflet

This leaflet, produced through negotiation between university staff and officers of the Students Union, provides a simple and clear outline of key issues regarding feedback. It aligns with University of Hull Assessment and Feedback policies and Codes of Practice, and highlights key aspects felt by students to be priority issues. It communicates a balanced view of staff and student responsibilities with respect to feedback - what students can expect from their teaching staff and what they themselves should do.

The contents were deliberately concise and snappy, intended to get key messages home quickly. However, on reflection, perhaps it lacks the depth of exploration of some other such resources for students.
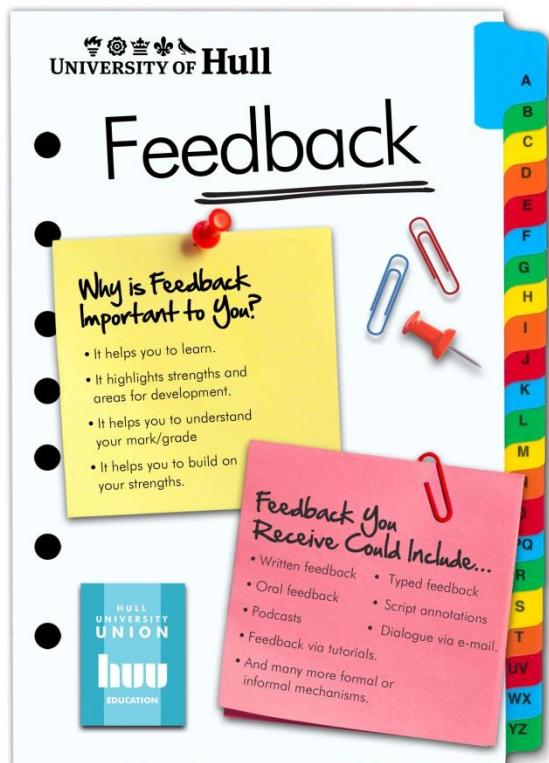
Empowering Students and Engaging Students in Assessment Feedback as Dialogue

This discusses two types of form produced by the National Union of Students (NUS) as part of their Feedback Amnesty Briefing Pack. The forms are designed as tools to encourage students to be self-reflective of their own work, encourage better feedback from the marker, and provide a means to empower students to select their preferred form of feedback. The feedback form provides for students to request the type of feedback they want and the coversheet additionally encourages students to reflect on the qualities of the work they are submitting and the mark they feel it is worth.

The NUS itself highlights the value in particular of a coversheet which empowers students to inform tutors what it is they would like feedback to focus on:

'Sue Bloxham and Liz Campbell for the University of Cumbria have been researching the use of student coversheets as a form of feedback dialogue. By asking students to state what they would like to receive feedback on, has meant not only that they were able to receive feedback meaningful to them but were able to

- communicate this without confronting a tutor and consequently preserving their anonymity. Using a feedback coversheet is beneficial for both staff and students; Students are able to comment on the work without feeling embarrassed or intimidated;
- whilst staff are able to give constructive feedback which students will be able to apply to future learning without exerting any more time.' (NUS guidance on Feedback, p.13).

The resources themselves are to be found online at:
http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/learning-and-teaching-hub/feedback/

The NUS Coversheet, Feedback form and Guidance on Feedback can all be downloaded from: http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/highereducation/learning-and-teaching-hub/feedback/campaigntools/

The usefulness will to an extent depend on how much flexibility you have to adapt the forms you use with students, and how far you feel it is practicable to either vary the form of feedback across a module cohort and/or to accommodate personalised responses to student self-reflections according to the size of your group, but some aspects may be adoptable and adaptable, and the student-perspective on the role of students in the feedback exchange is itself valuable and interesting.

Working out what written feedback really means, and planning for action - Phil Race

New to Teaching tool Kit

A repeated theme in writing about feedback is the importance of students responding and acting on the points made and the guidance provide for improvement.

This resource highlights the important step of not just acting on your first impression of the apparent meaning of such feedback and instead firstly working out what the points of feedback in order to have a firm basis for related action plans for development. Down to earth advice as to possible downsides in simply asking a tutor are supplemented by suggestions as to how

students might work it out for themselves and a suggested proforma Action Plan which supports and guides them in structured thinking towards putting this into practice.

I suspect that for all but the most motivated of students this might be best incorporated into course activity but the template lends itself to such exploitation, thus laying the groundwork and providing experience of benefits from implementation to encourage further independent use.

Building on feedback - Phil Race

New to Teaching tool Kit

Having come across this document for students, I immediately added it as a resource on the VLE site for my own programme.

The resource includes definitions of feedback, types of feedback, sources and benefits of feedback, what students do when they receive feedback, and description of ways to get the most out of feedback, and does so in the clear, simple, authoritative and 'applied' manner many of us have encountered as typical of Phil Race's resources for teachers. Additionally, right from the start it goes further than description and discussion, to draw the student into meaningful activity to explore their personal preferences for different types of feedback (p.2), illustrate the value of action within learning (p.5-6) and engage them in exploration of 'How well are you already using the channels of feedback available to you?' (p.7-8). It draws parallels with everyday life when inviting them to consider how they react to receiving feedback, praise and criticism (p.9) demonstrating the connections between aspects of academic progress and both daily life and national culture.

However, perhaps my favourite student activities from within the resource are two fold. The first is that focusing on 'what I currently do with written comments from lecturers on my work' (p.12) and accompanying advice (p.13-16), getting down to nitty gritty of student awareness that their personal response is not a blanket one-size-fits-all thing but is likely to depend on factors such as the differential between student expectation and marks received. The second making links between working out what points of feedback really mean and action plans for development.

While written as a resource for individual student self-study, there is scope here for taking resources for use with a student group, and perhaps all of us know students who would benefit from such guided and structured and supported engagement with a resource such as this.

