

4. Giving feedback in academic writing

Before we begin thinking about feedback, discuss the following:

1. What is the purpose of feedback?
2. How and when do you typically give feedback?
3. What do you comment on?
4. How much time do you spend giving feedback?
5. Do you pick up on general mistakes and feedback in class?
6. Do you think students take on board your feedback?
7. Can you think of any better ways of giving feedback? (time dependent)

Approaches & strategies

There are many different ways and levels of giving feedback. If students are able to submit draft copies of their essays/writing then the feedback that you give them at this stage is vital for the students to improve their work.

Let's look at your pre-workshop task to see how you have chosen to give the student feedback.

Draft feedback

Here are a number of ways to give feedback on draft essays/writing.

1. Overall comment at the end of the essay

Example 1 (Mark awarded 48%)

This essay would have been much better if it had addressed the exact question. It is important to answer the question you have been given. Many students underachieve because they answer questions that they were not asked to answer. Everything you write should be linked to the exact question. In your case, there was a lack of focus that affected your mark negatively. I am confident that had you focused on the exact question you would have achieved a higher mark.

Example 2 (Mark awarded 62%)

Suitably structured and developed. Well done.

Example 3 (Mark awarded 49%)

Reasonably focussed but some arguments are unsupported and some material is irrelevant. You need to re-think the organisation as it is not clear. Some problems with linking devices. Limited range of grammatical structures and vocabulary.

Discuss with a partner:

- What are the advantages of this approach?
- What are the disadvantages of this approach?
- Would the students benefit from the feedback given?

2. In-text feedback (using track changes & comments)

Read what the student has written and the comments made by the teacher.

Pensions nowadays work on a pay-as-you-go basis. This means that the working population contributes to the income of retirees now. Lately, the working population is decreasing while life expectancy is increasing, therefore, pensions are demanding more money for pensioners when there's less people working for this money. There are fewer workers because of fewer young people; developed countries are in emergency of a pensions crisis due to the ageing of their population. (This thesis is going to be discussed.)

Developed countries are seeing an increase in a more elderly population. Where there used to be 4% of retirees in a population, nowadays there are 16% and this figure is soaring (Jackson & Howe, 2008). There are two reasonable explanations for this. First, due to choosing a career over family, more women get less to no children. The birth-rate to maintain a population (should be 2.1), while in all developed countries this is reasonably lower. Women get children at a later age and fewer children, and some women decide to not have children at all anymore. Second, the life expectancy for people has increased over the past couple of decades. The retirement age used to be a couple of years above the life expectancy for the lucky few who survived that long. Nowadays people have several years of retirement ahead of them, since the retirement age did not change. Life expectancy in most developed countries lies at around 78, while this was 62 a few decades ago (Slater, 2008).

Comment [KM2]: This is not a good introduction to the topic.

Comment [KM3]: Revise this sentence as a little confusing

Comment [KM4]: What does this mean?

This introduction could be improved by improving the first sentence, giving some background information (including a reference), adding a thesis statement and also an outline of the structure! (Revise essay introductions)

Comment [KM5]: Change the word order of your sentences. Typically the most important information in a sentences comes at the beginning. Also, 'more women get less to no children' – not very academic

Comment [KM6]: Who says this? Reference needed.

Comment [KM7]: Excellent point but try and explain it better

Comment [KM8]: Make your writing more academic by using more academic vocabulary

Discuss the following:

- Do you feel the student would benefit from this level of comments? If yes, how? If not, why not?
- Do you have the time to give this level of comments?

3. Reformulation

Reformulation can be a good technique to use during the draft stage. It can make students consciously aware of some of the key issues involved in academic writing.

Below, is an example which I have used with my students.

What is reformulation?

Reformulation is a mistake correction technique used on the output (more typically written) of language learners. The technique requires the students to reflect on their own writing and 'notice the gap' between their current written output and that of a native or near-native speaker. This technique aims to help students develop their writing (in this case) or speaking skills.

