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Giving Them What They Want: Online Feedback That Works

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Many instructors can recall times when they have handed back assignments with written feedback and could feel the confusion in the room as students read through their comments. Perhaps they fielded questions at that moment or met with students after class to clarify their expectations of revision. This timely teaching is essential to ensure that students can continue the learning process. For online educators, who spend a significant amount of time giving specific feedback on assignments in a virtual setting, it is almost impossible to know how that feedback is received or understood by the student. In an online environment, feedback is essential to build relationships between the instructor and student (Bonnel, Ludwig, & Smith 2007; Leibold & Schwarz 2015); therefore, we must consider how we can adjust our teaching practices to match the new mediums we teach in.

According to Weaver (2006), misinterpretation of feedback is likely to occur and interfere with students' ability or willingness to respond to feedback. In order to find out what type of feedback works best for students, they respond to a feedback survey after each formative assessment. Table 1 shows select quotes regarding students' perception of the "most helpful piece of feedback" that they received as well as an explanation of the feedback strategy associated with each comment.

Specific attention was given to the order in which online feedback strategies were used. Video explanation of the feedback process was delivered pre-assessment, strategies that support dialogue and suggest resources were ongoing, and the feedback survey was delivered post-assessment. With reduced opportunities to visually gauge student understanding, systematically using these modified feedback strategies increases student learning in the online environment.

Table 1. Student survey responses and associated feedback strategies.

Student response	Feedback strategy
"My formatting was wrong, so it gave me a chance to correct it."	Prior to assessment, students **view a pre-recorded video** that discusses feedback and their instructor's expectations throughout the process. **Formative assessment** is crucial to success in an asynchronous environment. To create opportunities for reflection, revision, and growth, students must complete multiple drafts.
"The teacher made comments directly in our documents to show us where we needed to make revisions."	Students appreciated feedback that was specific to their work and showed where changes were needed. This feedback was delivered using **track changes/comments within the LMS**.
"I felt that the video feedback from my professor was very personable and helped me feel more connected to the professor. I also like that we could interact back and forth on the comments tab…"	**Interactive LMS features** allow us to provide video feedback and involve students in the feedback process. We mimic the dialogue that occurs in a face-to-face environment by asking students to "comment back" after receiving feedback via the LMS or email to indicate understanding or ask clarifying questions.
"Compliment of the good start of my paper; website was given to check grammar"	We **provide explicit resources** that assist in revisions. Suggestions include the campus writing center, grammar websites, or additional course documents.

References

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