

**Giving and Receiving Feedback
By Interactive Measurement Group at
The University of Nevada, Las Vegas**

Please cite the following reference if you use or modify these materials:

Reference: Interactive Measurement Group. (2014). *Workshop on giving and receiving feedback*. Retrieved from <http://img.faculty.unlv.edu/workshops/>

Lesson 1: Giving Feedback

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to provide suggestions about how to give helpful feedback to others.

Prerequisites

No prerequisites are required to start this lesson

Part 1: How to Give Feedback

This section contains guidelines on how to give feedback on someone's writing. Most of these guidelines can be adapted if you are proving guidelines on something else (a computer program, a video, a drawing, etc.).

1. If someone asks you a specific question, answer it. The next section will list specific questions that you should ask when you are asking for feedback. Hopefully, if you ask these questions, your reviewers will answer them. In turn, if someone asks you a specific question, answer it to the best of your ability.
2. If someone just asks you for general feedback, you need to decide how much feedback to give. Give no more than 3 general comments. People are overwhelmed if you give them more than that. Also, give no more than 2 sentence- or word-level remarks. Big picture feedback is more valuable than detailed feedback. And if you comment on a particular sentence, the writer will likely assume that this sentence is a good sentence that should still exist in the next draft. It can be hard to select just 2 sentence or word-level remarks. Pick problems that occur multiple times, and mention them once.
3. Give at least one piece of positive feedback before giving suggestions for improvement. Positive feedback is important because it demonstrates to the reader that you appreciate the hard work that they put into their project or assignment, and gives the writer encouragement. Similarly, end your feedback with at least one final piece of positive feedback. Here are some generic examples that may be relevant to many papers: "I found your paper really interesting." "I enjoyed reading your paper." "Your paper is very exciting." "Your paper addresses an important topic." "You have found a lot of good material on this topic." However, positive feedback that is obviously about this particular paper will often be more motivating for the writer. For example, "The example with your brother had my heart in my throat." "Your argument against capital punishment is compelling."
4. Give suggestions for improvement. If you don't tell the writer how to improve the writing, then you haven't helped them in any way.
5. Make concrete suggestions that the reader can change. For example, consider the feedback, "That section was nice, but it could have been better." This feedback is ambiguous and it does not suggest concrete changes to be made. Instead, provide straightforward feedback that says what to change: "That section was very informative, though I was a bit confused by the part where _____. I think if you clarify that point, it will strengthen your argument." Here's a second example. Do not say, "Your writing

isn't very clear." Instead say, "The second and third paragraphs were unclear. Add a key sentence to each of these paragraphs."

6. Avoid ambiguous feedback. The writer won't know what you mean and so it won't help them improve the writing. Also, if it's not clear if a comment is positive or negative, readers will tend to interpret it negatively. Therefore, write explicit feedback that is hard to misinterpret.
7. Use specific emotion words and adjectives to help readers understand your feedback. For example, say "I am happy that..." "I was disappointed that..." "I am sad that..." "I worry that..." "I was excited about..." "I was interested to read..." Readers often misinterpret the emotional tone of written feedback. When words are ambiguous, readers interpret them as negative. When words are slightly negative, readers interpret them as very negative. The emotional tone of your feedback is as important (and sometimes more important) than the content of your feedback. Make sure your feedback has the emotional tone that you intend.

Part 2: Examples of Feedback

This section contains three examples. The first example contains feedback on the **CONTENT**: "The introduction is unclear. I was confused and bored while I was reading it. It would be better if you moved the second paragraph above the first paragraph. That will provide a compelling and interesting opening for your paper."

The second example contains feedback on the **PERSON** or the **PROCESS**: "I am disappointed that you ignored the feedback I gave you last week. I told you that you should re-organize the introduction, by moving the second paragraph after the first one, and you didn't do this. I feel like you don't value my feedback: You asked for my advice but then didn't follow it. You didn't tell me why you didn't re-arrange the introduction, and you didn't try something else to fix the problem. I don't know why you asked for my feedback again, when you have not yet incorporated my previous set of suggestions and don't really seem to value my opinion."

