

Student Feedback on Practice-based Teaching and Learning

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► Introduction



This guide is part of a series produced as part of the ‘Enhancing Teaching and Learning through Programme and Module Evaluation’ Initiative. These guides provide advice on how to gather feedback from students and how to employ student feedback to enhance teaching and learning.

This guide provides tips for gathering feedback in the specific context of practice-based teaching and learning.

Practice-based Teaching and Learning: A Definition

Practice-based teaching is where teaching and learning processes are substantiated by practical activities, deployed both as teaching tools and integrated learning outcomes. “Practice-based” is sometimes used interchangeably with “work-based” learning (Sims, Shreeve, 2006). In general, practice-based teaching and learning connects to specific infrastructures (laboratories, hospitals, offices, performing venues), or formal work placements. What is learnt conceptually in the field is simultaneously applied in practice and, in turn, the experience derived from practice becomes embedded in the teaching and learning outcomes of the courses. In the case of arts education or, more specifically, performing arts education sector, contact with individual instructors is crucial. Moreover, in the case of music or theatre practice-based teaching, the setting might vary from one-to-one tutorials to class teaching. In this guide, we will focus especially on diverse teaching settings for one-to-one or ensemble activities as detailed in our case i.e. Practice-based teaching in Music modules at Maynooth University.

Our Case

Practice-based teaching in Music modules at Maynooth University

From the outset of the Music programme at Maynooth University, students take a compulsory performance component. This involves either:

- One-to-one instrumental tuition (First study), *or*
- Group fundamental keyboard skills (Group Piano), *and*
- Participation in an approved ensemble

These ensemble activities are diverse, yet share the common objective to put together a public end-of-the year concert for the academic community at the University.

Depending on interests and abilities, some students continue to specialise in performance in their second and third year.

► Purpose of this Guide

Purpose of this Guide

This guide was conceived in response to the fact that musical practice-based teaching activities require diversified teaching strategies, and because of this it is essential to choose approaches that are appropriate to these diverse strategies, when seeking student feedback. In particular, the guide is designed to provide Maynooth University staff involved in practice-based teaching and learning with ideas and practical examples of how to gather rich feedback, respond to it, and communicate that response back to the students.

As observed above, the teaching and learning settings offering performance as a subject vary considerably, spanning from one-to-one tuition to masterclass settings to group learning. For this reason, identifying distinct methods to effectively obtain feedback across these different frameworks is vital. Just as important is devising methods for closing the feedback loop – responding meaningfully to student feedback – so that students can see the value of actively voicing their ideas and concerns, and to help them appreciate that verbalising issues related to their practical learning is important for their broader skills development.

Authors' Reflections and Advice

The practice-based area of study adopted by the Music programme at MU partly adheres to the model provided by musical academies, which revolves around the teaching of the principal instrument. The latter is often organised as one-to-one exchange, an “apprenticeship-like relationship between the student and a distinguished performer of the instrument.” (Nerland, 2007, 399). The framework for this type of exchange is highly regulated and nearly prescribed by conventions shared by the community of reference, and in this case, highly institutionalised. Subsequently, the expectations surrounding the learning experiences of the students are generally understood as parts of a wider known tradition, which transmission necessarily depends on the functionality of facilities, the quality of teaching, but also an underlying, inevitable personal factor.

Why Seek Feedback on Practice-based Teaching?

What Should you Bear in Mind when Seeking this Feedback?

Currently, students are increasingly asked to provide feedback on their experiences of Higher Education and their input can be incredibly valuable for enhancing teaching and learning. Gathering and responding to feedback in a meaningful way can help.

- **To Clarify:** Addressing practice-based teaching means to differentiate the response provided by students involved in practical activities from that given by students involved in strictly academic studies, somehow singling them out. This means that numerous challenges, especially related to the very personal nature of the relation between instructor and pupil might emerge in the process. Yet, letting students know the basis for that distinction and how you intend to act on their feedback recommendations can provide an opportunity for students to overcome privacy fears and engage more effectively with the feedback process.