SNOB Analysis - University of Salford

The 'Feedback SNOB Analysis' is a tool found within the resource MAKING THE MOST OF FEEDBACK

ONE STEP TOWARDS GETTING THE MOST MARKS YOU CAN from the University of Salford.

It is a constructive and feedback-oriented adaptation of a SWOT analysis and provides a clear, simple and structured framework for student reflection on the feedback received on an assignment in relation to the work undertaken.

Students are encouraged to draw on the feedback received to identify their:
Strengths - the things that you did well and that you can continue to do in future assessments'
Needs - things that you think you need to do before the next assessment to give you the best chance of improving your marks'
Opportunities - things that you got wrong or missed that could have helped you to gain more marks' and
Barriers - what you think could make it difficult to do the extra things you think necessary' (Sykes, A.E., 2010, p.9).

They are encouraged to build the points emerging from this into an Action Plan for future development.

A simple, clear and memorable approach to benefit from feedback, which would dovetail with many of the other resources and activities highlighted in this toolkit and could be adopted and supported equally well within face-to-face, blended and wholly online learning.

MAKING THE MOST OF FEEDBACK - ONE STEP TOWARDS GETTING THE MOST MARKS YOU CAN - University of Salford

ONE STEP TOWARDS GETTING THE MOST MARKS YOU CAN from the University of Salford.

I would certainly consider drawing on this resource for use with my students! In line with the resource title, it takes students through each step of the assessment and feedback process, outlining the nature and usefulness of feedback, all in a very positive and encouraging light, and then focuses in on reflective processes for getting the most out of feedback. In this the booklet starts from the point before submission, and advice to 'Check what you were expected to do in the assessment' by focusing in on past feedback and 'Analyse your feedback and identify key learning points'.

Advice is provided, via bullet points explaining how to go about such reflection, in order to pull key points out of feedback received over a number of assignments, think about the reasons for the advice given, and look for signs of progress.

The 'Feedback SNOB Analysis' is a tool highlighted independently in this toolkit, supporting student reflection on feedback to identify their:
Strengths - the things that you did well and that you can continue to do in future assessments'
Needs - things that you think you need to do before the next assessment to give you the best chance of improving your marks'
Opportunities - things that you got wrong or missed that could have helped you to gain more marks' and
Barriers - what you think could make it difficult to do the extra things you think necessary' (Sykes, A.E., 2010, p.9).

But this is not reflection for the sake of reflection. Students are encouraged to develop an Action Plan, and provided with manageable, practical and varied steps they can take the ensure action on issues arising from their earlier reflection to improve their marks.

All steps are then brought together within an overall Assignment Preparation and Feedback Timeline.

The Appendices to the resource are very much institution-specific but this does not detract from the usefulness of these earlier sections, and effective use could be made to enhance the reflection on feedback by your own students.

Target Monitoring Grids for Turning Feedback into Feedforward - Scarborough School of Education

Target Monitoring Grids for Turning Feedback into Feedforward

These forms, originally developed by Scarborough School of Education, are tools designed to be used by students to provide continuity between assignments and modules, encouraging students to build on feedback they receive from one assignment / module, implement it actively within the work for a following assignment / module, reflect on their own development, and as part of the feedback for that later assignment / module, receive feedback on their progress.

It is thus intended to provide staff with a means of facilitating, supporting and tracking the academic development of students from assignment to assignment and module to module.

The original approach was taken forward within an online MEd eLearning, incorporated within assignment coversheets and built into feedback sheets. Examples of the form used and the format of staff response are provided, as are paper-based and electronic variants of the underpinning approach.

Appendix 1

Building on feedback

(Phil Race: Visiting Professor: Assessment, Learning and Teaching)

Feedback is important. You'll get lots of feedback as you study, and this can really deepen your learning. But you need to be *looking* for feedback to get the most from it. And you need to be *receptive* to it when you get it.

And even more important, you need to be analysing the feedback you get, all the way through your studies, so that you can use it to improve your performance when it really matters – not least in exams and assessments which contribute to the level of your qualifications.

This booklet aims to help you to make the most of each and every form of feedback you can gain during your studies. The contents of this download are specially adapted for you from 'How to Get a Good Degree: 2nd edition' by Phil Race, published by Open University Press in 2007, with some additional extracts adapted from 'How to Study' published by Blackwell in 2003.

What *is* feedback?

Good question! There's not much use thinking about how you can make the most of feedback unless you know exactly what it is. In short, feedback is when you receive comments about your work, so that you know how well your studies are going – and of course there's the other side to this – so you know how *badly* your studies are going. In the latter case, it's really important to make good use of such feedback to make sure your work gets better next time, and so on. Getting a grade or mark is also feedback, but that's actually not as useful to you as when you get comments which can help you to make your next piece of assessed work better.

There are lots of different kinds of feedback. What kinds of feedback do you prefer?
Have a go at the following task.

What sorts of feedback do you prefer?

Kinds of feedback	I like this a lot	I like this sometimes	I don't like this	I've never had this
1. Handwritten comments on my work				
2. Word-processed front sheets about my work				
3. Handwritten front sheets attached to my work				
4. Assignment reports about the overall work for the group				
5. Matrix showing what's expected for each grade band				
6. Code numbers written onto my assignment, with translation menu				
7. Face-to-face debriefing about an assignment with the whole group in a lecture				
8. Small-group explanation e.g. in a tutorial or seminar				
9. One-to-one face-to-face chat with the lecturer concerned				
10. Informal chats with lecturers in corridors				
11. Individual emails to me from lecturers				
12. Emails sent to the whole group about common strengths and weaknesses in an assignment				
13. Posting about the assignment on the virtual learning environment discussion board				
14. Just a mark on my work, and no comments				
15. Just the feedback and no mark, then being asked to self-assess my mark using the criteria				
16. Feedback from fellow-students in the context of peer-assessment				
17. Feedback from fellow-students informally				
18. Feedback from friends or relatives informally				
19. Feedback I gain for myself by comparing my work with examples on the web				
20. Feedback I gain by myself by comparing my work informally with fellow-students work before submission of an assignment				
21. Feedback I gain by self-assessing my work against the assessment criteria prior to submitting my work				
22. Feedback I gain from my lecturer on my self-assessment of the work at the point of submission				

You probably never guessed that there are so many possible ways you can get feedback. Many of these are up to you. There are in fact two main varieties of feedback, as follows.

