Feeback: How to

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Lesson objectives

- Give thoughtful and useful feedback
- Incorporate feedback to improve your instruction

Overview

In this session, we will focus on ourselves as teachers. We have talked a lot about getting feedback from our students to assess their learning progress, but how can we, as instructors, use feedback to improve our teaching skill?

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Exercise

Previously we talked about motivation in the classroom. Reply to one of the prompts below:

- When teaching, have you ever had to recover from a bad start where you demotivated your students? What did you do (or what *should* you have done) to get back to a positive learning environment?
- Have you been a student in a class where the instructor got off on the wrong foot? What could they have done to get things back on track?

Feedback is hard

Sometimes it can be hard to receive feedback, especially negative feedback.
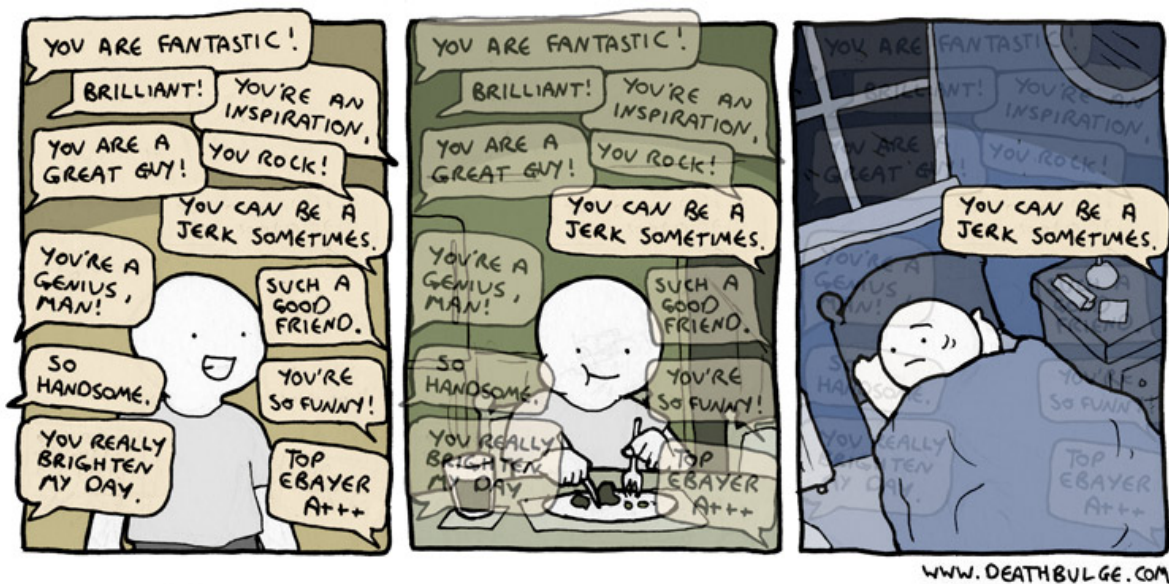

Figure 1: Image credit: deathbulge.com

Feedback is most effective when the people involved share ground rules and expectations. One useful approach is to balance feedback on what works with constructive feedback on areas that could use improvement (and *how* they could be improved). We also want feedback on both *what* is being taught (the content) and *how* it is being taught (the presentation). Each person giving feedback is expected to provide at least one piece of negative and one piece of positive feedback each for content and delivery. This helps overcome two common tendencies when giving feedback on teaching: to focus on the content (even though delivery is at least as important) and to either provide only negative or only positive feedback.

Exercise

What strategies have you used to receive feedback on your instruction? If you have not had the opportunity for gathering feedback on your instruction, what feedback would you like to receive? Take two minutes to add your answer to the collaborative document and we will discuss them as a group.

A couple ways you can set the stage for receiving or providing feedback are:

- **Initiate feedback**. Most people will not offer it freely, and those who do are not the only voices you should listen to. Also, it is easier to hear feedback that you have asked for.
- **Be specific**. What do you want feedback on? As an instructor one way to get specific feedback is to provide questions that focus the responses. Writing your own feedback questions allows you to frame feedback in a way that is helpful to you - the questions below reveal what did not work in your teaching, but read as professional suggestions rather than personal judgments. For example:
  - "What is one thing I could have done as an instructor to make this lesson more effective?"
  - "If you could pick one thing from the lesson to go over again, what would it be?"
- **Balance** positive and negative feedback.
  - Ask for or give "compliment sandwiches" (one positive, one negative, one positive)
  - Ask for both types of feedback, and give both types.
- When you are giving feedback, provide a clear **next step** with negative feedback to follow that will help the recipient improve. i.e. Don't be reviewer 2!
- **Communicate expectations**. If your teaching feedback is taking the form of an observation (and you are comfortable enough with the observer), tell that person how they can best communicate their feedback to you.
- When giving feedback, remember that giving and receiving **feedback is a skill** that requires practice, so do not be frustrated if your feedback is rejected but try to think about why the recipient might not have been comfortable with the feedback you gave.
- Use a **feedback translator**. Have someone else read over all the feedback and give an executive summary. It can be easier to hear "It sounds like most people are ahead with the materials, so you could speed up" rather than reading a bunch of notes that all say "this is too slow".
- Finally, **be kind** to yourself. If you are a self-critical person, it is OK to remind yourself:
  - The feedback is not personal. In many cases, feedback says more about the person giving it than the person receiving it.
  - There are always positives along with the negatives. Save your favorites.

Provide feedback

We will start by observing an example of teaching and providing some feedback.

Exercise

Watch this example teaching video and then give feedback on it https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ApVt04rB4U. Put your feedback in the collaborative document. Organize your feedback along two axes: positive vs. opportunities for growth (sometimes called "negative") and content (what was said) vs. presentation (how it was said).

Receive feedback

Now that you have had some practice observing teaching and giving feedback, let us practice with each other.

Exercise

The prep time for this exercise is intentionally short - the point is to practice giving and receiving feedback, not to create a perfect presentation. Imperfect presentations will give you more to work with!

1. Split into groups of three.
2. Assign roles, which will rotate: presenter, timekeeper, note-taker.
3. Have each group member teach 3 minutes of your chosen lesson episode using live coding. For this exercise, your peers will not "code-along." Before you begin, briefly describe what you will be teaching and what has been learned previously.
4. After each person finishes, each group member should share feedback (starting with themselves) using the same 2x2 rubric as before (positive/negative, content/presentation). The timekeeper should keep feedback discussion to about 2 minutes per person; this may leave some time at the end for general discussion. The note-taker should record feedback in the collaborative document.
5. Trade off roles.

Use feedback

Exercise

Look back at the feedback you received on your teaching. How do you feel about this feedback? Is it fair and reasonable? Do you agree with it?

Identify at least one specific change you will make to your teaching based on this feedback. Describe your change in the collaborative document.

Summary

Remember, teaching is a skill that is learned. If you notice yourself feeling hurt or threatened by the feedback you got, or rejecting it as unfair or wrong, pause and try to consider the feedback from a growth mindset - that through practice and feedback, your skills are going to improve.

Feedback on the day

Your instructor will ask for you to provide feedback on this session.