

# Feedback Activity Guide

CLI Fellowship: A Culture of Feedback

The Erasmus logo, featuring the word "Erasmus" in a stylized, cursive script.

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## Introduction

This feedback activity guide contains all varieties of generic and peer-feedback activities we use in our skills education in the first bachelor year of Public Administration, Sociology, and Management of International Social Challenges. The guide can be seen as a supplement to the 'Culture of Feedback – CLI Fellowship report'.

Every block the students at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS, ESSB) take part in a 'theoretical' course and a practicum. During the practicums several academic and professional skills are taught. Feedback, in all sorts of forms, is a key element in the educational design of the practicums. This document contains all varieties of feedback exercises and instructions we use in the practicums during the first bachelor year. They are presented in chronological order. If certain exercises occur multiple times during the academic year, they are only mentioned once in this guide.

Factsheets and PowerPoints on certain aspects of feedback are not included in this guide but are separate files.

## Feedback in 'Introduction Academic Skills'

### ***Factsheets***

Prior to the third meeting, where we will first make use of various forms of feedback, students read two handouts: 1) What is feedback?, and 2) Peer-feedback and deeper learning. These handouts discuss the most important aspects of feedback, and peer-feedback and deeper learning. For more information see document '2. Instructions - What is feedback' and '3. Instructions – peer-feedback and deeper learning (student)'.

Teachers will read the same documents as mentioned above and the teacher factsheet peer-feedback. For more information see '4. Instructions – Peer-feedback and deeper learning (teacher)'.

The instructions teaches students about the role of feedback in our education and discusses the 'theory' behind it.

### ***Presentation on the importance of feedback***

As a follow up on the handouts discussed above, teachers give a brief presentation on the importance of feedback. We give an extra presentation on these topics because students learn in different ways: some learn and remember well by reading, others benefit more from listening. For more information see '5a. PowerPoint Feedback Instructions EN'.

### ***Peer-feedback on assignment using guided questions***

Teacher provides students with questions that guide them where they should pay attention to when giving peer-feedback. Questions should be concrete and of a low level of abstraction, so students can easily understand where to focus on.

Other ways of guiding students in answering the questions or giving feedback are:

- giving them an amount of words they should use;
- letting them provide concrete examples out of fellow students work to illustrate their answers; and
- always asking them why this is the answer to the question.

An example of such an exercise, as mentioned in our trainer instructions for this course, can be found in the text box below. For the original assignment students handed in an overview (in Dutch: *bouwplan*) – a schematic representation – of an academic review article.

After you have explained the generic points of feedback (show them on a sheet), the students themselves get to work with the assignment of their neighbour. How do they assess the other person's assignment? They will have to try to formulate their feedback as much as possible as is mentioned in the factsheet. For the peer-feedback, students go into the following questions. First, they write down the answers for themselves, after that they explain these answers to each other:

- a) Is it possible, based on reading the overview, to explain what the research is about?
- b) Is it clear which method has been used for the research? Does it explain in sufficient detail what has been researched, who and how?
- c) Is it clear to you what we could learn from this article? In other words: is the conclusion clear?
- d) Do the parts of the overview read as a cohesive whole?

## Feedback in 'Academic Writing'

### **Peer-feedback on anonymous examples**

The teacher discusses generic feedback plenary, followed by showing samples of student work that are exemplary for the generic feedback. As a group, students now 'dissect' the examples and explain what is good about it and what can still be improved.

Selecting examples from students work makes generic feedback more personal. It is a way for a) teachers to not read all student work, and thus save time (you read assignments until saturation occurs), and yet for b) students to still feel like individual attention was paid to their assignments.

The purpose of this plenary discussion is to set a standard on how *they* should assess each other's work: critically! Let students discuss what can be improved in the examples and why, in a constructive manner. A critical attitude and being open to improvement are things that will benefit them enormously. Not only during their academic careers, but also in their professional careers.

