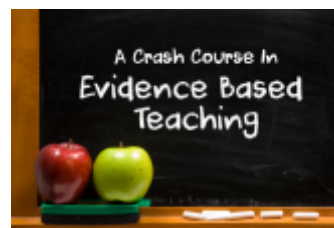


Feedback: The First Secret John Hattie Revealed

 evidencebasedteaching.org.au/crash-course-evidence-based-teaching/how-to-give-effective-feedback-to-your-students/

When John Hattie reviewed over 500,000 research studies, he found that feedback had more impact on student results than any other teaching strategy.

By the time he conducted his latest review, published in **Visible Learning**, he had added an extra 300,000+ studies to his database, and *feedback still comes out on top*¹.



In all aspects of life, feedback is the breakfast of champions. It lets you know how you are going while also telling you how you can improve.

You can use feedback to improve how well your students do at school. In fact, research² shows that feedback has double the impact that regular teaching strategies have on student achievement.

Therefore, it is no surprise that John Hattie, the author of **Visible Learning** and the Director of the Melbourne Education Research Institute, believes that feedback is essential to school improvement. In this article, you will discover how to use feedback to increase the effect you have on your students' results.

The simplest prescription for improving education must be dollops of feedback John Hattie

You may have heard that practice makes perfect. It is true that practice is essential for learning. Giving students time to practice was a key element in the earlier article, An Underused Lesson Structure That Delivers Results.

Yet, as eminent psychologist Tony Buzan points out, practice only helps people to repeat what they are doing. If what they are doing is incorrect, people internalise the wrong thing. Feedback lets students know how they are doing while there is still time to adjust and perfect their efforts.

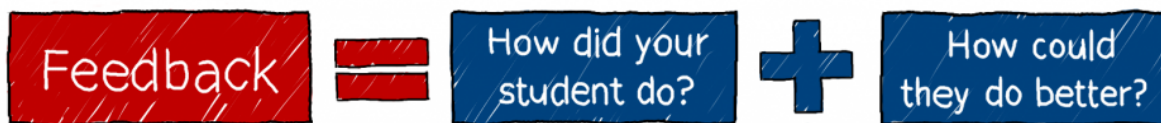
But the question of how to give effective feedback to your students remains?

How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students: The Basics

Feedback is information that you give to your students that helps them close the gap between where they are now with their work, and where they could be. **The goal of feedback is to provide students with insight that helps them to improve their performance.**

The answer to the question, *How to give effective feedback to your students?* involves two steps.

1. Tell your student about their current level of performance
2. Tell them what they could do to improve



How To Give Effective Feedback To Your Students: The Options

When thinking about how to give effective feedback to your students, you should always remember the basics. Feedback involves telling students how they are done, and how they could improve.

However, while the basics of how to give effective feedback always remain the same, there are different forms of feedback you can use.

There are four ways that you can use feedback to help your students. These are:

1. **Affirming what they did well.**
2. **Correcting and directing.**
3. **Pointing out the process.**
4. **Coaching students to critique their own efforts.**

With this in mind, deciding how to give effective feedback to your students becomes a little more complex. When making your choice, you need to consider:

- The nature of the task
- The ability and experience level of the student

And to do this, you need to know a bit more about each of the options.

How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students: *Option 1 – Affirm What They Do Well*

You should **let your students know what they have done right** as well as what they have done wrong.

This holds true for all learners, from the child who is struggling to the student who excels.

However, affirmation is different to praise. Personal praise, such as *good girl, well done, you're so smart, or I'm proud of you* is not feedback as it focuses on the person instead of on their work. At its most basic level, affirmative feedback tells your students that what they have done is correct.

Whenever you give your students practice problems, whether in class or as homework, you must mark their work so that they can see that they are on track.

Of course, some tasks, such as writing a story, cannot be right or wrong. In these cases, affirmative feedback involves telling your students what they have done that makes their work better than it used to be.