Formative and summative feedback

'Formative feedback' is the name given to the sort of feedback which you gain along the course of your studies, which can help you develop your approach, and fine-tune your efforts towards succeeding in your studies. Formative feedback can be, for example:

- Comments written by lecturers on your coursework;
- Emails from lecturers about your work;
- Discussion of your work in tutorials and one-to-one meetings with lecturers;
- Comments from other students on your work;
- Handouts given to you after completing a piece of work.

'Summative feedback' is what we call the feedback on things which you can no longer change. This includes:

- Exam marks or grades;
- Marks or grades on assessed coursework.

You can, of course, learn from summative feedback too. If you get a low mark or grade for an exam or a piece of coursework, you may well be able to find out more about *why* you didn't do as well as you would have liked to – but you may not necessarily have the benefit of formative feedback to help you to do better next time.

How to make the most of feedback

1   **Regard *all* feedback as valuable.** Whether feedback is praise or criticism, you will get a lot more out of it if you value it.

2   **Feedback from *anyone* is useful.** While it's understandable to regard the feedback you get from lecturers and tutors as authoritative, you will also get feedback all the time from fellow students, and other people around you. So don't *just* take notice of the feedback you get from lecturers.

3   **Don't shrug off positive feedback.** When you're complimented on your work, there's a temptation to try to ease any feeling of embarrassment by saying 'we'll, it's not *so* special really' or so on. The problem with doing this is that *you* then start to believe this. It's much better to allow yourself to swell with pride, at least for a little while. This helps you to accept the positive feedback, and to build upon it and do even better next time.

4   **Practise thanking people for their positive feedback.** Simply saying, 'thanks, I'm glad you liked that' can be enough sometimes. When people are thanked for giving you praise or compliments, they're more likely to do so again, and this means more and better feedback for you.

5   **Don't get defensive when feedback is critical.** It's perfectly natural to try to protect yourself from the hurt of critical feedback, but the problem then is that this interferes with the flow of critical feedback to you. The more you can gently probe for even more feedback, the more useful the feedback turns out to be.

6   **Thank people for critical feedback too.** Even when you're not actually too pleased with the critical feedback you've just received, it can be useful to say something along the lines 'well, thanks for telling me about this, it should be useful for me in future' and so on.

7   **Don't just wait for feedback, ask for it.** Don't lose any opportunities to press gently for even more feedback than you already have received. Ask questions, such as 'what do you think was the best thing I did here?' and 'what would have been the most useful change I should make next time I do something similar', and so on.

What to do when you get your work back

Suppose, for example, you're getting an assignment back after marking. Doing the right things now can make a lot of difference to the *next* assignment you do. Here are some suggestions.

1 **Decide to regard it as an important feedback opportunity.** If you really *want* to learn from whatever feedback you get, you're much more likely to make the most of it.

2 **Acknowledge that when you get your work back with a grade, your feelings may run high.** It's not unknown for a student to take a marked assignment to a place outside, set fire to it, and then stamp on it! If it was a disappointment, that may indeed make your feel better, but it's a lost learning opportunity (and could be dangerous of course).

3 **Don't take too much notice of the mark or grade you're given.** There is, of course, nothing you can now *do* about whatever mark or grade you were given. The opportunity is to learn about *why* you got whatever mark or grade you were given. This can help tremendously with your next assignment.

4 **Don't become defensive.** It's all too easy to look at every critical comment as a personal affront. Remind yourself that any critical comments are about *what you wrote,* not about you as a human being. You can change what you write next time. You don't have to try to change who you are!

5 **If your mark wasn't good, find out exactly why.** We learn at least as much through getting things wrong as we do through getting them right. And even if your mark was poor, look carefully for any clues regarding where you did in fact score the marks you got.

6 **Don't be too smug if your mark or grade is good.** Try to work out *why* your work scored well. What did you do that pleased your lecturers? How best can you put such things to work again in your next assignment? And even if you did very well indeed, continue to look for what you might have done to make your work even better.

7 **Put it away for a while, then look at it again.** The real problem with feedback and marks together is that the marks cloud the picture. When your mind is full of thoughts about getting a high mark (or a low mark), you don't have room to really benefit from the feedback about your work. Once you've got used to whatever mark you were awarded, you will find you are much better able to look dispassionately at the feedback, and get maximum value from it.

8 **Don't rest on your laurels.** 'Pride comes before a fall', and so on. If you got a really high mark or grade this time, the chances are that you'll have to work really hard to improve on it – or even to equal it again. Indeed, the chances are that your next mark won't be quite so good. Then you'll be disappointed of course. But you can minimise that pain by learning as much as you can now about *why* you did well the first time.

9 **Analyse your mark or grade against the marking scheme.** Sometimes you'll have access to quite a lot of detail about how the marks were allocated for the assignment. See where your work scored well alongside particular assessment criteria. More important, look at where you *didn't* score well. Try to work out *why* you missed particular marks. This will be really useful for next time round.

10 **Try to look at the feedback fellow-students received too.** In fact, it's sometimes easier for you to make sense of the feedback comments on other students' work – you're not too close to that work to have your judgement clouded by emotions. At the same time, fellow-students may be able to give you useful insights into the real meaning of feedback comments written on your own work. Besides, looking at other people's marked assignments tells you yet more about the overall 'rules of the game' regarding getting good marks for such assignments. The better you become acquainted with these rules, the more marks you can get next time – and indeed in your answers in exams too.