Note that being critical at your fellow student's work in public is not a bad thing, you are not 'shaming' your peers. Providing constructive and critical feedback actually enables them to improve their future assignments.

Subsequently, students will discuss their assignments and provide feedback in groups of two. They do this by applying the points of generic feedback as discussed earlier on the work of their peer.

### **Reflecting on generic feedback**

The teacher discusses generic feedback plenary. Afterwards, students, for themselves, complete the table below<sup>1</sup>.

<b>Feedback</b>	<b>To what extent might this feedback apply to me?</b>				<b>What, if anything, could/should I do differently to ensure that I address this point in the future?</b>
	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A little bit</i>	<i>Quite a lot</i>	<i>Entirely</i>	

<sup>1</sup> Winstone, N. E., & Nash, R.A. (2016). The developing engagement with feedback toolkit (DEFT). *Higher Education Academy*.

### **Group work, group discussion, and reflection**

Students work in small groups on an assignment or exercise. Highlights or key points from the work in small groups are then discussed plenary. The teacher can listen to the discussion, ask questions and/or emphasize important points the students are addressing. After the plenary discussion students return to their small groups and evaluate their first efforts based on the plenary discussion and the input of other groups and the teacher.

### **The process of action**

This exercise is directed at enabling students to appreciate the importance of acting on feedback, and to reflect upon and share their strategies for putting feedback into action. See text box below for the entire exercise<sup>2</sup>.

#### **THE PROCESS OF ACTION**

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*Learning objective: To enable students to appreciate the importance of acting on feedback, and to reflect upon and share their strategies for putting feedback into action.*

This exercise should begin with a discussion of why it is important to act upon feedback. Students are then instructed to work individually and write down a list of the things they do upon receiving feedback (3 mins). These might range from simply reading it through to more proactive strategies such as keeping a list of common comments or seeking guidance from a tutor or peer. The facilitator should emphasize that students' lists will remain completely anonymous. The facilitator collects all the individual lists and shares the actions with the group, ideally by writing them on a whiteboard so that all students can see the list. (Another option is collecting them during the break and organize them while students are busy with an exercise. Later on, during the meeting you can follow up with sharing them on the whiteboard.)

Next, divide students into groups and ask them to discuss the list of actions, and rank them in order from least to most effective, considering the reasons for their ranking (5 – 10 mins). Each group then feeds back to the rest of the class. A useful topic for discussion is how those that had been ranked as least effective could be reframed to become more effective. Students could also be invited to reflect on whether they think they do enough with their feedback (ask them for their own experiences, positive or negative) (10 mins).

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<sup>2</sup> Winstone, N. E., & Nash, R.A. (2016). The developing engagement with feedback toolkit (DEFT). *Higher Education Academy*.

## Feedback in 'Research Design'

### ***Group discussion with students in charge***

This exercise works well for assignments that have very concrete questions or learning goals. Students prepare an assignment where they answer specific questions. This could be learning goals, similar to PBL-meetings, or questions that should be answered about a specific text. The teacher appoints a chair (and perhaps a scribe) for the discussion and he/she/they will make sure everyone is able to share their answers and ideas. Based on the discussion students can check if their own answers are correct. If not, they can ask for further explanation by their peers.

### ***Peer-feedback by using an assessment table***

This exercise is very similar to assessing an assignment by using a rubric. However, sometimes rubrics can be quite abstract for students. Using an assessment table containing several elements you want students to focus on whilst giving peer feedback makes sure you can guide students in what aspects they should give feedback on (similar to guided questions) but also leave room for assessing how well students master these aspects.

In the example below we can find a checklist of criteria students should assess in each other's work. But it also leaves room for substantive constructive peer-feedback by giving three tops and three tips. The example below is used for assessing a draft introduction to an academic paper.



When giving feedback, students pay attention to the following matters. First, they check whether all elements are clearly (not: approximately) present, and then they assess whether this is very good, just fine, or needs improvement. Finally, they give three tips and tops.

