

# Guide on Giving and Receiving Feedback in the Workplace

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## Introduction

Giving and receiving effective feedback are central skills in the workplace. Whether you are a Head of Department or a manager giving feedback to a direct report, a colleague giving feedback to another colleague, or a team member giving feedback to a manager, feedback plays a strong part in the learning and development of an individual and moving forward.

Feedback also helps to produce different, and often better, outcomes and allows individuals to understand how their actions are impacting results and relationships. If done in the right manner, constructive feedback will act as a powerful motivator.

Developing a constructive and empathetic feedback culture builds robust professional relationships and creates an environment where staff members can grow and thrive.

## Types of feedback

Most common types of feedback include:

- Informal feedback, which is the most frequent form, provided on a day-to-day basis, and is given on any aspect of someone's work or behaviour. It is usually in verbal form.
- Formal feedback usually comes as part of a structured assessment.
- Formative feedback is given continuously throughout a job, project or academic year. This type of feedback is common in academic environments as it is about a learner's progress at a particular time through a course or during the acquisition of a new skill. It provides opportunities to gain feedback, reflect and redirect effort (where appropriate) before completing a final assessment. It relies on continuous encouragement.
- Summative feedback is usually given at the end of a project or task.

## Feedback Models

Consideration should be given to the way in which feedback is delivered. Feedback must be timely, relevant and specific, focused on observed behaviours or actions and not on personality.

Constructive feedback is actionable. It provides direction, emphasises staff members goals and is composed.

The following tips can be helpful when delivering constructive feedback:

- Ensure to begin with positive feedback, which is sincere and deserved
- Focus your feedback on observed behaviour, rather than generalisations
- Focus on data, not opinions
- Ensure to keep the feedback neutral, factual and non-judgemental
- Avoid emotive or critical language
- Provide feedback on actions or behaviours rather than on personal qualities
- Focus on measures to improve and provide help and support
- Continue to check in with the person in an agreed and reasonable manner.

There are a number of feedback models or techniques that can be useful to adopt depending on the situation.

## The 'Feedback Sandwich'

The feedback sandwich starts and concludes with positive feedback, and what can be considered as the more critical / constructive feedback is "sandwiched" between the positive aspects. The theory is, by effectively "sandwiching" the constructive criticism in between positive feedback, you are softening the message. However, you should be clear on what the feedback is so it is not lost in the messaging. For example: *"Thank you for sending such a comprehensive email, our external provider should not have been copied on it since it was intended to be internal information only. I appreciate the initiative, though."*

However, if you use this method continuously the person receiving your feedback will only wait for the "but" in the middle. To counteract this, make sure to give positive feedback on its own when the opportunity arises. When individuals feel they are positively acknowledged, they will be more open to all kinds of feedback.

## STAR (Situation-Task-Action-Result) Model

Commonly used in recruitment practice, this model can also be effective to prepare and deliver feedback as it makes it specific and relevant to a particular situation. It describes the situation, the task assigned, the action that actually took place and what happened as a result of the action.

- Situation/Task: Start with the specific challenge the staff member faced or project/initiative they worked on.
- Action: Think about their approach to the situation or task.
- Results: Lastly, consider how their actions impacted the outcome of the situation or task.

For example: *"Thank you for helping me with my report when I had to rush to the meeting (Situation). I appreciate you finishing the table index formatting for me and emailing it to Sue without delay (Task). I wanted you to know that she called me back and said she was really impressed with our responsiveness and submitting the report at such short notice". (Results)*

## SAID (Standard, Action, Impact, Do)

Similar to STAR, this model can assist when planning feedback by asking the following questions:

"What is supposed to happen?" (Standard)

"What happened in this instance?" (Action)

"What does this mean for the team / organisation?" (Impact)

"What do we need to do to fix it?" (Do/Develop)

For example, a standard may be *"we mute our mics when not talking during an online meeting"*. The action that contravenes the standard is when someone unmutes themselves repeatedly. The impact can be that the session can be disrupted and/or people may become frustrated. When challenging inappropriate behaviour, the starting point should always be to offer the opportunity for the individual to lead on what they should do differently next time, for example, *"what can you do different next time before you come online?"*.