Finally, here's a third example. It also deals with a situation where someone ignored previous feedback, but it has a positive emotional tone: "I am pleased that you asked for feedback on your paper again. I am glad that you find my feedback helpful. I see that you have not yet had time to incorporate all of my previous feedback. For example, I suggested you re-organize the introduction by moving the second paragraph after the first paragraph, and you didn't do this yet. I trust you will get around to this in the next few days. Rather than repeating feedback I gave you before, I will only provide new suggestions for improvement."

This is so important that I'll repeat it: The emotional tone of your feedback is as important (and sometimes more important) than the content of your feedback. Make sure your feedback has the emotional tone that you intend.

Lesson 2: Asking for Feedback

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to explain why feedback is beneficial, who to ask for feedback, and what to ask.

Prerequisites

Lesson 1: Giving Feedback

Part 1: Why People Should Ask for Feedback

Feedback on your writing is beneficial for three reasons:

First, feedback will improve the current piece of writing. If you are working on a course assignment, you'll get a higher grade. If you are working on a conference poster, it is more likely to get accepted. If you are working on your thesis, it won't take as long to write and you are more likely to pass.

Second, feedback will make you a better writer. You will learn writing techniques that are useful in your future writing assignments. You'll learn how to write better first drafts and what to look for when revising. Rather than making the same grammatical, organizational, and structural errors over and over again, your basic writing skills will improve so that you write more clearly, concisely, and persuasively. This will allow you to focus your effort on the content itself.

Third, feedback will help keep you motivated. If you are working on a large paper (e.g., a journal article, a masters thesis), it can be difficult to maintain your motivation week after week and month after month. Getting feedback gives you something concrete to work on. For example, Reader A said that paragraph 3 is unclear. You can polish paragraph 3. Reader B pointed out that you haven't defined your abbreviations. You can explain your abbreviations the first time you use them. Feedback provides direction. When you are unsure what you should do with a section, feedback can help you refine your approach. When you aren't sure how to start, you can write something, anything, and know that you can ask for feedback in order to know if that approach is worthwhile. If you get feedback regularly, it can eliminate writers block because you won't be perfectionistic. You know that the writing is going to change, is going to improve, and so you don't worry that it has to be perfect right now. Feedback is beneficial at all stages of writing. You might be just beginning a paper and want to talk to someone about your ideas. You might be midway through a draft and find that you are unsure about the direction you've been taking. You might be polishing the final draft and want a fresh set of eyes to look for typos. Even after a piece of writing is finished, feedback can help you develop your skills as a writer. There is no "best time" to ask for feedback on a piece of writing. Essentially, asking for feedback at any stage helps you break out of the isolation of writing. When you ask for feedback, you are no longer working in a void, wondering whether or not your writing is clear, concise, and persuasive. By seeking feedback from others, you are taking positive, constructive steps to improve your own writing and develop as a writer.

Part 2: Why People Do Not Ask for Feedback

Sometimes people do not ask for feedback because they are worried that the feedback will be negative. They avoid asking others what they think about a piece of writing because they have a sneaking suspicion that the news will not be good. However, if you want to improve your writing, constructive criticism from others will help. Remember that the criticism you receive is only criticism of the writing and not of the writer.

Sometimes people don't ask for feedback because they don't want to take up someone else's time. You may be hesitant to go to your instructor or TA to talk about your writing because you don't want to bother him or her. Instructors and TAs are paid to provide you with feedback: That's their job. Moreover, instructors are usually especially generous with their assistance and their advice when students seek them out. They like it when someone expresses interest. Finally, instructors and TA's set up office hours specifically so they can work with students: They are often pleased when someone shows up. If you can't meet the instructor during office hours, try making a special appointment or contact them by email. If you aren't able to obtain feedback from your instructor or TA, remember that there are plenty of other people around you who can offer feedback.