Feedback from students engaging in practice-based learning activities in music performance is crucial to the development of a teaching style able to actively enhance the interdisciplinary crossover between theory and practice in the performing arts. For feedback from students to be fully effective, however, the feedback must engage specifically with the sources of the practical provisions their courses are designed to offer: facilities, access to tutorials, materials, ensemble activities, and, ultimately the balance between their expectations at the onset of a defined academic period (start of course, start of term, semester, year, etc...) and the actual pathway they experience. In addition, students must know how their feedback has been responded to, be informed of the changes that have been implemented because of it, or be told why certain requested alterations did not occur.

In the case of one-to-one teaching, it is important to create a feedback strategy in conjunction with the Head of Department that reaches out to the tutors as well, by re-elaborating concepts and requests made by students in ways that could translate into general, objective approaches to strategic teaching.

- **To Get More and Better Feedback:** If feedback from this demographic is seen as valued by teaching staff, then students are more likely to take the process seriously. They are more likely to respond to requests for feedback and give more thoughtful/constructive responses (Asghar, 2016; Trieschl and Wohlbring, 2017). This is a particularly important consideration if we want to counter potential survey fatigue, as students are increasingly asked for their opinion through online surveys. Feedback should be scheduled at a time that will allow the module coordinators to make any possible and appropriate changes before the module ends; possibly, the final part of the feedback should be requested on the occasion of main events involving their practical activities, when the likelihood of a full attendance is maximised.

An example of that appropriate for Maynooth University might be:

- **1 for first study tuition:**
Phase 1: end of Semester 1 performance seminars;
Phase 2: end of Semester 2 performance seminars;
- **2 for group piano:**
Phase 1: in conjunction with Test 1 (December);
Phase 2: Phase 1: in conjunction with Test 3 (April);
- **3 for approved ensembles:**
Phase 1: in conjunction with Christmas Activities (December);
Phase 2: in conjunction with end-of-the-year concerts (April).

This timing might also keep the practical activities in students' minds and make it more likely that they will focus on these activities when giving feedback

- **To Promote Student Partnership:** Valuing and responding to student feedback may encourage student partnership and prompt students to take greater ownership of their own learning (Bovill *et al.*, 2016). In the Maynooth University music department, strategically implementing the creation of focus groups or working closely with students representatives from the different performance streams has already proved effective.

► Closing the Loop

Attention to three factors will help you to close the feedback loop and respond meaningfully to student feedback.

Tips for Gathering Student Feedback on Practice-based Teaching and Learning:

1 Keep Students Informed

At an early stage in the module tell students that their feedback will be requested and indicate when and how this will take place. Explain the aims of the feedback process. Consider providing examples of what might constitute constructive feedback (Hou *et al.*, 2017).

2 Choose the Correct Timing

Do not leave it too late to seek student opinions. Requests for feedback should closely follow the scheduling of class activities. While one-to-one teaching takes place throughout the week at scattered times, all performance students meet weekly in performance seminars (platform classes). The response to the feedback session in Phase 1 should then be presented in the first class after the break; the response to Phase 2 should be shared more widely through use of online presentations/podcasts, and with the assistance of students reps, and made available to incoming students through digital sharing (Moodle, Teams), so that students involved can value the implementation of the communication system as an effective feed-forward action.

3 Maintain Momentum

Schedule class time to discuss your responses to student feedback as soon as possible after feedback is received and processed; possibly share the outcomes with them using visual aids, and devoting to the process a section of a lecture module. The performance director should then deal with feedback assigned to tutors, by elaborating an organic form of response that could assemble all different aspects raised by students about their individual tutorials, keeping the underlying importance of the anonymity of the feedback. This could be gathered in a document shared online with the tutors, where feedback is organised by topic (for instance: etiquette, effectiveness, suggestions for improvement).

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Resources

- [Dublin City University Guide to Teaching Evaluation: Getting the Best Out of Your Reflections](#)
- [University College Dublin 'Closing the Feedback Loop](#)
- [University of Edinburgh 'Mid-Course Feedback Guidance](#)
- [University of West London, Anke Görzig, 'Closing the Feedback Loop. Engaging Students by Acting on Mid-term Feedback](#)

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About this guide

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