## **BOOST (Balanced, Objective, Observed, Specific, Timely)**

**Balanced:** feedback should focus both on strengths and on areas for development

**Objective:** relate your feedback to the observed behaviours, not to the person's personality traits

**Observed:** feedback should be based only on behaviours that are observable and witnessed by you (not third-hand testimony)

**Specific:** back up your comments with specific examples of the observed behaviour

**Timely:** give feedback soon after the activity, but not in the 'heat of the moment' if the person has just done something that was difficult or very exciting there's a good chance, they won't be able to hear the feedback if they are very emotional.

For example:

**Balanced:** "You have done a great job on the recent IT project, especially with the detailed research and clear presentation. However, there are a few areas where we can improve."

**Objective:** "The project report was comprehensive and well-structured, but it missed the deadline by two days."

**Observed:** "I noticed that while your analysis was thorough, some of the data points were outdated, which affected the overall accuracy of the report."

**Specific:** "For future projects, please ensure that all data is up-to-date and double-check the deadlines to avoid any delays."

**Timely:** "Let's discuss this now so we can implement these improvements in the next project starting next week."

## **The Pendleton feedback Model**

The Pendleton feedback model aims to create a two-way feedback system, rather than one person just giving another person feedback. The steps from Pendleton's model are:

1. Ensure the recipient is ready to receive feedback
2. Ask the recipient how they feel the situation went or how their behaviour was
3. Ask the recipient what went well
4. Tell the recipient what went well
5. Ask the recipient what could be improved
6. Tell the recipient what could be improved
7. Together, form an action plan to ensure the discussed improvements are implemented/actioned

While you will select the model that works for the situation you are in, it is always best to allow for discussion of the feedback and possible disagreement with your points. Feedback should not be one-way.

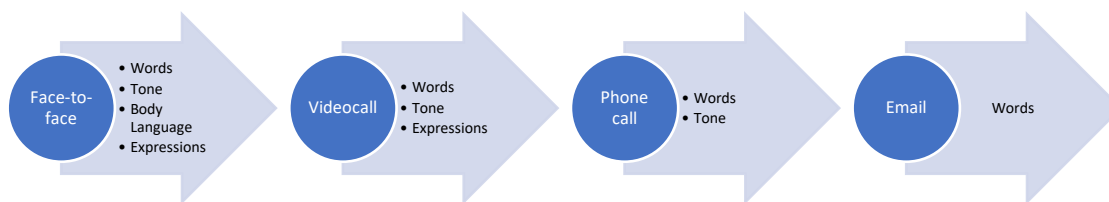
# Key Skills

## Effective Communication

How feedback is delivered and the degree to which it is successful is determined by effective communication.

Communication not only includes the spoken or written words but also body language, facial expressions and tone. All these elements will impact the meaning of what is being said. If we fail to communicate in an effective way it is harder for us to make a positive difference.

We use different channels of communication in the workplace and it is important to be aware of the weight of these elements in each form of communication:



## Active Listening

Most listening time is spent waiting to reply instead of trying to understand what the other person thinks before making any judgements. Our own judgements and assumptions can move us away from taking a neutral or objective stance when listening. These judgements and assumptions are usually based on our prior knowledge, biases, body language, emotional state, tone and environmental factors.

Active listening involves being:

- Silent
- Non-reactive
- Open minded
- Observant
- Patient, slowing down our pace and allowing the other person time to elaborate

Active listening can also be evidenced with our body language, for example:

- Maintaining eye contact
- Nodding, making affirmative sounds
- Leaning forward, being aware of how we are sitting/positioned in respect of the other person

You can also use verbal cues such as *"I hear you.."* or *"Tell me more.."* to show you are listening.

Paraphrasing (describing our own understanding of the situation) is also a helpful technique as it:

- Clarifies any misunderstanding
- Is useful if the speaker has trouble being clear
- Demonstrates that you are trying to understand

- Encourages engagement and discussion

Paraphrasing can start with:

*“If I understand correctly..”*

*“What I’m hearing is...”*

Finally, listening with empathy allows us to suspend judgement, step back and be objective. Empathy also disrupts our tendency to attack/defend. Show empathy by saying *‘I understand this project has been challenging for you. How can I support you moving forward?’*

### **Questioning Skills**

Questioning skills can include open and closed questions.