11 **Don't be afraid to seek clarification.** If you can't understand some of the feedback comments written on your work, find an appropriate time to ask about them. Be careful, however, not to come across as if asking for higher marks. And don't harangue your lecturers in corridors or at the end of lectures. Don't make them feel as though their judgement is being challenged – that certainly doesn't help you to endear yourself to them! Make an appointment to see them, so that they have time to explain to you anything you *need* them to explain.

12 **Make yourself an action plan.** For each essay you have marked, jot down some things you've learned to try to do again next time round, and three things to try to avoid in future. Then you can really let the assignment go, as a useful learning experience, and hang on to your learning, rather than just that mark or grade. Now file that assignment, but keep your action plan. Later in this booklet, there's detailed advice on how to go about action-planning on the basis of feedback you receive.

Building on feedback

The rest of this booklet is based on the 'Building on Feedback' chapter in 'How to get a Good Degree: 2nd edition' (Phil Race, 2007, Maidenhead: Open University Press) – this chapter is new to the 2nd edition, as the results of the National Student Survey from 2005 onwards has got us all thinking much more deeply about the importance of feedback.

You can only really know how your progress towards getting a good qualification is going if you build on each and every kind of feedback you gain on your studies along the way. Actually, the real crunch is making sure that you not only *get* lots of feedback, but that you systematically *use* it to improve and develop your work continuously.

A very short, but important task

Don't skip this little task. You'll see why when you read the discussion below – but do the task first. Here is a quotation – someone else's words…

"Everything should be made as simple as possible, - but not simpler"

That's the quotation – now your task. Who said it? There's no reason why you should know, but your task is to *guess* who is may have been. Write your guess down below…

Now that you've written down your guess, please look at the very end of this Booklet on page 17 to see whether you guessed correctly or not.

Discussion

Now that you've made your guess, *then* looked at page 17, you will know whether you guessed right. Either tick what you wrote down above, or cross out what you wrote and enter in the right name alongside.

Now for the point of all of this. Feedback only really works after you've *done* something. If you guessed correctly, you'll remember the name of the originator of the quote for a long time, and will probably be rather pleased with yourself. If you guessed wrongly, you're even better off – you now know who said what was quoted *and* you know the name of someone who didn't say it too!

If, however, you simply *thought* about who it may have been, and then checked at the end of the booklet to see whether you were right or not, you will very quickly forget both what you thought, and what the correct answer was. And hopefully you will probably feel just a little guilty that you didn't do the task as asked.

Is feedback the weak link in the chain?

In the National Student Survey used in the UK from 2005 with final-year students, their views on feedback have consistently shown that feedback is often the least satisfactory aspect of their experience of higher education.

In particular, students have responded that feedback:
- Reached them too late;
- Did not contain sufficient detailed comments on their work;
- Did not often enough help them to clarify things that they didn't understand.

Many institutions in the UK are already responding to these three weaknesses, and working hard towards giving you better feedback more quickly. However, there is a lot you can do to make feedback work better for yourself, not least by:

1. adjusting your own work carefully so that it matches closely your expected evidence of achievement of the intended learning outcomes for each module and course – make sure you keep tabs on these learning outcomes, so you are well informed about how you are expected to show that you have achieved them;
2. self-assessing your work against the assessment criteria which link to these intended learning outcomes, and gaining feedback on how good you become at this self-assessment;
3. Being alert and receptive to all the different ways you get feedback – in other words, not just written comments from lecturers on your assessed work.

Feedback and feed-ahead
'Feedback' is when you find out what was good about what you did, and what wasn't so good, and as we've seen can be formative or summative. 'Feed-ahead' is when you also find out about what you can do to learn from what you did, particularly from formative feedback, so that you make your next attempt at doing something similar better. 'Feed-ahead' is also often called 'Feed-forward' – you can see why.

Audit your own channels of feedback

As mentioned above, written comments on your coursework represent only one of many avenues of feedback available to you on your learning. By using all available channels purposefully, you can increase the impact of feedback on your work towards making your studies successful. The task below aims to remind you about a wider variety of channels of feedback, so that you don't let any of them slip by you unnoticed. How well are you already using the channels of feedback available to you? Try the next task.

How I use the available channels of feedback on my learning				
Feedback channels	I always use these well	I sometimes use these well	I'm not good at using these	These aren't available to me
1. Written comments from lecturers on your essays, reports, assignments, and so on				
2. Front-sheets giving overall feedback from lecturers on your work				
3. Summary reports issued by lecturers on the work of the whole group				
4. Grids where lecturers rate my performance against each assessment criterion				
5. Grids where lecturers rate my achievement against each intended learning outcome				
6. Emailed feedback comments direct to me from lecturers				
7. General feedback comments emailed by lecturers to the whole group				
8. Overall comments posted by lecturers on discussion boards in the virtual learning environment				

How I use the available channels of feedback on my learning				
Feedback channels	I always use these well	I sometimes use these well	I'm not good at using these	These aren't available to me
9. Face-to-face feedback from lecturers to the whole lecture group on matters arising from an assignment				
10. Face-to-face one-to-one feedback on my work directly from lecturers to me				
11. Face-to-face feedback on my work from lecturers to small groups, e.g. in tutorials and seminars				
12. Peer-feedback comments gained from fellow-students in formal peer-assessment contexts				
13. Peer-feedback comments I gain from fellow students on my own initiative				
14. Feedback I gain from other people (mentor, friend, - anyone!) who are not fellow-students				
15. Feedback arising from my own self-assessment of my work against the intended learning outcomes associated with the work				
16. Feedback I gain from self-assessing my work against the published assessment criteria for the work				
17. (Other sources of feedback you use or could use…)				

Perhaps as a result of this audit, you are already determined to make better use of some feedback channels you had not thought about before? The more, the better! Next, we'll explore not just the available channels but more importantly, what you actually *do* with the feedback you can put to work towards ensuring that your studies prove successful.

