

What is feedback?

As a student, you will have to work with feedback at many points during your studies. Almost every week you hand in an assignment. However, after submitting an assignment the learning process does not end. It continues whilst you are interacting with its feedback.

What is feedback?

Hattie and Timperley (2007, p. 86) argue that the "main purpose of feedback is to reduce the gap between current understanding and performance, and a goal".

So, in order to improve and develop yourself, and to achieve your goal, it is important to pay attention to feedback. Not only will feedback give you insight in what went wrong and needs improvement, it will also show you what went well

The goal is not to read and accept the feedback, but to read it, think about it and then process it. Feedback is therefore not a one-way street but a dialogue in which you are involved, with yourself and others. What are my strengths? What are my weaknesses, why are these my weaknesses, and how can I improve them next time?

Feedback thus occupies a central place in the learning process and in education.

Feedback within academics

Feedback ensures that you develop yourself further. That is not only relevant for students, but for everyone within the academic community. Feedback is an academic skill that plays a central role in this process. Before a scientific article is published, it goes through a thorough peer review process. And when a teacher makes a test, a test committee first thoroughly checks whether it is suitable.

Sources of feedback

Feedback is available from various sources. Depending on where you are in the learning process and what you need, you can consult those different sources. The four most common are further explained here, these are:

- ✓ fellow students
- ✓ yourself
- ✓ the expert
- ✓ the layperson

The first source of feedback is your *fellow student*, we also call this peer feedback.

Fellow students are familiar with the material covered during the course, know what the assignment is, and have their own view of the assignment. This means that peer feedback allows you to talk to each other and discuss the quality of the assignment at a detailed level.

With peer feedback you also look at the work of others. As a result, you can see how they approach the assignment: How do they write? What structure do they use? What view do they have? So, you can see how others approach something and compare it with your own work; can I learn something from this?

Which will broaden your critical view.

With this expanded critical view, we arrive at **the second source of feedback**: *yourself*. If you look critically at other people's work on a regular basis, you will eventually be better able to look critically at your own work. You train yourself to look at something from a distance, analyze what is happening, and on the basis of that, make improvements. You are also responsible for your assignment, you know what feedback you have received in the past and where your strengths and weaknesses lie. Do you find it difficult to look at your own work from a distance? Try working on the assignment early in order to have enough time to look at it again after a period of time. Looking at an assignment a few days after working on it allows you to see your own work with a fresh perspective.



Student factsheet

What is feedback?

Fellow students (peer feedback)	Yourself	Expert	Layperson
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Knowledge of the assignment ✓ Level of detail ✓ Many possibilities to ask questions ✓ Active dialogue ✓ Active role reserved for yourself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Insight into own learning process ✓ Critical look ✓ Responsible for end result 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A lot of knowledge of the assignment ✓ Subject knowledge ✓ Abstract feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Fresh perspective ✓ New insights ✓ Feedback on language, structure and argumentation

The **third source of feedback** is the *expert*, in many cases this is the (workgroup) teacher. The teacher can clearly indicate the difference between the current performance of a student and the goal of the assignment (desired result).

Unlike fellow students, the teacher often has less time and will focus more on feedback on a more abstract level. This usually takes the form of generic feedback, illustrated with examples. Expert feedback on individual student assignments usually takes place on key assignments in a course (a draft version or other important assignment for the success of the course).

The **final source of feedback** may not be the most obvious: the *layperson*. The layperson can be anyone you know, who is not directly involved in your education. For example, think of your partner, friends, parents or other family members. Because they have little or no knowledge of the assignment, they can look at the assignment with a fresh perspective.

They may not be able to provide substantive feedback ("Is that theory correct?"), but they can provide feedback in terms of language use, writing style or argumentation. Often, laypeople can also ask unexpected questions that can clarify things or force you to better explain certain aspects of your work.

Feedback unclear? Ask questions

Is the feedback you receive unclear, do you not know what it means or do you disagree with it? Then ask questions!

Remember that feedback is a dialogue. The feedback process (of giving and receiving) is therefore not only good for your communication skills, but also for your argumentative skills.

Please note that you:

- ✓ Have an open attitude towards others
- ✓ Keep a critical eye on your own work
- ✓ Have the will to improve

References

Hattie, J. & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77 (1), 81 – 112