Closed questions require a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer, for example:

*“Would you like me to check that out for you?”*

*“Are you clear on that?”*

*“Are you happy with that?”*

Open questions encourage conversation:

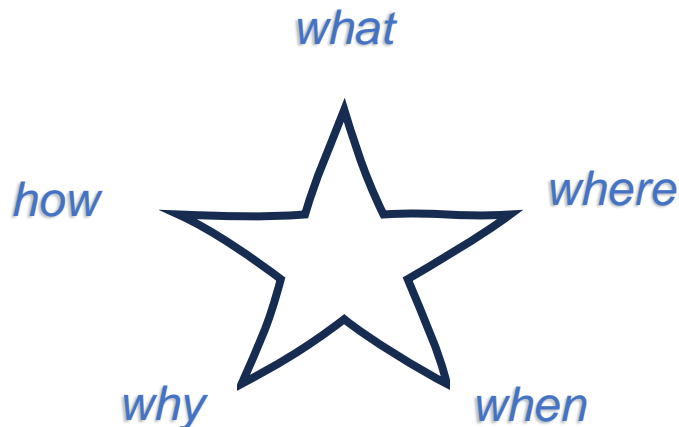
*“Why would that not work?”*

*“How would that affect other areas?”*

*“What do you think would happen if we did it this way?”*

You can also use some questioning techniques such as:

The **Starbursting analytic technique**, which can assist when asking questions to dig-down rather than immediately seeking answers:



*“What do you like about the job?”*

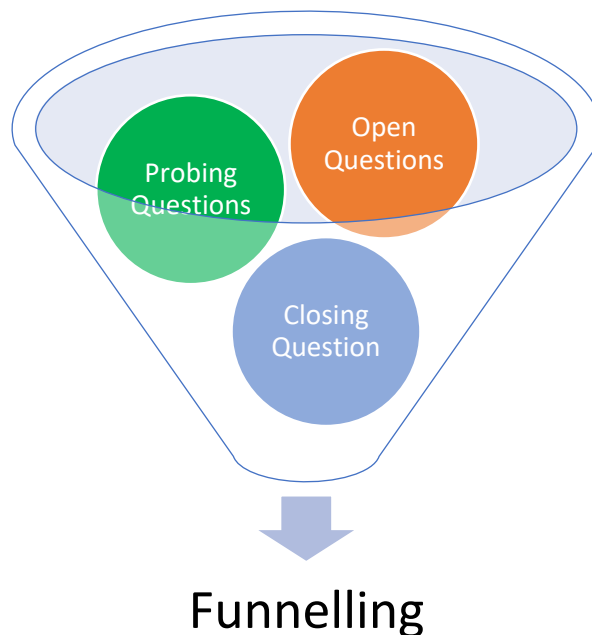
*“Why do you find that interesting?”*

*“How would you develop that aspect?”*

*“Where could we get advice?”*

*“When was that required for?”*

**Funnelling** or creating a funnel effect, can be useful for getting someone to open up. Start by asking open questions, probing questions and closed questions (in that order). It is also an effective manner to clarify context around an issue and finding its root causes.



## Planning feedback

It is never easy to give feedback to colleagues, direct reports or managers. The feedback techniques discussed above can allow you to plan your feedback before the conversation takes place. This ensures that feedback is consistent and fair and will allow you to set SMART goals to ensure the feedback is acted upon.

The following steps can help you prepare for your feedback session and reduce miscommunication or potential negative reactions:

### 1. Choose a private space

Make sure you give feedback in private and find a quiet and neutral space free from interruptions.

### 2. State the purpose of your feedback

If you do not regularly meet with the person you want to give feedback to, reference the topic of your discussion so the person comes to the meeting as prepared as possible. For example, you might say:

*“I want to discuss / talk about the presentation you did yesterday”*

*“I have some thoughts about the presentation you did yesterday. Can we talk?”*

### 3. Be timely



Avoid giving feedback on something that happened more than two weeks ago, instead, give the feedback in a timely manner while the topic is still relevant. At the same time, you may avoid giving feedback immediately after something happens. In-the-moment feedback can be perceived more negative than you might intend. By waiting at least 24 hours before commenting both you and the other person can reflect on what happened.