Getting better at receiving feedback: face-to-face praise and criticism

As we have already seen, feedback is a vital part of learning. For all sorts of reasons, however, students do not always make the most of the feedback they receive from other people. Some of the feedback that you receive is from expert witnesses, your lecturers. The feedback may not always be 'right', but it is always worth taking notice of any comments, verbal or written, that can help you form a better picture of how your learning is going. Let's think in particular about face-to-face feedback about your work from lecturers, such as you might receive from them in whole-class discussions, tutorials or one-to-one meetings. Try the following task to explore how you personally respond to face-to-face feedback from lecturers – and indeed from other people.

Task: your reactions to face-to-face feedback

Think about how you receive face-to-face feedback from other people, and particularly from lecturers, tutors, supervisors, and so on. Rate yourself on each of the following possibilities, then consider your decisions in the light of the information provided in the next section.

Your reactions to feedback	*Very like me*	*Quite like me*	*Not like me*
1. When I receive a compliment, I tend to laugh and react in an embarrassed way.			
2. When I receive a compliment, I tend to shrug it off, and say that 'it's not really special'.			
3. When I receive a compliment, I thank the person who gives it to me, and try to take it on board.			
4. When something I have done is criticized, I go on the defensive.			
5. When something I have done is criticized, I feel hurt and demotivated.			
6. When something I have done is criticized, I thank the person for their feedback, and try to take it on board.			
7. When something I have done is criticized, I feel that it is *me* that is being criticized.			
8. When something I have done is criticized, I probe for more details about what is *really* the cause of the negative feedback.			

Discussion: receiving and using feedback

In many cultures, people are not good at receiving feedback, whether positive or critical. Even though most people agree that feedback is important and useful, they rarely really *use* it as well as they could. They tend to shrug off complimentary feedback for example, often laughing in embarrassment. This amounts to rejecting the feedback, and not really taking it on board. It also means that, in the nicest possible way, the person giving the feedback has been rejected. People giving compliments are sometimes taking risks, and if their feedback is rejected, they are less inclined to take further risks. The channel of communication is being closed down if their feedback is not being received. Simply responding with phrases such as 'Thank you for that', or 'I'm glad you liked that' can solve the problem. The feedback has then been received, and the channel of communication remains open for further positive feedback.

In the case of critical feedback, the situation is even more problematic. Many people get defensive or even hostile when they feel that they are being criticized. They feel that they are being criticized personally, even when it's only something that they have *done* that is being criticized. Even if they say nothing, it is usually very plain to the person giving the critical feedback that a hostile or defensive stance is being taken. The feedback is not really being taken notice of, and the channel of communication is being closed down. Furthermore, few people giving critical feedback begin with the most important element; they usually test out the waters with something that is not particularly important. If communication then fails, the *real* feedback may not even be expressed at all. It takes a little practice to *thank* people for their critical feedback, but in doing so, the feedback is being logged for future action. It is possible to go further, and to gently probe for yet more detail about the feedback. Questions such as 'Tell me more about what I could have done instead' or 'What was the most important difference I could have made?' are ways of keeping the communication going until all the available feedback has been given and received.

Another problem with oral feedback (positive or negative) is that our human memory does not seem to be particularly accurate. We tend to remember only certain parts of it. If you've received three elements each of positive feedback and critical feedback in an interview with a lecturer, the chances are that after a while you will remember two of the negative parts, and maybe only one positive part. The simple way round this problem is to log the feedback very soon after receiving it. Make notes under both headings (positive and negative), and try to ensure that you don't lose sight of one category because of preoccupation with the other one. Also, turn *both* kinds of feedback into action-planning notes to yourself. With positive feedback, write short notes along the lines of 'I'll try to do *more* of this'. With critical or negative feedback, write yourself some recommendations about how you can address the cause of the feedback in future.

Written feedback causes less problems, in that at least it exists on paper, and can be looked at again and again, and digested. Make the most of written feedback, because it is a prime way of learning how to improve your performance. Many students just ignore the words, and look at the mark or grade that they have been given; that *isn't* the way to get a good degree! Lecturers marking coursework often go to some lengths to make sure that there is positive feedback as well as criticism. Unfortunately, it is sometimes only the critical feedback that students seem to notice. The valuable learning that could have been derived from the positive feedback is often lost. In particular, students often take too much notice of the mark or grade that they have been awarded – but this is only *summative* feedback. If it is a good mark or grade, they are tempted not to bother to read the feedback. This means that they often miss valuable suggestions for further improvements to their work, or details of exactly *what* they had done really well. In other words, they miss out on the benefits which could have come from taking on board the *formative* feedback. Similarly, in the case of poor marks or grades, many students are too disappointed with the result to get down to the task of going carefully through all the feedback which may have been provided. The feedback is more important than the score or grade, as far as *future* learning is concerned. Taking really good notice of feedback can help to ensure that strengths are identified and built upon, and that weaknesses are faced up to, and addressed in future work.

Getting hurt by critical feedback (spoken or written) is perfectly natural, but is not productive in terms of learning. Emotions can be very powerful, and if they take over, serious damage can be done to motivation. It is best to be coldly analytical about critical feedback, at least until you have decided exactly *why* the feedback was warranted, and exactly *what* was being criticized – usually only *part* of your work, not the entire piece. Sometimes, after reflecting on critical feedback, you may be justified in concluding that the feedback was after all inappropriate, or inaccurate, and that there are no action points for you to take forward into your future work. If, however, the same critical feedback agenda occurs more than once, and from different sources, think hard about the possibility that you indeed have something to learn from it.