You may be hesitant to ask family and friends for feedback. Remember that family and friends support each other in myriad ways. For example, your brother might proof-read your paper and you might babysit his daughter. Your friend might talk with you about the approach you are taking to a paper and you might talk with her about an issue she's having at work. You might be hesitant to ask classmates for feedback. Remember, your classmates are interested in many of the same things as you are. They will enjoy reading your paper and talking with you about the content area. Also, you should offer to provide them with feedback on one of their papers in return. Giving someone else feedback will make you a better writer because you'll notice things that work well and things that cause confusion. Ideally, you'll develop relationships with one or two classmates where you regularly give each other feedback on your writing.

Part 3: Who to ask for feedback

You should ask for feedback from two different groups of people.

Non-experts

Non-experts are people who have little or no background in the topic you are writing about. They might be other students in your program, but ideally they would NOT be in the same class as you or would not be members of the same research team. They might also be family members and friends. Non-experts are the best source of feedback on the clarity of your writing. If you don't explain something clearly, they won't understand it, because they can't fill in the rest of the argument for themselves.

You should ask for feedback from 2-5 non-experts on each piece of writing you do. If the writing is really important (a statement of purpose for graduate school, your CV, a

conference abstract, a journal article, a master's thesis), you should ask for feedback from five or more. If the writing has ordinary importance (e.g., a class paper, a conference poster), you might only ask for feedback from one or two people. To request feedback, ask each person individually and explain why you are asking for their feedback in particular.

Experts

Experts are people who have a degree in the area you are writing about. In the classroom, the experts are your teacher and teaching assistant. In the research lab, the experts are your research mentor on that project and other faculty members in the same discipline. Experts are valuable because they can comment on whether you have included the right material and whether you are on the right track in terms of content.

When you are writing something important (a statement of purpose for graduate school, your CV, a conference abstract, a journal article, a master's thesis), you should ask for feedback from 1-3 experts. You will receive feedback from 3 or more experts for your master's thesis, because they will be on your committee. You will receive feedback from 3 or more experts on your refereed journal articles, because they will be the reviewers. However, you will need to make a special effort to request expert feedback on other important writing, such as your statement of purpose for graduate school, your CV, and your conference abstract. To request feedback, ask each person individually and explain why you are asking for their feedback in particular.

The person who can offer the most effective feedback on your writing may vary depending on when you need the feedback and what kind of feedback you need. Keep in mind, though, that if you want to improve a piece of writing, almost any thoughtful reader (e.g., a classmate, roommate, mother, friend, or neighbor) can provide useful feedback that will help you improve your writing. Don't wait for an expert: There may not be an expert readily available to look over your work. Instead, share your writing often and with a variety of readers. The more readers you expose your writing to, the better.

Part 4: Kinds of Feedback to Ask for

When you do ask for feedback on your writing, ask open-ended questions that specifically ask the reader to point out weaknesses. Do not ask yes/no questions.

At the early and middle stages of writing, ask **non-experts** 3-5 of the following questions:

1. What passages were the hardest to read and understand?
2. Where you were lost or even just unsure about where the paper was going?
3. What jargon do I use without adequate explanation?
4. What section is the most boring to you personally?
5. How could I reorganize the material to make it clearer and more persuasive?
6. What is the most important finding from this paper?
7. This paper is too long. Which sections should I shorten and which should I delete?

8. What is the main point of the paper? (If readers cannot discern your main point, then you need to revise your paper)

At the early and middle stages of writing, ask **experts** 3-5 of the following questions:

1. What sections were the hardest to read and understand?
2. Where you were lost or even just unsure about where the paper was going?
3. How could this material be reorganized to make it clearer and more persuasive?
4. What additional papers should I read and cite?
5. I plan to submit this paper to a refereed journal for publication. What journals would you recommend?
6. This paper is too long. Which sections should I shorten and which should I delete?