<b>Part</b>	<b>Very good</b>	<b>Just fine</b>	<b>Needs improvent</b>
Introduction to the topic, based on a newspaper article			
Theory, incl. possible mechanisms			
Conceptualization			
Societal relevance			
Academic relevance			
Research question			
Reading guide			
Language (academic, no spelling mistakes)			
Structure (reads logically, write use of paragraphs, use of structure indicators)			
APA			
3 tops (what is already done well, incl. supporting arguments)	1. 2. 3.		
3 tips (what still needs to be done/improved, incl. supporting arguments)	1. 2. 3.		
Other			

## ***Refreshing your memory***

Prior to the third meeting several documents are published on Canvas. These documents<sup>3</sup> are aimed at refreshing student's memories on the importance of feedback and what you can (or should) do with feedback. The first document is called 'General Advice'.

### **General Advice**

**What is feedback?** *Feedback is any kind of information that someone gives you about your performance, skills, and understanding, and can represent one of the best opportunities for improving. Feedback could be a grade on your essay, or comments or suggestions given to you verbally or in writing. It might come from your tutors, but might also come from friends, family, or even from yourself.*

- **Listen to your feedback!** *Many students don't even take any notice of their feedback! This can be for many reasons, but it's very difficult to improve "magically" without getting any input on what to do differently, and how. Ignoring your feedback makes it difficult to improve.*
- **What issues are the feedback highlighting?** *Your feedback will tell you where you have earned marks, and where you can improve.*
- **What solution does the feedback propose?** *Your feedback may also include advice on how to improve. It's important to try and find this direction, which can be invaluable. Sometimes you may need to read between the lines. For example, if you're told your essay structure was weak, this should make you think about how to improve your structuring in future, not just why it wasn't better last time.*

Besides the general advice there are also several documents containing possible questions students might have about their feedback. What if, for instance, I'm really happy with my grade. Should I still read my feedback? Several possible questions are discussed and answers to these questions (including tips) are provided.

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<sup>3</sup> Winstone, N. E., & Nash, R.A. (2016). The developing engagement with feedback toolkit (DEFT). *Higher Education Academy*.

## What if...?

### **I'm really happy with my grade! I don't need to read the feedback, do I?**

*Because you have done well, you presumably will want to ensure you do just as well next time – your feedback will help you to understand why you did so well, and this shows what you should do again in future. Also, maybe you could do even better next time - look out for ideas on how to improve.*

### **The grade has made me feel really awful, I don't want to read the feedback!**

*This is understandable! A bad grade can knock your confidence and motivation. But it's important to remember that the feedback is about your work, not about you as a person. It may help to put your feedback aside for a few days before you look at it properly. When you come back to it, it's often easier to absorb and use.*

*Feedback can be instrumental in telling you **WHY** you have a disappointing mark. If you ignore it, you can't improve. If you need someone to guide you through feedback, the tutor who marked your work may be willing and able.*

## What if...?

### **I'm never going to do any other work like this, the feedback is useless!**

*A lot of students feel this way. But there's always something to gain from feedback, even when it's describing work you will never do again. For example, it may comment on issues that apply to all written assessments, like structure, grammar, or referencing. Or it may comment on other things that you can apply elsewhere, like the quality of your critique, or depth of further reading. If you really can't find anything helpful in your feedback, a meeting with your tutor may help you to find it.*

### **The feedback I've been given is really unhelpful, I can't do anything with it!**

*Not all feedback is equally constructive and detailed. It may feel uninformative, or maybe you completely disagree with it. Don't dismiss it! Sometimes the most valuable part of feedback is your reflection upon it. For example, even if you disagree with a suggestion, thinking about why can help you clarify your understanding, or realise how you could better justify your arguments. You could also (politely) contact the marker and ask them to discuss it.*

## What if...?

**There's a specific area I've been told I need to improve.**

*Some of the feedback comments that students receive come up time and again. Here are some of the common aspects that you may be asked to improve:*