As you will have seen from the activity above, feedback (and especially feed-ahead) only works when you *use* it. It is one thing to be given feedback, but only you can make sure that you actually take in on board to purposefully analyze it and improve your future work as a result of it.

More about *critical* feedback
In this booklet, I often use the term 'critical feedback' rather than 'negative feedback' as the latter seems demotivating. However, 'critical' by no means is just 'bad'. If you're asked to do a 'critical review' of something, it would not be wise to simply concentrate on writing or speaking about what is wrong with it; you would be expected to give a balanced view, including what was good about it too. In fact, critical feedback you receive on your work can also be praise, where lecturers have looked deeply into your work and found particular things they feel they can tell you about it. That said, most of what you might regard as 'critical' feedback is likely to be about suggestions to improve your work, and to remedy deficiencies which your lecturers may have noticed.

What do you *do* with written feedback on your work?
Written feedback from lecturers or tutors can be a very useful avenue for alerting you to how best you can fine-tune your work towards getting the qualification you're aiming towards. Sometimes you'll get comments written directly onto your work, or summary comments appended to your work. Sometimes you'll get the opportunity to get face-to-face discussion of these comments, but more often you're likely to be expected to make sense of the written feedback on its own merits.
Now could be an ideal time to revisit how exactly you respond to written feedback on your work. Please do the task below, answering honestly each of the possibilities listed there, then look at the discussion of the pros and cons of the choices you've entered.

Task: what I currently do with written comments from lecturers on my work

Decide what you normally do when you get your work back with written feedback from tutors and lecturers. Tick one or more of the columns as appropriate – not least the 'I won't do this in future' and 'I'll do this in future' column where you realize that it would be helpful to adjust your technique regarding using written feedback towards making sure that your studies will be successful.

What I do with written feedback comments on my work	This is exactly what I do	This is sometimes what I do	This is not what I do!	I won't do this in future	I'll do this in future
1. I look first at the mark or grade I've received.					
2. I'm influenced a lot by the mark or grade I receive when I look at the feedback.					
3. If the mark is better than I expected, I analyse the feedback carefully to work out why my mark was better.					
4. If the mark was worse than I expected, I analyse the feedback carefully to find out why my mark wasn't so good.					
5. If I don't like the lecturer very much, I don't take much notice of the feedback.					
6. I take careful note of positive comments, and find out what earned them, so I can use this feedback to make future work better.					
7. I get upset by critical comments, and sometimes feel bad about such feedback.					
8. I take careful note of the causes of critical feedback, and work out how exactly I can avoid these sorts of criticism in future work.					
9. I make systematic comparisons between feedback comments I receive from different lecturers, and work out which are general trends regarding my work.					
10. I share the feedback comments I receive with fellow students, and learn more about the comments they received on their work.					
11. I file my marked work carefully, so that I can return to the feedback comments later and reflect on them.					
12. I make an action plan based on the feedback I've received, and keep this handy to continue to use in future work.					

Discussion: what you currently do with written comments from lecturers on your work

Looking back at the choices you made in the Task above, check out the discussion below to see if you are making optimum use of written comments on your work, and making the most of such feedback to help you towards getting the good degree you're aiming for.

What I do with written feedback comments on my work	*Discussion comments*
1. I look first at the mark or grade I've received.	This is natural. Few people can resist this! However, your emotions can run high when having just received a 'judgment' such as a mare or grade. This is just *summative* feedback – you can't alter it. It's much more important to be able to learn from the reasons *why* you got a particular mark or grade, so that you can make your next mark better.

When possible, it is productive to *avoid* seeing the mark or grade, and looking straight at the feedback comments, then trying to work out what your mark or grade is *before* looking at the actual one. However, this is sometimes very hard to do in practice – unless your lecturers are aware of the value of this chance to make sense of feedback, and withhold marks for a week or so to give you the opportunity to try to work your mark out for yourself. |
| 2. I'm influenced a lot by the mark or grade I receive when I look at the feedback. | Most people are. But this can distract you from making optimum use of the feedback. For example, if the mark was high, you may fail to find out *why* you did so well, and therefore miss out on the chance to gain such success routinely in future. Or if the mark is low, you may be too demoralized to make best use of the feedback, using it to work out how you can ensure that you get better marks in future on similar work.

It can be useful (assuming you can't avoid seeing the mark or grade) to give yourself a little time to get used to the mark you've got, and allow your feelings (whether high or low) to settle down, and only then go on to analyse the feedback systematically and dispassionately. |
| 3. If the mark is better than I expected, I analyse the feedback carefully to work out why my mark was better. | This is what you should aim to do. Look carefully at the positive comments, and see what earned you the good result. But also remember to look systematically at the critical comments, to see how you can continue to improve your work even more. |
| 4. If the mark was worse than I expected, I analyse the feedback carefully to find out why my mark wasn't so good. | This too is what you should aim to do. But you sometimes need to have given yourself time to get used to the fact that you didn't do as well as you had hoped before getting down to the very useful task of *finding out exactly why* this was so. Then, you are better able to look objectively at the critical feedback comments, making notes of how to avoiding causing such comments to be given to you in future.
Don't, however, be so intent on looking at the critical comments that you don't give yourself the chance to learn from positive comments as well – there will usually be both kinds of feedback on your work. |
| 5. If I don't like the lecturer very much, I don't take much notice of the feedback. | This is perfectly natural. You're bound to like some lecturers more than others. But some of the lecturers you don't like so much may well be markers of your exam answers too. (And of course, so may some of your favourite lecturers). However, part of your key mission to get the qualification you're aiming towards is to learn from *all* the feedback you get |