Read both the original and the reformulated essay and answer the questions.

Version 1

This essay will discuss whether cosmetic surgery is making teenagers obsessed with their appearance. Cosmetic surgery is a “surgery that modifies or improves the appearance of a physical feature, irregularity, or defect.” (The American Heritage® Medical Dictionary, 2007). This essay will show why cosmetic surgery is not making teenager obsessed with their appearance by first explaining that it is not the surgery itself, then by giving the reason why it might still contribute in the obsession and finish with the clarification that it is not teenagers that are obsessed with their appearance due to surgery.

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Version 2

Cosmetic surgery can be defined as a “surgery that modifies or improves the appearance of a physical feature, irregularity, or defect” (The American Heritage Medical Dictionary 2007). This essay aims to discuss whether cosmetic surgery is making teenagers obsess with their appearance. It is evident that this procedure alone is not the only culprit. This essay will start by giving some background information about cosmetic surgery and how it is not the surgery itself that is making teenagers obsess. We will conclude by stating that it is not in fact teenagers that are obsessed with cosmetic surgery but older people between 40-54 years old.

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1. What similarities and what differences do you notice between the two texts? Consider the following:

- a) vocabulary used
- b) grammar (e.g. passive vs. active)
- c) structure of the paragraph
- d) cohesion (theme and rheme)
- e) the way in which the question is answered e.g. does it discuss?

Similarities	Differences

2. Focus on what the native writer did not change. Why do you think the native writer did not make changes in these instances? Be specific.

3. Look at the changes the native writer made. Why do you think these changes were made? Be specific.

Discuss with your partner/group:

- As a learner, how would you feel about carrying out this type of activity?
- Do you think your students could benefit from this type of activity?
- What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of carrying out this type of task?

Final draft feedback

The same type and level of feedback can be given for the final draft. But at this stage, it can be important to consider the mark scheme.

Discuss with a partner/group:

If your students have continued to make the same errors in their final draft, how could you prevent them in the future?

Consideration of the mark scheme

Below you will see the mark scheme for a report plan. This was given back to the students (the necessary sections where the students fell were highlighted) together with a copy of the student's report plan with detailed comments.

Once the students had all received their comments and marks, the teacher spent some time going through the most common errors.

Discuss with a partner/group:

- How important is it to show the students the mark scheme before they submit their work?
- How can the students benefit from seeing it?

Below you will find 1: Report plan marking feedback and 2: Essay final draft feedback (TEACHER HIGHLIGHTS THE STUDENTS ABILITIES AND GIVES BACK TO THE STUDENT TOGETHER WITH SPECIFIC COMMENTS WRITTEN ON THEIR REPORT PLAN OR ESSAY)

Name of student:

Mark:

	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	GOOD	SATISFACTORY	LESS THAN SATISFACTORY	COMPLETELY UNSATISFACTORY
Task Achievement. Applies to all parts	The plan is completely relevant to the task, fully developing all content points; the purpose of the report is clearly and fully explained, the information is appropriately presented.	The plan covers the requirements of the task but the content points could be more fully extended; the purpose of the report is presented; the information is appropriately presented in spite of minor inaccuracies.	The plan addresses the requirements of the task but not all content points are included; the format may be faulty at times; the purpose of the report is presented but it is not very clear; there are lapses in the organisation of the information.	The plan does not cover the requirements of the task; the content points are attempted but many irrelevant details are included, the format is faulty; the purpose of the report is missing or the information is inappropriately organised.	The report/ proposal does not relate to the task	No reasonable attempt made
List of references presented using Harvard System (At least two need)	Accurate list of references. And both references are suitably academic.	Generally accurate list of references. And both references are suitably academic.	Minor errors/ omissions in list of references. And /or at least one of the references is suitably academic.	Major errors / omissions in list of references. And/or neither reference is suitably academic.	One reference only	No list of references
Introduction only	Sources (when required) are integrated very successfully into the text, and formal conventions adhered to. A wide range of vocabulary is used appropriately and accurately; precise meaning is conveyed; minor errors are rare; spelling is very well controlled.	Sources (when required) are integrated successfully into the text, and formal conventions generally adhered to. A range of vocabulary is used appropriately and accurately; occasional errors in word choice/ formation are possible; spelling is well controlled with occasional slips.	Sources (when required) are integrated partly into the text, and some points may not be supported. There may be some inconsistencies with formal conventions. The range of vocabulary is adequate; errors in word choice/ formation are present when more sophisticated items of vocabulary are attempted; spelling can be faulty at times.	Sources (when required) are insufficiently integrated into the text, and points tend to be unsupported. A limited range of vocabulary is present; less common items of vocabulary are rare and may be often faulty; spelling errors can make text understanding difficult.	Sources (when required) are insufficient or missing A very narrow range of vocabulary is present; errors in word choice/formation predominate; spelling errors make the text obscure at times.	No references. Language errors prevent any meaningful communication