At the final state of writing, ask **experts** for help polishing technical aspects of your paper. Ask them some of the following questions:

1. How could the tables and figures be improved?
2. How could the margins, footnotes, and formatting be improved?
3. Are there any obvious violations of APA format?
4. How could the reporting of statistical results be improved?

At the final stage of writing, ask **non-experts** for help polishing your paper. Ask them 3-5 of the following questions:

1. Are there any silly typos? These could be spelling or grammar errors or something else.
2. Are there any silly formatting errors? These could be inappropriate margins, footnotes in the wrong place, etc.
3. Are there any obvious violations of APA format?
4. Please compare the in-text citations and the reference list. Check that each in-text citation appears in the reference list and that each item in the reference list is cited somewhere in the paper.

Lesson 3: Using Feedback

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to provide helpful suggestions about how to use feedback they have received others.

Prerequisites

Lesson 1: Giving Feedback

Lesson 2: Asking for Feedback

Part 1: How to use Feedback

Ignore general negative comments that have no specifics (e.g., “the paper is worthless”). These comments do not tell you what to do, and so they are not useful feedback. By the same token, ignore general positive comments that have no specifics. They also do not tell you what to do.

When feedback is ambiguous, avoid assuming that the reviewer meant it in a negative way. Remember that the reviewer is volunteering their time in order to help you. They are criticizing the writing, not the writer. And they are providing you with advice about how to make the writing better.

Read through all of the feedback before you start to make changes. This allows you to find patterns of errors in your writing. Also, this ensures that you are aware of big changes that are needed before you become absorbed in making small changes.

Sometimes, there will be comments that require you to re-do EVERYTHING. Deal with these ones first. After that, work on whatever comment you want to – the goal is to maintain motivation. You do not need to address the comments in the order in which they are written.

Address every suggestion for improvement, to the best of your ability. However, don't follow suggestions blindly. Just because someone says to change something about your paper doesn't mean you should. Sometimes the person offering feedback will misunderstand your paper or make a suggestion that doesn't make sense in terms of your goals. Figure out why they made the comment they did. For example, is the writing unclear? Is the purpose of the paper unclear? Have you failed to define your terms? Should you have explained something in an earlier section? Then figure out how to fix the problem. Note that the problem might or might not be in the section that they commented on. Sometimes you will need to revise an earlier section of the paper.

If a reader tells you that something is unclear, they are by definition right. As a writer, your job is not to be understood. Your job is to make it impossible for you to be misunderstood.

If someone tells you that some specific thing is wonderful, be very slow to remove or destroy it. For example, if someone says “I love the examples you give for each calculation. They make the formulas understandable!” then you probably shouldn't remove the examples. If someone tells you that some specific thing is terrible, do not automatically remove it. However, consider if you want to remove it, or revise it, or change something else in your paper. For

example, if they say the text is unclear, perhaps you should add a table. Or if they say the table is unclear, maybe you should explain it better in the text. Or if they say a table is not needed, perhaps you need to clarify the purpose of your paper so that readers will know why it is there.

Different people will give you different suggestions. They are NOT disagreeing with each other. They are each thinking of additional ways of improving your work. Think of this as plugging holes in a dam. You need to plug every hole or else your dam will leak.

You might ask people what is the most important point of your paper. If you do, different people might identify different points. If they do, this is a problem. It means that your paper does not have a single, coherent point. Each paper is only allowed to make one point. It must be imbued in your title, your abstract, your introduction, your method, your results, and your discussion. Every single part of your paper must be focused on whatever your main point is. If your readers don't all agree on the most important point you are making, then you need to revise some parts of your paper to make them all support the same story-line.

Sometimes, it will be clear from a comment that the reviewer has no idea what they are talking about. This is extremely important feedback. This means that what you wrote was not clear. Do not be discouraged by the number of comments on your paper. Interpret this as the person being interested in your paper and wanting to help you.