<b>Being Critical</b>	When describing studies or theories, ask whether what you've learned about them is necessarily true – are the conclusions questionable? If so, why? Does the evidence actually support the ideas it claims to support? Your university might offer workshops on critical thinking.
	The best way to improve structure is to plan your work well before you start writing. What exactly do you want to say? What does the marker need to understand first, before they can understand the rest? How can you make each section of your work flow nicely into the rest, so that the marker won't get lost?
<b>Referencing</b>	Using references appropriately is often tricky, but it's also fairly easy to find out what to do. Check your feedback to see where you often go wrong. Sometimes it's an aspect of formatting that you didn't even know about. You can find referencing style guides online, or you can look in published papers for examples. Have these to hand while you work.
	Sometimes students feel so confident in their understanding of a topic, that they forget to show evidence to support their claims. Make sure you back up everything you say with evidence! Also, it's always best to read your primary sources carefully, rather than just reading descriptions of those sources - do they actually say what you think they say?
<b>Writing Style</b>	Your writing style can be hard to change, and the expectations are often much higher at university compared with school or college. When you read papers, don't just focus on what they say, but also on how they are written. If you find papers that are really clear and easy to understand, keep them as examples of the kinds of style you could emulate.

## Feedback in 'Literature Review'

### *Receiving feedback, a glossary*

Between the second and third meeting a glossary is published on Canvas. In this glossary students can find numerous phrases or words that are probably and quite regularly written as feedback on their papers. But sometimes students can struggle with this feedback because they are not quite sure what is meant with it. For instance, what do teachers mean when they say that "you're being too abstract"? This glossary<sup>4</sup> not only provides the most common feedback-phrases but also adds a brief explanation for all terms.

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## GLOSSARY

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Sometimes, markers give you feedback, and you have no idea what they mean! Based on a research by Winstone and Nash (2016) and our own experiences at Erasmus University Rotterdam we have come up with a list of common terms used when giving feedback and present you a short summary of what this means.

<i>Abstract</i>	Being too vague about a point by not explaining it in specific language, or by failing to ground it in theory or to use examples (see also 'Concrete').
<i>Address the question</i>	Make sure you're answering the question that is being asked – students sometimes write about topics that miss the point. Make sure your arguments and material are relevant and clearly linked to the question, and you are not simply writing everything you know about the topic.
<i>Assess the limitations of the study</i>	Weigh up aspects of the study and consider weaknesses that might undermine the validity of the study, and/or suggest ways the research could be improved. The weaknesses could be methodological but may also be with how the authors interpret and present their own findings. Limitations of the study are usually presented at the end of your study.
<i>Balanced argument</i>	While it is often valuable to take a stance, be sure to present evidence for the other sides of the argument. Doing so shows nuance and that you've researched the topic and all available information, and you not merely selectively investigated other research.

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<sup>4</sup> Winstone, N. E., & Nash, R.A. (2016). The developing engagement with feedback toolkit (DEFT). *Higher Education Academy*. And edited by R. Govers (2022)

<i>Clarity</i>	Make sure the reader can easily understand what points you have made by writing clearly, and explaining why you have made these points. Sometimes it's just a case of writing straightforwardly, and not assuming the reader will automatically know what you were thinking.
<i>Concise</i>	In your work you need to explain ideas clearly but with fewer words – if you have a word limit, make effective use of it! The marker may think you are waffling. Be succinct and avoid needlessly complicated words and phrases.
<i>Concrete</i>	Make sure you're using clear and specific language to talk about a defined situation or a certain finding, not just vague ideas (see also 'Abstract').
<i>Critically evaluate / critically analyse</i>	Show that you have actively thought about and questioned the claims you are describing or making. Even if the claims are completely valid, show that you haven't just accepted them at face value.
<i>Depth / elaborate</i>	Make sure you explain your arguments in detail, using examples where appropriate and working through your ideas rather than simply glossing over them.
<i>Flow</i>	Showing a sophisticated or elegant writing style, or presenting evidence in an original and insightful way.
<i>Illustrate</i>	Give examples to back up the points you make, ideally using evidence.
<i>Originality</i>	Demonstrating your own thinking, perhaps by drawing upon research beyond the ones you learned about in class, to make an argument that not every student would have thought of. Making something your own shows that you have your own academic voice, and are not merely replicating what others say.
<i>Proof-read</i>	Reading work back carefully, or getting another person to read it, to check for spelling and grammar mistakes. You should also check that your arguments make sense, and that everything is phrased clearly.
<i>Range of material</i>	Try and use more than just the material provided by the lecturers, and avoid basing too much of your work on just one or two references. Again: using multiple sources demonstrates your knowledge of the subject. Based on the audience you're writing for the types of sources may also vary. If you're writing for an academic audience you should make sure you almost completely base your arguments on academic sources.
<i>Specific</i>	Give a more precise and detailed account of what is being described, drawing on particular examples. Readers should not 'kind of...' understand what you're saying.