What I do with written feedback comments on my work	Discussion comments
	– even from lecturers you don't like or respect very much. In particular, analyse the feedback to work out any changes you can make to your future work so that such people would rate your work more highly. Making adjustments to counter *their* critical comments may indeed help you to secure higher grades from other lecturers too.
6. I take careful note of positive comments, and find out what earned them, so I can use this feedback to make future work better.	This is indeed what you should do. Don't just luxuriate in the praise – work out exactly what you did to earn such praise, so you can do it again all the more deliberately in future work, including in exam answers.
7. I get upset by critical comments, and sometimes feel bad about such feedback.	This is perfectly natural, but feeling bad about critical comments won't actually help you much towards getting the qualification you're aiming towards. You may need to give yourself a little time to heal your hurt feelings before doing the next step, which (as you will know yourself) is to work out what you can usefully learn from the critical comments.
8. I take careful note of the causes of critical feedback, and work out how exactly I can avoid these sorts of criticism in future work.	This is exactly what to do. Even when you feel overwhelmed by critical comments, it's worth systematically working out what led to the comments (and not just blaming their authors). The more you can learn about how to avoid attracting such comments in future, the better your chance of safely getting the qualification you're aiming towards.
9. I make systematic comparisons between feedback comments I receive from different lecturers, and work out which are general trends regarding my work.	This is a wise thing to do. Some lecturers will be 'harder' than others (but so will some examiners). Sometimes what pleases one lecturer will annoy another. Your aim should be to please as many lecturers as possible for as much of the time as possible, so that when it comes to exams your chances of pleasing your assessors are maximized. Besides, the general trends are likely to be significant, and can be a really useful basis to go about developing your work systematically towards earning the qualification you're aiming towards.
10. I share the feedback comments I receive with fellow students, and learn more about the comments they received on their work.	This one takes some courage. You may feel some reluctance to let other students see the feedback comments you received on your work, particularly if you got better grades than them. But you can learn a lot from praise they received on things you didn't do yourself – and even more from critical comments they received on faults or mistakes you didn't make yourself. All in all, the more you can put your own feedback comments in perspective – the more you can find out about the bigger picture – the better are your chances of aiming to ensure that you come out with the good degree you're aiming for.
11. I file my marked work carefully, so that I can return to the feedback comments later and reflect on them.	This is sensible on one level. As you're pulling your act together for exams, for example, it is really useful to remind yourself of the sorts of ways where you earned praise, and even more to ensure that you remember what to do to avoid some of the critical comments you've received on coursework. However, there is a risk: that you won't actually get round to returning to the feedback and re-learning from it. That is why it can be useful to get into the habit of making action plans – please see below.
12. I make an action plan based on the feedback I've received, and keep this handy to continue to use	If you already do this – splendid. For more ideas about how best to do this, please see below. Continuously developing action plans on the basis of feedback can help you to distance the feedback you receive from individual lecturers from

What I do with written feedback comments on my work	Discussion comments
in future work.	your feelings about the particular lecturers, and from the high or low marks you were awarded for particular pieces of work.

Working out what written feedback really means!

There are several ways you can set about finding out what lecturers actually mean regarding particular comments on your work. The most obvious option is simply to ask them – but there are dangers on this route. In particular, if you question something which a lecturer has written, you risk one or more of the following possible instinctive reactions to your query.

● 'Oh dear, so-and-so is challenging my feedback. Probably thinks it's unfair or wrong'.
● 'Grumbling about the grade I guess. Am I going to be asked why the mark wasn't higher? I really can't have everyone doing this. Best not say much in response to this query'.
● 'Attention-seeking behaviour! I haven't got time for this. I don't like attention-seekers! Students need to become able to work out what I mean'.

For all sorts of reasons, lecturers don't always quite manage to say what they mean when they're writing feedback comments on students' work! Not least, they sometimes want to be kind, and to avoid giving feedback which may be demoralizing. Perhaps the problem with written or on-screen feedback is that you don't have other clues to what lecturers actually mean, such as you would be able to gain in face-to-face contexts through:

● Tone of voice,
● Body language,
● Facial expression,
● Eye contact,
● Emphasis on particular spoken words,
● Use of pauses to give you time to think,
● The chance for you to ask what lecturers really mean,
● Lecturers being able to respond to puzzled looks on your face, and explain what they mean.

In short, sometimes you'll need to take steps to find out what exactly your lecturers mean by feedback comments on your work, in particular critical comments. Other things you can do to work out what feedback comments really mean include:

1. Look carefully at the comments and the aspects of your work they relate to, and try to work out for yourself exactly what is being commented upon, and how you may be able to respond to each feedback comment in your future work (especially future work for that particular lecturer, or exam answers which may be marked by this person).

2. Compare the feedback comments you have received with those received by fellow-students on the course or module. Ask them what *they* think lecturers mean by particular comments. This will at least give you some more information about the standard of your own work, and probably will make you feel better about your own work when you notice critical feedback comments on other students' work which were not written on your work. However, there may still be some guesswork regarding what the lecturers may actually mean by their comments.

For example 'perhaps you could have put this better' against a point you have made *could* really mean 'I haven't a clue what you're trying to say here!' and probably does *not* mean 'this is fine, there's no need to make the point better than you have done already'!

Using feedback to make action plans

As mentioned in the discussion above, it can be really productive to extract the essence from all of the written feedback you receive on your work, and combine this with additional things you may pick up from face-to-face feedback from lecturers, and from discussions with other students about their feedback. Some further ways of working out what particular feedback comments really mean are suggested below, in the context of developing action plans into a systematic approach to making optimum use of the feedback you receive on your work, combined with deliberately seeking yet more feedback from other people. *All* feedback is potentially useful.