If you receive a lot of feedback, break it down, point by point, in either an Excel or Word file. List the source of the feedback and the specific comment. Make a quick note about what you intend to do with the feedback. As you finish dealing with each point, change the font color so you know you have dealt with it. If you do this consistently, changing the font color will become a positive reward in and of itself; it's like checking off an item as being done.

If you are confused by any of the feedback, set it aside for a couple of days (if you have time) and come back to it later. Often, you'll be able to figure it out on your own if you come at it from another perspective. If you can't figure it out, ask the person who offered it for more information. Ask them to highlight the section of the paper that the comment refers to. Ask them to describe the problem in more detail or to provide an idea of the kind of change they are recommending. If the original person who gave you the feedback is not available, ask someone else to help you interpret the comment. If you don't understand a comment, you can't benefit from it, so ask for clarification when you need it. Ultimately, the paper you write will be your own. You have the final responsibility for its form and content. Take responsibility for being the final judge of what should and should not be done with your paper.

Lesson 4: Replying to Feedback

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to teach you how to reply to feedback.

Prerequisites

Lesson 1: Giving Feedback

Lesson 2: Asking for Feedback

Lesson 3: Using Feedback

Sometimes you may need to provide a reply to the reviewers. For example, if you submit a paper to a journal, then you need to provide a detailed reply to every comment that the reviewers made. Or if your instructor provides feedback on a draft of the paper, you may want to include a note that explains how you used the feedback.

When providing your reply, create a separate document that explains how you modified your paper in response to the feedback. Be specific. State how you incorporated EACH piece of feedback.

When you disagree with a piece of feedback, provide your reasoning. Never say – “Yes, you are right, but I don’t care enough to fix this problem.” But do say “I disagree with you. The paper/project is better the way it is. Doing what you say would make it worse.” And do say “Yes, you are right. The paper/project would be better if we did that. I anticipate it will take X additional weeks/months to implement your suggestion and I personally don’t think it’s worth that much time. What we have right now is good enough.” Or “I anticipate that it will take X additional weeks/months to implement your suggestion. I’d be happy to do this. Do you agree that I should do this?”

In Class Activity

Purpose

The purpose of the in class activity is to model appropriate ways to solicit feedback, provide feedback, and react to feedback.

Prerequisites

Before students complete the in class activity, they should have read this workshop on their own. In addition, this workshop will usually precede a feedback session during which students give each other feedback on something they have written – perhaps a CV or statement of purpose. If so, that writing should be complete before this in class activity is completed, so that students can read the workshop on feedback, participate in this in class activity which demonstrates how to give feedback on that type of writing, and then immediately give each other feedback.

Version 1: Feedback on a CV (15 minutes)

The Presenter should tell students

- At this point, all of you should have read the workshop on feedback. Now I'm going to demonstrate how to give and receive feedback on a CV. We will give feedback on a fake CV, but I'm going to pretend that it's MY CV. So, when you are giving feedback, you should address your comments directly to me.
- Also, when you are giving me feedback, please be considerate of my feelings. A CV is a very personal thing. First, it describes my professional accomplishments. I might feel self-conscious about my accomplishments, worried about what you will think of me. Second, this is an unfamiliar writing task. Most undergraduates aren't too sure how to write a CV and they aren't sure they did it right. I might feel defensive or hurt if you criticize what I have written or how I have formatted it.
- On the other hand, your goal is to help me achieve my educational and career goals. If you can think of some way that my CV can be improved, I want you to tell me. You just need to think of a nice way to say your suggestions.
- When giving feedback on a CV (or any other piece of writing), it's often helpful to start by saying something friendly and encouraging about the writing. That usually makes the writer feel more open to criticisms.

Presenter should hand out the fake CV. The fake CV (given below) should be printed single-sided, so that students can see the entire CV at once.