A young child may be starting to use capital letters for names while an older student may be using dialogue to help with characterisation.

The specifics will vary from task to task, and student to student. However, in all cases, you let your student know what they have done that you like, and tell them that you want to see more of it as they continue their practice.

How to Give Feedback to Your Students: *Option 2 – Correct & Direct*

Your students will not always do things correctly. Making mistakes is part of learning.

When your students make errors, it shows that they are willing to push themselves beyond what they have already mastered.

Allowing time for students to make mistakes before you formally assess them enables you to put feedback to good use.

When students get things wrong, it is vital that they know they wrong, and that they know it quickly. This is especially true when what they are learning is totally unfamiliar, and with students who struggle with the subject you are teaching them.

You need to **correct their mistakes**.

However, you need to do more than just tell them they are wrong. You also need to **direct them to the right answer**. You *correct* and *then direct*.

For simple tasks, you can do this through providing the answer. You could highlight a misspelling and write the correct spelling above it, or mark a question wrong while also providing the right answer.

Giving 'correct and direct' feedback about more complex tasks often involves telling your students what they could add. I was recently working with a Year 6 student who was producing a video on the effects of earthquakes. She filmed a series of clips of a table shaking. With each clip, she made the table shake more to show that the effects of earthquakes depended on their intensity. However, she made no mention of intensity during the clips. My feedback to her was that:

- *The link between earthquakes' intensities and their effects was not clear (correct)*
- *She needed an introduction explaining how intensity is measured using the Richter Scale, and she needed to tell the audience how intense each simulation was meant to be (direct)*

How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students: *Option 3 – Point Out the Process*

The correct and direct approach to feedback works.

However, it only helps with the specific task (word, math's problem or assignment) that you are commenting on. By adding the **point out the process** approach to your repertoire, you can also help students to do better on similar tasks in the future.

The essence of the *point out the process* form of feedback is that show the child the connection between *their result, what they did to get that result and what they need to do to get a better result.*

This can be as simple as showing them what step they messed up in a math's problem and modelling the steps again using a sample problem. Many tasks involve following a series of steps enabling you to give this type of feedback on a regular basis. You can even do this when marking practice work as a class by modelling how to do the problems on the board, effectively re-teaching your main points. Just be sure to give your students time to do more practice problems afterwards.

While the steps involved in a particular task form one type of process, they are not the only type of process that you can refer to when giving feedback. Remember the central aspect of *point out the process* feedback is to connect the student's actions with the quality of their work. You could apply this principle in many different ways, such as highlighting the link between:

- **Test scores** and *time spent studying.*
- **Assignment grades** and *proofreading.*
- **A wrong answer to a sum** and *estimating to determine the reasonableness of an answer.*
- **The quality of a short story** and *the narrative devices that have been and could be used.*
- **Understanding a story** and *self-correcting when meaning is lost.*
- **A wrong answer to a math' problem** and *the creating an organised list strategy.*

I was recently working with a Year 8 student revising the idea of *highest common factors*. When asked to list the factors of a number such as 64, he did so but in a random and unorganised way. His answers were 8, 1, 2 and 64. I told him that this was wrong as he had missed some factors (correct) and I informed him the correct answer was 1, 64, 2, 32, 4, 64, and 8 (direct). I then pointed out the process he used (random) and a better process (an organised list). By organising my list of factors in pairs (e.g. 1, 64) and starting from 1 before checking each number after that, I made sure I didn't miss any factors. I then showed him how to use the organised list strategy to find the factors of 48 before letting him continue with practice questions of his own. Not only will using the organised list strategy help him to list all the factors of other numbers, it will help him with a wide range of other math's problems.