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	70-85%	60-69%	50-59%	40-49%	30-39%	Less than 30%
Addressing the question / Task fulfilment	The writer has accurately addressed the issues raised by the essay question, and answered them with insight and maturity	Addresses most of the issues raised	Addresses some, but not all, of the issues	The writer has made an attempt to answer the essay question, but the ideas are underdeveloped and the writing lacks focus	The writer has failed to address the essay question sufficiently.	The writer has not attempted to address the essay question, or the answer is almost entirely irrelevant to the question
Use of Sources	Sources (when required) are integrated very successfully into the text, and formal conventions adhered to. Accurate and complete list of references	Sources (when required) are integrated successfully into the text, and formal conventions generally adhered to. Generally accurate list of references	Sources (when required) are integrated partly into the text, and some points may not be supported. There may be some inconsistencies with formal conventions. Minor errors/ omissions in list of references	Sources (when required) are insufficiently integrated into the text, and points tend to be unsupported. Major errors / omissions in list of references	Sources (when required) are insufficient or missing No list of references	No references No list of references
Level of Criticality	There is very strong evidence of criticality and analysis	There is some evidence of criticality and analysis.	There is limited evidence of criticality and analysis; the writing may lack depth or be mainly descriptive.	There is little evidence of criticality or analysis; the writing is primarily descriptive.	There is little or no evidence of criticality or analysis.	There is no evidence of criticality or analysis.
Level of Organisation	The essay is very well organised, with a coherent and consistent line of argument throughout.	The essay is well organised, with a generally coherent line of argument, although there are slight flaws at times.	Although there is evidence of organisation, the line of argument lacks clarity.	Although an adequate attempt has been made at organisation, the line of argument is fragmented and difficult to follow at times.	The writing seems fragmented or incomplete, and the argument is difficult to follow.	The writing is fragmented or incomplete, and the argument is very difficult to follow
Communicative Competence	The writing has a positive effect on the reader.	Communication is achieved with minimum effort on the part of the reader.	Communication is achieved with some effort on the part of the reader.	Communication is achieved with effort on the part of the reader.	Communication is not maintained consistently due to problems with use of language and lack of vocabulary.	Communication is barely achieved due to problems with use of language and lack of vocabulary.
Accuracy of Language	Use of language in general is excellent, and the register used is entirely appropriate throughout	There are errors when more complex vocabulary and structures are attempted, but these do not significantly interfere with meaning	There are some errors in expression and accuracy, but these do not significantly interfere with meaning.	There are basic errors when complex structures are attempted, which may lead to obscurity.	There are regular errors of expression and accuracy, which impede communication.	There are numerous errors of expression and accuracy, which severely impede communication.
Use of Vocabulary	There is an impressively wide range of lexis and structures, which are relevant to the context.	There is a generally competent and assured range of lexis and structures, which are relevant to the context.	There is a fairly competent range of lexis and structures, although there may be some inappropriacy in the register used.	There is limited use of vocabulary and expression, with some inappropriacy in the register.	There is little range of vocabulary or expression, and the register is largely inappropriate.	Range of vocabulary or expression is minimal, and the register is inappropriate.
Cohesiveness / Coherence	The writing flows seamlessly, and is cohesive.	The writing flows well, and is generally cohesive.	The writing flows fairly well, but may lack cohesion at times.	The writing lacks basic cohesive devices, and is halting rather than fluent. The overall impression is one of passable but weak language.	There is a serious lack of cohesive devices, and the writing does not flow well.	There is a total absence of cohesive devices, and the writing is fragmented

