

TYCA-Southwest 2012 Conference: The Rhetoric of Civil Discourse

The Discourse of Feedback: Beyond Praise or Encouragement to Objectivity

Feedback seems obvious: a report on performance. But society now links feedback and self-esteem to where the process has become muddled. Despite experts claiming that self-esteem comes from being capable, society has developed a practice of providing positive feedback whenever possible, even when not warranted.

The word “positive,” as applied to feedback, identifies the problem. Communication experts make the distinction between praise and encouragement claiming praise hurts the receivers. In fact, some go so far to claim praise harms others because it is valuation language that creates a situation of dominance. They recommend encouragement. However, encouragement in a teaching environment does not provide the most useful and appropriate information. Objective feedback answers this requirement.

Using an objective stance to provide feedback to students creates an adult-oriented, professional environment. This in turn creates a subtext of expectation of the level of work and quality of behavior college demands.

Moving evaluation to the work itself and away from the student allows the student to detach emotionally. This viewpoint helps students learn to approach their work critically. They can conceptualize rules as tools rather than

impediments, teaching as something to seek rather than something to resist.

Objectivity also helps the teacher provide specific feedback to guide students toward improved writing. It helps the teacher establish ethos by maintaining an unbiased tone. Students who have spent years in a system with bias especially appreciate objective feedback and associate it with college level performance. Consistent objectivity helps the teacher maintain objectivity despite any personal bias.

This habit by the teacher models objectivity for students. Students can apply this model of being objective to the work of others, for example, reading assignments for class.

This environment of objectivity—feedback from the teacher, workshopping with students to revise and improve work, and evaluating others’ works such as in the context of the reading assignments—creates an environment of critical thinking and enables students to civilly discuss controversial topics as ideas detached and separate from beliefs and emotions. This environment may sound simple, but following this method consistently requires constant awareness.

Beth Humphreys
Asst. Professor, Rhetoric and Composition
NMSU-Grants
1500 Third St.
Grants, NM 87020
beth_hum@nmsu.edu
505-287-6675

8 Tips and Sample Feedback

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use Third Person. 2. The “person” is the work, not the student. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “This essay needs...” ○ “This paper accomplishes...” ○ “The third paragraph goes off topic at this point...” 3. Resist using the pronoun “you” and talking directly to the student. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. If possible, find something that works and lead with that. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have them model their own successes. 5. Provide specific ways and places the essay can improve. 6. The build a case for the earned grade. 7. Grading is not about “them”; it’s about the product. 8. Grading (and teaching) is not about the teacher <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ no impressions, reactions, opinions, etc. 	
<p>The shortness of this essay could be solved by developing paragraphs. The paragraphs are not much more than topic sentences. The journalist questions would help. Another strategy would be to choose patterns—for example, is this an opportunity to explain a process? Give a definition? Explain cause and effect? Essays show the writer’s mind at work, but this essay needs much more thinking.</p>	<p>The revisions to this essay align it with the assignment so that it meets the requirements. Good work. The essay accomplishes the goal of showing how modeling works, surprisingly especially the consideration of Grand Theft Auto and consequences. Good understanding of the assignment. The lack of in-text citations is a problem because it creates plagiarism – not being about to tell when ideas and words belong to others. That along with the errors impact the grade.</p>	<p>The front of the essay is loaded with quotes so the tone is more formal than the second half. This is part of the task of integrating quotes—helping them blend in. The second half’s best accomplishment is the way it considers more than one side of a feature. Although saying “could be a good thing” and “could be a bad thing” is not especially academic, the exploration behind those ideas is. Effective strategy. The MLA needs <u>work!</u></p>
<p>When this essay summarizes books, the writing is smooth and sophisticated. When it talks about media and teens, it becomes less smooth and more simple. Unfortunately, those portion are the assignment and not the book reviews. Those portions deserve the effort and attention the assignment asks for.</p>	<p>This essay accomplishes the goal of showing how modeling works. The ideas are well-developed with examples; however, the essay tends to revisit topics and ideas when working to develop new ones. This is the function of organizing – making sure the topic continues always forward. Otherwise, good job. Not having a 2nd source impacts the grade.</p>	<p>The introduction claims the problems cause depression and suicide, but the essay does not discuss these. The conclusion mentions stalking, rape and burglaries, but the essay does not mention these either. The intro and conclusion cannot include material that is not covered in the essay. However, including them in the discussion would have helped the essay explore more and be more developed.</p>
<p>This essay makes strong arguments and it works to bring in money as a model, but it does not always keep that as its focus. The essay should focus less on “money is the root of evil” and more on how money—as a model—influences people to follow “evil.” The paragraphs about war and Sesame Street do not make clear direct links. Doing so would create coherence and go a long way towards enhancing the essay’s ability to convince the audience. Well written and argued, but another revision would make the difference.</p>	<p>This essay works hard to accomplish the assignment, but it mostly presents one idea repeatedly – good role models equal good life and bad role models equal bad life. The essay does mention examples, but those examples need development – how? why? when? etc. And examples used in the body paragraphs change completely to different examples in the conclusion. The writing process work-shopped during class is not only for a grade; it is also to help students learn to develop ideas and organize them. The lack of sources impact the grade.</p>	<p>The assignment limited the number of examples to three to keep essays from listing examples without giving them adequate consideration. The paragraph about superheroes is the most developed and should be a model for other paragraphs. For example, the paragraph about stories, myths and characters just uses one idea. It could use more to develop deeper thinking. The outline form used in class looks for three types of support for each paragraph. Using this method, this paper would not have needed so many different topics.</p>