A UQ Assessment Brief on “Using feedback to help students to learn”

(Brief No: 2 - OCTOBER 2009)

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http://www.uq.edu.au/tediteach/assessment/resources.html#briefs

Race, P. Using feedback to help students to learn. The Higher Education Academy.

Keywords
feedback, feedback modes, evaluation of feedback modes, feedback effectiveness/efficiency

Abstract
Feedback is vital in just about all learning contexts. These pages look at the central role that feedback plays in student learning, and explores ways to help the reception of feedback to be improved. I've also linked feedback to the development of competence, exploring the different roles that feedback has at different stages on the pathway towards conscious competence. The main section of these pages then expands on some tactics for making feedback work, whether in writing, face-to-face, in print, or electronically. All forms of feedback have their pros and cons, and I've tried to highlight both sides of the picture in each case, to help you decide how best to use feedback in your own teaching, learning and assessment contexts.

Feedback qualities and attributes
This resource begins with a discussion of the nature of feedback and the qualities and attributes that determine its effectiveness – timely, intimate and individual, empowering, encouraging of ongoing dialogue, manageable.

Feedback and competence
Feedback needs to be tailored to student competence and also the degree to which they are conscious of their level of competence. An embedded PowerPoint presentation elaborates on this point.

Feedback strategies
Most of this resource (more than six pages) is devoted to a description of a wide range of feedback strategies and the advantages and disadvantages of each. They include:

- **Feedback in writing or print**
  - Handwritten comments on (or about) students’ assessed work
  - Word-processed overall comments on each student’s assessed work
  - Model answers or solutions, issued to students along with their marked work
  - Assignment return sheets
  - Word-processed overall class reports on an assignment
  - Codes written on students’ work, debriefed in a whole-group session

- **Face-to-face feedback**
  - Face-to-face feedback to whole classes
  - Face-to-face feedback to individual students
  - Face-to-face feedback to small groups of students

- **Electronic feedback**
Emailed comments on students’ assessed work
- Using computing conferences for overall comments on batches of students’ work
- Computer-delivered feedback

Feedback: balancing learning payoff and efficiency
A final section discusses the tensions and trade-offs between feedback that has a high impact on student learning and feedback that is highly efficient in terms of time and effort. There is also a task that can be used by coordinators and teachers for the analysis of individual feedback methods.

This series of briefs on assessment topics has been prepared by the UQ Teaching and Educational Development Institute (TEDI) for UQ teaching academics. “UQ ASSESSMENT BRIEFS” of journal articles, book chapters, reviews, websites, reports etc are distributed to Faculty and School Teaching and Learning Chairs in a form designed to encourage wider distribution.

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