<i>Structure</i>	A way of presenting your work so the reader can follow the argument. Make sure your paragraphs are in a logical order, that you show the connections between different paragraphs, and that each section has good beginning and ending sentences. Use structure indicators to guide your readers through the assignment.
<i>Synthesis / Integration</i>	Show how different sources and theories go together to make a good argument. A lack of synthesis, or merely summarizing your sources, could mean your essay reads more like a list of research than an argument.
<i>Transparent</i>	Making sure that the thought-process which underlies your argument is clearly expressed. Even if you have a good idea, it's not always easy for the marker to see your train of thought.
<i>Unsubstantiated claims</i>	An unsubstantiated claim lacks evidence. Make sure you justify your argument by supporting each point with empirical evidence and references. This will create a more persuasive argument.

Still not sure what your feedback means? Ask your peers or teacher to elaborate on their feedback. There's no harm in asking!

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### ***Peer-feedback by creating a schematic representation***

The aim of this exercise is to let students create a visual (schematic) representation of the written work of a fellow student. This is a good way to assess the structure and argumentation of an assignment. If it is a well written and coherent story it should be easy draw up a clear visualization. If the argument in the written paper is incoherent or unclear it gets harder to make a helpful schematic representation and it becomes clear where the weaknesses in the argumentation are. After drawing up a visualization, students explain to their peers where and why they struggled (or didn't).

### ***Using emotion positively***

The process of giving feedback, but especially of receiving feedback, can be an emotional process (besides being a technical one). When feedback is bluntly phrased, poorly formulated, or negative in nature, it can do something to your self-confidence. This exercise<sup>5</sup> therefore focuses on what feedback can do to a student and how you might deal with it.

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<sup>5</sup> Winstone, N. E., & Nash, R.A. (2016). The developing engagement with feedback toolkit (DEFT). *Higher Education Academy*. And edited by R. Govers (2022)



## USING EMOTION POSITIVELY

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*Learning objective: To enable students to understand the importance of the emotions elicited by feedback, and to appreciate the role of emotion in driving their future development.*

Students should bring along to the workgroup a piece of written feedback they have received on their own work (home assignment, peer feedback, final assignment, or other). They should be encouraged to read through the feedback in the workgroup, and to select a few phrases that elicit (or elicited) emotions, either positive or negative (pride, anger, insecurity, inspiration, (de)motivated, etc.) (10 min.). They should then attempt to critically reflect on how they feel, and on how they can use those pieces of feedback and their own feelings to help decide what to do differently next time (5 min.).

It may be useful to discuss the functions of emotions in the process of receiving feedback, for example. Even though reading negative feedback can be difficult, if we can sit with that feedback, it can really change the way we do things and can make us more independent learners.