One way of going about a systematic and productive approach to making the most of feedback is to prepare for yourself a simple pro-forma, and have copies of it available for each episode of feedback on your work, so that you can collect together the complete pro-formas as an ongoing record of how your work is developing. In other words, you can take charge of the process of keeping track of how your work is progressing towards earning you the good degree you're aiming towards. All the better if you have copies of such a pro-forma ready to use each time you gain feedback, so that capturing the essence of the feedback becomes a matter of routine rather than a luxury. This also gives you the opportunity to separate your *reflections* on particular instances of feedback from the actual individual pieces of work, so that you distance yourself from the first thoughts you got when receiving the feedback, and move onwards and upwards with the significant trends, enabling you to continuously adjust your approaches.

A possible pro-forma is suggested below – but all the better if you design one of your own, customized you what you know about how you currently use feedback – and pointing towards how you want to make optimum use of feedback to get you firmly towards the good degree you want. You may indeed want to design a much shorter pro-forma than that given below. My reason for including a fairly wide range of possibilities is to give you more choice in deciding what exactly is going to work well in practice for you – it's *your* feedback, and it's *your* good degree we're working towards at the end of the day.

Conclusions

I hope after working through this booklet, you're now convinced that feedback on your work (and on your learning in general) can be really useful in helping you towards your ambition to get the qualification you're aiming towards.
The more you know about how your work is progressing right from the beginning of your studies the better. Feedback can alert you to what is going well, so that you can purposefully build on your strengths. More importantly, feedback can alert you to the hazards which may otherwise stop you from getting the qualification you're aiming towards. I hope also that you're now prepared not just to *wait* for feedback, but to *seek* feedback.

Response to the short task earlier in this booklet
The quotation is commonly attributed to Albert Einstein, 1879-1955 – but I haven't been able to track down exactly where or when he said it or wrote it!

Feedback Action Plan

Date:	Piece of work:	Mark or grade:
	Most significant feedback comments:	What these really mean: (e.g. after asking the lecturers, or after discussing with other students, or after reflecting further on the work and the feedback
I		
2		
3		
Extent to which I *agree* with the feedback	Positive:	Critical:
	Things I did which attracted positive feedback:	Things I did which attracted critical feedback:
I		
2		
3		

Notes about any recurring trends in the feedback I am receiving		
	Things I can do to build on the positive feedback in my future work:	Things I can do to address the critical feedback in my future work:
1		
2		
3		
Additional feedback	Further positive feedback I've obtained on this work from other people	Further critical feedback I've obtained on this work from other people
Source 1:		
Source 2:		
Source 3:		

The single most important thing for me to *keep doing* in my future work on the basis of this feedback:

The single most important thing for me to *improve* in my future work on the basis of this feedback:

Appendix 2

Target Monitoring Grids for Turning Feedback into Feedforward

University of Hull, Scarborough School of Education & MEd eLearning

Aims:	A strategy which aims to get students to act and build on feedback they receive and to provide staff with a means of facilitating, supporting and tracking their academic development from assignment to assignment and module to module.
Preparation:	Plan the mechanism for using the Target Monitoring Grid. This might be: • A paper slip attached to assignments handed in as hard copy • An attachment to work submitted electronically. • An insert within the 'cover sheet' for the submission of work. Plan how you will integrate student issues within your feedback – where the Target Monitoring grid comes in electronically, and feedback provided electronically, it is possible to use an efficient process of cut and paste into feedback.

Instructions / Guidance:	1. In advance of the assessment, engage students in discussion of the value of feedback and on strategies to act on areas of weakness highlighted in feedback on one assignment to help improve the next.
	2. Ask students to take 2 or 3 points for improvement from previous feedback (e.g. structure, referencing, supporting points with examples), work on them while completing their assignment, and make notes in the Target Monitoring Grid to show
	   • What points they have worked on
	   • Their evaluation of progress made on these points.
	3. When work comes in, by including comment on the points they list in their Target Monitoring Grids as part of your feedback on the task, thus adding a personalised and focused response to the points they have raised.
	
	As I work with electronic submission and electronic feedback, this is easily achieved by pasting their comments in and adding my own, but this can equally be achieved directly onto the paper slip if completing feedback by hand.
	
	4. Repeat the process from assignment to assignment and module to module to give continuity across a programme involving different staff.

Rationale:	The strategy gives students a specific reason to look at and read the feedback they receive, and to work with key guidance for improvement from one assignment to improve their work on the next. In this way FeedBACK is turned into FeedFORWARD. The expectation to comment on progress made in attempting to improve on each of their chosen points, students are encouraged to be self-critical and to evaluate their own progress. By commenting on the points raised, and responding to students' self-evaluation, within your next feedback, you place value on their engagement in the task of acting on feedback and are seen to be 'monitoring' their involvement. If implemented across a programme, the use of the Target Monitoring Grid • provides some continuity and progression from module to module • alerts each tutor to issues raised by the members of staff with respect to individual students' progress • can act as a form of Personal Development Planning (PDP) integrated within students' regular module learning activity; this can be an especially significant point on part-time programmes where students may be juggling work and study and find it difficult to find additional time for distinct PDP activity.

Example Target Monitoring Grid

List here any targets e.g. referencing skills, from previous assignments that are appropriate to this assignment, and indicate to the marker of this new assignment that you have addressed them.	
Target	**Notes on how this has been addressed in this assignment**

Example of Tutor Response to Target Monitoring Grid within Feedback

List here any targets e.g. referencing skills, from previous assignments that are appropriate to this assignment, and indicate to the marker of this new assignment that you have addressed them.		
Target	**Notes on how this has been addressed in this assignment**	**Response**
To ensure I keep my work within the word count	Throughout writing I have been aware of my word count and have used as part of planning, which has ensured that when I came to editing there was little need to cut anything out	Well done. This was an appropriate approach, and I think has resulted in a well-balanced piece of work.
To ensure learning outcomes are addressed	I have kept referring back to the outcomes during the planning/writing of this task. This has made me fairly confident that this submission works towards these.	I think that, again, the success of both these aspects of your approach to the work is clear and is evidenced in the mark achieved. Well done Gina. ☺