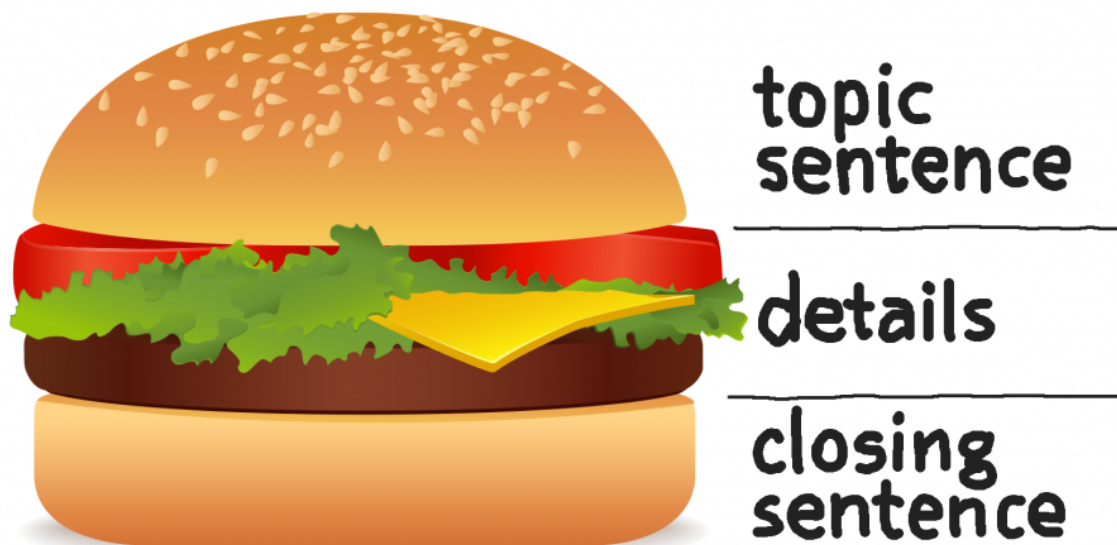
How to Give Feedback to Your Students:

Option 4 – Coach the Student to Give Feedback to Themselves

Coaching is the art of using questions to help students help themselves.

It is a potent strategy to use when giving feedback to more experienced and advanced learners. However, coaching is not effective with learners who are inexperienced at what you have asked them to do or with students who generally struggle with the subject.

Coaching is powerful because it eases students into meta-cognitive strategies, such as monitoring their own performance, evaluating how they approached the task and adjusting the strategies they are using before continuing. Some time ago, my year seven students had been working on how to structure their paragraphs using the hamburger model.



Initially, I would give *correct and direct* type feedback. Yet, as the weeks went on, we started exploring other aspects of writing. The students knew how to structure paragraphs; however, as their focus was elsewhere, they often forgot to do so in their writing.

This was the perfect opportunity to use coaching.

When conferencing with a child who had not structured a paragraph properly, I would ask them:

- What is the structure of a paragraph?
- What aspects of this structure have you used in this paragraph? Which one/s have you forgotten?
- What do you need to do to improve your work?

This encouraged the students to take ownership of the whole process by highlighting that they were capable of:

1. Evaluating their own work
2. Using their insights to improve it

These are the two central aspects of feedback, but you are helping your students to give feedback to themselves.

In short, then considering how to give effective feedback to your students:

- Use **affirmation** with all students, but make sure you are affirming their performance rather than praising them as people.

- Use **correct and direct feedback** to help inexperienced and struggling students with a particular task.
- **Point out the process** when you want to help your students use your feedback to complete similar tasks in the future.
- **Coach** experienced and gifted students to critique themselves.

Feedback is a potent part of evidence based teaching. Now that you know how to give effective feedback to your students, you should use it widely and well.

Continue to learn more about evidence based teaching by returning to the **[Crash Course In Evidence Based Teaching homepage](#)**.

References

1. Note: Hattie lists many factors that influence student achievement – not just teaching strategies. Feedback is the most potent teaching strategy he lists that can be applied across all subjects. [↗]
2. Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*. Routledge. [↗]