#### **4. Constructive feedback vs. negative feedback**

Before giving feedback, it is important to differentiate between constructive and negative feedback:

- Constructive feedback centers on something the person can do to improve.
- Negative feedback or critical feedback puts people down instead of helping them improve.

To ensure you are giving constructive feedback rather than negative feedback, make sure you are approaching the feedback with the intention of helping the other person grow—even if you feel frustrated, avoid micromanaging or personally criticising someone.

#### **5. Use “I” statements**

When you use “I” statements, you are focusing on your experience and opinion about the situation, not the person you are speaking to. Using “I” statements also helps feedback feel like less of a blame game and more of a collaborative exercise to improve things for the future.

For example, instead of saying *“You said you would get me the presentation slides on Thursday but you didn’t send them over until Monday, which made me feel unprepared for the meeting,”* try something like, *“I was under the impression that I would receive the presentation slides on Thursday. Was there a delay I didn’t know about?”*

#### **6. Focus on one or two things**

If you try to give feedback about too many things at once, you might accidentally trigger the other person’s defensiveness and make them less likely to receive feedback with an open mindset. When giving feedback becomes a regular practice, topics for feedback will not build up.

#### **7. Be specific and provide examples**

The goal of providing feedback is to help someone improve. This could be to help them understand something they are good at or identify and improve. The more specific you can be about details, the easier it is for the other person to take that feedback and turn it into action.

Describe specifically what you have observed, be able to say when and where it happened, who was involved, and what the results were. Stick to what you personally observed, not third party observations. Avoid talking vaguely about what the person “always” or “usually” does. For example: *“Yesterday afternoon, when you were speaking with Joe, I noticed that you kept raising your voice.”* Or instead of saying *“I think the presentation yesterday wasn’t very clear,”* which is vague and could lead to miscommunication, try something like, *“During yesterday’s presentation, I thought it would be helpful if you had paused more for questions. There were times where I didn’t understand the point you were trying to make.”*

#### **8. Describe the impact**

Explain the consequences of the other person’s behaviour / action. Give examples of how you and others are affected. When you describe your reactions or the consequences of the observed behaviours, the other person can better appreciate the impact their actions are having on others, the team or the organisation. For example: *“Shouting at our staff is not acceptable behaviour, Joe looked embarrassed and I felt uncomfortable about seeing the episode.”*

#### **9. Give the other person space to react**

Even though the feedback you are sharing is designed to help the other person improve in some way, feedback is still sometimes hard to hear. One of the challenges of giving real time feedback is that you never know exactly how the other person will respond. The person you are sharing feedback with may have questions, reactions, or additional comments.

After you have shared your specific, timely feedback, ask the other person if they have any questions or thoughts. For example:

*"What do you think?"*

*"What is your view of this situation?"*

*"What are your reactions to this?"*

*"Tell me, what are your thoughts?"*

Some people may want to brainstorm actionable solutions right there and then, which you can do together if you are comfortable doing so. If they want to follow up at a later date, let them know that is fine too.

#### **10. Offer specific suggestions**

Make your suggestions helpful by including practical examples. Offer an idea if you think the other person will find it useful. For example: *"I sometimes write myself notes to remind myself to do something"* or *"Rather than telling Ed that you are not interested in all the details, you might try asking him specific questions about the information you are most interested in."*

#### **11. Encourage dialogue**

You can make the feedback a two-way conversation and invite discussion with questions, for example:

*"What do you think went well?"*

*"What do you think could be done differently?"*

*"What could be further improved?"*

*"How can this be achieved?"*

*"Let us brainstorm how we can avoid similar issues in the future"*

These will pave the way to get actionable suggestions on how to move forward.

#### **11. Do not forget to acknowledge the positive**

It is important to share what the person is doing well and recognise their strengths. Acknowledging someone's hard work, skills or achievements and express gratitude for someone's help, support or positive impact on the team will act as a motivator.

#### **12. Summarise and express your support**

Review the major points you discussed. Summarise the agreed actions, not the negative points of the other person's behaviour. Where necessary highlight the main things you've discussed that the person could do differently. End on a positive note by communicating confidence in the person's ability to improve the situation. For example: *"You have followed through on a tough problem. Please keep taking the initiative on problems like that."*

## Receiving feedback

Receiving feedback should be regarded as an opportunity to learn and grow. Being receptive and open minded can counteract the tendency to react to it in a defensive manner.