The usefulness of check-lists

Before we look at the essay checklist that I often give to my students, discuss the questions with a partner/group:

- Do you ever give your students checklists before they submit their written work? Why? Why not?
- What are some of the advantages of using checklists?

Essay Checklist

Introduction

1. Do I have an introduction? **Y/N**
2. Is it clear where my introduction ends? **Y/N**
3. Do I give some general background information to the topic? **Y/N**
4. Have I defined any necessary terms? **Y/N**
5. Do I make the aims of my essay clear? **Y/N**
6. Is there a thesis statement that highlights my position on the topic? **Y/N**
7. Is there a map of the essay, indicating the structure of what will follow? **Y/N**

Your INTRODUCTION should NOT include any of the following:

- The exact words of the title repeated
- Detailed examples
- Direct questions to the reader
- Verb contractions (e.g. use *it is* rather than *it's*)
- Obvious definitions

Main Body

1. Is my essay clearly divided into reasonably short paragraphs? **Y/N**
2. Is there an obvious link between each paragraph? **Y/N**
3. Are there cohesive devices / linking words to show how sentences relate to each other? **Y/N**
4. Does each paragraph cover only one main point? **Y/N**
5. Is the main point of each paragraph made clear with a topic sentence? **Y/N**
6. Does each point have an example or evidence from one of the sources? **Y/N**
7. Have I paraphrased where possible, instead of copying a large chunk of the source? **Y/N**
8. Is it clear to the reader what parts are my views, and what parts are the ideas of others? **Y/N**
9. Are the sentences reasonably short, with correct punctuation between each clause in the sentence? **Y/N**
10. Have I demonstrated how the points made relate to the essay title? **Y/N**

11. Does every paragraph have a concluding sentence that reinforces, evaluates, analyses the main point, or links to the next paragraph? **Y/N**

In-text Referencing

1. Does each indirect reference include only the surname of the author and the year? **Y/N**
2. Does each direct quotation include the surname of the author, the year, and the page number? **Y/N**
3. Have I referenced correctly, making a clear distinction between primary and secondary sources (using *cited in* if necessary)? **Y/N**
4. Are the direct quotations totally relevant to the point I am trying to make? **Y/N**
5. Do the direct quotations fit grammatically into the text of the essay? **Y/N**
6. Do the direct quotations support, rather than make a point? **Y/N**

Your MAIN BODY should NOT include any of the following:

- Personal pronouns such as I, we, or you
- Generalisations that cannot be supported with hard evidence
- Direct questions to the reader
- Verb contractions

Conclusion

1. Is it clear where my conclusion begins? **Y/N**
2. Have I referred back to the essay title and reminded the reader what the main aims were? **Y/N**
3. Have I provided a summary of the main points of the essay? **Y/N**
4. Have I looked beyond the essay to further points that need to be considered? **Y/N**

Your CONCLUSION should NOT include any of the following:

- New points
- Irrelevant quotations
- Direct questions to the reader
- Verb contractions

List of References

1. Do the references in the text correspond exactly to the list of references? **Y/N**
2. Are the names listed in alphabetical order? **Y/N**
3. Have I included only the primary sources? **Y/N**
4. Are the references laid out according to the Harvard System of referencing? **Y/N**