June 2015

CURRICULUM VITAE

Name: John Doe
Address: 123 Apple Road,
Las Vegas, NV 89119
Telephone: 702-123-4567
E-mail: doej@unlv.nevada.edu

Education

H.S. Diploma Green Valley High School, Las Vegas, NV, June 2011
B.A. Psychology, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, May 2015

Career Goals

Short-term career goals included obtaining a PhD, a substantial publication record, and interning. Long-term interests include a tenured university-level faculty position, which includes teaching and research, as well as operate a private practice.

Clinical Experience

Victim Advocate, Rape Crisis Center, Las Vegas, Nevada, May 2014-Current.

Duties: used a crisis intervention model to counsel a wide range of callers, help plan and execute community events, and served as victim advocate in the emergency rooms.

Presentations

Doe, J., Smith, A. B., & Barchard, K. A. (2014, May). *Measuring emotional intelligence: Examining the discriminant validity of the metaphors test*. Poster to be presented at the annual convention of the Nevada Psychological Association, Reno, NV.

Research Experience

Research Assistant, University of Las Vegas, NV, Interactive Measurement Lab, 2013-Current.

Experience includes the following:

Website Coordinator Fall 2013-Current

Updated the lab website with in lab members information, and posters in progress

New Member Trainer Fall 2013-Current

Trained lab members on programs such as Captivate, SPSS, and Microsoft Office

Tracked workshops completed for new lab members

Trained lab members on administration of the DV Study

Conducting lab orientations

Screened potential lab members for success using an interview style

Extensive knowledge and practical experience with SPSS, Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Word, Adobe Photoshop, and Adobe Dreamweaver

Certifications

CITI Conflicts of Interest Curriculum, 2015

CITI Responsible Conduct of Research, 2015

CITI Human Subjects Protection (Group 1 & 2), 2015

Professional and Honor Societies

Psi Chi, International Honor Society of in Psychology
American Psychological Association (student affiliate)
Nevada Psychological Association (student member)
Western Psychological Association (student affiliate)

Honors & Awards

UNLV Grant, 2012-2013
Dean's Honor List, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2011-2013
Psi Chi, 2012

Campus Activities and Leadership

Psi Chi, member (2012) and Psychology Club Coordinator (2014-2015)

References

Kimberly A. Barchard, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Psychology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
(702) 895-0758
Kim.barchard@unlv.edu

Presenter should ask students for feedback on the following questions, one at a time:

- Are there any silly typos? These could be spelling or grammar errors.
- What sections are too specific or not specific enough?
- How could I reorganize the material to make it clearer and more persuasive?
- Which sections should I shorten and which should I delete?
- Which sections should I expand?
- What jargon and abbreviations do I use without adequate explanation?

When soliciting feedback, your goal is to get as much information as possible. Therefore:

- Ask the question. Encourage students to answer it.
- Ask students to clarify their feedback, if it is at all unclear. Try to get a very good idea of the suggestion they are making.
- For many of the suggestions, ask others if they agree with that idea. Ask them to explain why it's a good idea, or to elaborate on it. Ask them if they disagree.
- Take copious notes. Write on your own paper copy of the CV.
- DO NOT state that you disagree with ANY of the feedback.
- DO NOT figure out the details of how you will change the CV to address the issue. There isn't time to make the changes during a feedback session. The goal is to get the feedback, not to incorporate it.
- Your goal during this session is NOT to get feedback on the CV. After all, this is a fake CV, and we designed it with several intentional errors. Your goal is to MODEL how to ask for feedback: asking specific questions, asking for clarification and additional feedback, taking lots of notes, never disagreeing with the people providing feedback, not trying to fix things during the feedback session.

After the presenter has solicited feedback using each of the questions above, they should ask the students how they would address conflicting feedback. Tell them that other students gave the following feedback, and they should say what (if any) changes they would make to the CV, based upon this feedback.

Examples:

1. You should further explain your career goals and be more specific.
Your career goals are too narrow, please broaden.
2. Be sure to add every detailed task you've completed in your research experience
Only list the specific leadership roles in your research experience section.