Understanding the feedback means getting all the details (e.g. what are the observed or measured behaviours/actions and why they are a problem). You need to actively listen to the feedback without interrupting the other person. If you do not understand any part of the feedback, ask clarifying questions to ensure you have understood the message, especially the details.

At this point you could state any new, factual information you consider relevant to the conversation and discuss how it may affect what has been said so far.

Once you are clear and agree on the needed changes, you can focus on how to bring about those and develop a plan with the other person.

To accomplish this, ask the person for specific steps you need to take. Give your input regarding those steps, negotiating any differences you have with them. Then reach a joint agreement on what has to happen to carry out the agreed on steps.

Make sure the discussion is summarised at the end, the feedback received, who is to do what and by when as agreed.

When carried out correctly, feedback can act as a motivator and promote engagement and satisfaction. Keep the communication open with your manager/others you may want to seek feedback from and make it a regular practice. You can ask for feedback using some of these questions below:

*“I value your opinion, could you share your thoughts?”*

*“Could you provide your insight on this?”*

*“Would you mind giving your input?”*

*“How do you feel about this?”*

*“I would appreciate your perspective on this”*

*“What are your thoughts on this”*

*“Could you offer your advice on this matter?”*

*“How am I doing?”*

*“Did that go well?”*

*“What could I do differently next time?”*

## Barriers to effective feedback

Various factors can impact on effective feedback and act as barriers. It is important to be able to identify and overcome them. Effective feedback is dependent on communication skills and as such, it is vital that the message intended by the sender is understood by the receiver in the same terms.

Some of these include:

- Generalised feedback, not related to specific facts or observations
- Fear of upsetting colleagues
- Fear of damaging professional relationships
- Defensive behaviour/resistance when receiving feedback
- Physical barriers: noise, or improper time, place or space
- Personal agendas
- Lack of confidence

- Feedback lacking guidance for rectifying /improving behaviour
- Inconsistent feedback from multiple sources
- Lack of respect for the source of feedback.

There are also other issues such as differences in gender, age, seniority, education and culture that can have an effect on the delivery and reception of feedback.

Keeping some of these barriers in mind in order to identify possible hurdles in how we plan and prepare to deliver feedback and how we receive feedback can go a long way to avoiding interpersonal difficulties.

## Summary

Feedback acts as the basis for learning and moving forward. When done properly and frequently, feedback can act as a motivator, promote engagement and job satisfaction.

Consideration should be given to the way in which feedback is delivered. Feedback must be timely, constructive, relevant and specific, focused on behaviour or actions and not on personality and allow for discussion. For feedback to be effective:

- Try to begin the meeting with positive feedback, which is sincere and deserved
- Focus your feedback on observed, specific behaviours, rather than generalisations
- Focus on data, not opinions
- Ensure to keep the feedback neutral, factual and non-judgemental
- Explain the impact of the behaviour /action that took place
- Check that the feedback is understood
- Avoid emotive or critical language, be mindful of your body language
- Provide feedback on actions or behaviours rather than on personal qualities
- Focus on measures to improve and provide help and support
- Make it actionable, something the other person can act upon
- Provide feedback as soon as possible after the observed behaviour / action
- Provide feedback in the right environment

Always be prepared, provide specific examples and make feedback actionable. This will provide the other person with clarity on what they need to improve / change and how to do it. Feedback delivered in this manner is motivational and helps staff to focus on what they need to do to reach their goals.

When receiving feedback, it is helpful to:

- Prepare to receive the feedback
- Respect the provider of feedback
- Understand the feedback, clarify if not
- Contribute new information
- Analyse the feedback
- Agree on the next step
- Summarize the discussion
- Reflect on the feedback

Creating and maintaining a feedback culture is everyone's responsibility. Meaningful feedback should be a common occurrence. In particular, Heads of Department/managers should maintain an ongoing dialogue with staff, using conversations that offer timely, in-the-moment feedback that is inspiring,

instructive and actionable. People remember their most recent experiences best, so feedback is most valuable when it occurs immediately after an action.

## **Further Information**

For further information, please take time to review our [HR webpage](#), including our [Learning and Development Supports](#) section to assist with any queries and for contact details if you need to follow-up with us directly.

[Giving and Receiving Feedback Course](#)