

Facilitating learning: supporting students' self-improvement through reflective use of feedback

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'Assessment and feedback' are the experiences with which students report least satisfaction in the National Student Survey. Academics are keen to find methods of delivering recognisably effective feedback; however, with funding cuts to the sector, improvements must necessarily be efficient and not overly burdensome to teaching staff. Hulme and Forshaw (2009) found that both students and tutors valued verbal feedback mechanisms, but that these were considered to be time consuming and inefficient. This study investigated a method of delivering verbal feedback efficiently using timetabled teaching time.

This study investigated the use of an alternative method of feedback return across three cohorts studying a biological psychology module (second undergraduate year). In year 1, students' marked coursework was returned at an interim point in the module, with structured written feedback on four transferable skills: literature searching, reading for understanding, academic writing and critical evaluation. In year 2, the same feedback sheets were employed, but students were guided (in seminar groups of 15-20 students) to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses with regard to each skill, and to identify benefits and strategies for improvement. In year 3, the same procedure was used, but an earlier additional formative assessment opportunity was provided. At the end of the module, feedback was evaluated and students were examined and marked on the same four skills.

Students consistently rated feedback as better than that received in other modules, and intended to continue to self-improve using feedback. Statistical analysis revealed that participating in guided reflection significantly improved students' performance in the subsequent examination, and also demonstrated the value of early formative assessment opportunities for overall student achievement. A model of good practice for feedback return is proposed, and exemplar resources will be shared with delegates.

Reference:

Hulme, J.A. and Forshaw, M.J. (2009). Effectiveness of feedback provision for psychology undergraduate students. *Psychology Learning and Teaching*, 8, 1, 34-38.

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Table 1: Mean (\pm standard deviation) marks for three cohorts of students, showing coursework marks, exam marks, the change in marks between the two assessment points, and the overall module marks.

Year	Course work	Exam	Change	Module
1 – standard feedback return	8.18 (± 2.916)	8.63 (± 2.29)	0.45 (± 2.71)	8.45 (± 2.19)
2 – feedback return in seminar	7.59 (± 2.836)	8.42 (± 2.20)	0.83 (± 2.42)	8.09 (± 2.17)
3 – formative feedback + feedback return in seminar	9.12 (± 2.03)	9.11 (± 2.33)	-0.01 (± 2.74)	9.12 (± 2.03)

Series of one-way unrelated ANOVAs, $p < .05$:

- Course work marks significantly improved from year 1 to year 3, and from year 2 to year 3.
- Exam marks significantly improved from year 2 to year 3.
- The difference between course work marks and exam marks (change) was significantly larger in year 2 than in year 3.
- Overall module marks were significantly higher in year 3 in comparison to both year 1 and year 2.

For more information about the HEA's work on assessment and feedback, please go to www.heacademy.ac.uk/assessment.