*Extra for trainers:* Receiving feedback can be a highly emotional process. Since you have probably worked hard on your assignment receiving negative or unnuanced feedback can be painful, even resulting in physical effects (sweat, pain in the stomach, raised heartbeat). This exercise aims at helping students deal with negative emotions and instead of feeling angry and rejected tries to see if there are other ways of dealing with the feedback. For instance: take some distance from the feedback and see if it could actually be accurate or helpful. Or maybe it is helpful to discuss the feedback with your peer(s) or trainer. After reflecting on the feedback students should try to come up with a plan to tackle the feedback. Overcoming negative feedback and improving your work can boost feelings of confidence when doing different tasks in the future.

Of course, sometimes feedback can be downright rude or useless. Still there are ways to deal with this. By going into dialogue with the person who gave you feedback you can check if you understood the feedback correctly or explain to them that the way the feedback is framed now is hurtful and not helpful for improving future work.

Feedback can also cause feelings of joy, especially when it is positive. The aim is not to immediately accept the feedback and feel glad the hurdle has been cleared ("I'm glad this assignment is done!"). Try to see what exactly is done right and thus what you should do again for future assignments.

Feedback can cause all sorts of emotions. None of these emotions are wrong or right and there is not one way to deal with all these things. The aim of this exercise therefore is not to present the solution to dealing with feedback but to discuss the reactions one might have when receiving feedback and explore the different pathways that can be chosen to put the feedback to work.

## Feedback in 'Interviewing'

### **Role playing game with observer**

To practice their interviewing skills students do several role plays in groups of three students. During each practice interview the topic of the interview switches and the roles of the students switch too. Every student should perform every role one time. The different roles are interviewer, participant, and observer. Whilst the interview takes place, the observer observes the interview and makes notes related to the interview skills of the interviewer. Afterwards the observer shares the notes with the interviewer, and all three students discuss how the interview went. Students try to relate their findings and suggestions for improvement to the literature of the course.

<b>Introduction</b>		Short explanation
Interviewer introduces himself/herself properly	Yes/no	.....
Interviewer reassures respondent	Yes/no	.....
Interviewer explains subject and aim of interview	Yes/no	.....
Interviewer asks for consent	Yes/no	.....
<b>Questions</b>		
Interviewer uses inviting, logical opening questions	Yes/no	.....
Interviewer avoids biased questions	Yes/no	.....
Interviewer avoids closed questions	Yes/no	.....
Interviewer uses good probing questions	Yes/no	.....
<b>General remarks</b>		
Position/attitude and non-verbal communication		.....
Strong points interviewer:		.....
Suggestions for improvement		.....
The participants 'secret mission*' was:		.....

\*During this exercise we usually give our participants a 'secret mission', this means that they have to act in a certain way and that the interviewer should react to that in accordance to the literature. For instance: how do you react if the participant talks way too much? Or doesn't open up at all? Or he/she/they tends to drift of during the entire interview? Of course, the interviewer doesn't know up front what the secret mission is.

## Feedback in 'Argumentative Writing'

### ***Ask for targeted feedback***

Students receive individual feedback from their teacher on their assignments. After thoroughly considering the teacher feedback students write down two or three concrete points for which they need assistance or advice. These points are presented to a fellow student, who then actively thinks about how these points can be improved. This exercise requires a more active role of the feedback-receiver since they need to actively think about which points of feedback they can improve themselves and which not.

## Feedback in 'Presentation'

### ***Verbal feedback, including learning goals***

This feedback exercise is used during in class presentations. Whilst one student gives a presentation several other students grade the presentation by using an assessment form. After the presentation is done students share their feedback with the presenter. The students who give feedback end by together coming up with a minimum of three learning goals which the presenter can work on for future presentations. Assessment forms are shared with presenter afterwards.

## Bibliography

Winstone, N. E., & Nash, R.A. (2016). The developing engagement with feedback toolkit (DEFT). *Higher Education Academy*.

## Supplements

2. Instructions – What is feedback
3. Instructions – Peer-feedback and deeper learning (student)
4. Instructions – Peer-feedback and deeper learning (teacher)
- 5a. PowerPoint Feedback Instructions EN
- 5b. PowerPoint Feedback Instructions NL