**Effective Teaching Strategies: 5 Feedback Elements**

By: [Jordan Catapano](http://www.teachhub.com/effective-teaching-strategies-5-feedback-elements)

The process of student learning is one of constant exploration, curiosity, and growth. As much as some might like to see a “straight line” of learning from point A to point B, the reality is that learning starts at point A and takes a long, winding route that somehow arrives at point B. While there are a number of factors that contribute to student growth and successful arrival at point B, one key element is the [**type of feedback**](http://www.teachhub.com/teaching-strategies-essentials-giving-feedback) students receive along the way.

With today’s [**digital tools**](http://www.teachhub.com/5-digital-tools-parents-will-love), students can receive feedback in countless forms and from many sources. But no one is more dedicated to or responsible for coaching students’ learning than their instructor. Quality feedback is like a strong wind on a kite: It helps to push and encourage students to the next height of achievement. Therefore, it is vital that teachers take time to consider how they can best provide feedback to students that guides their progress and encourages their growth.

When you’re giving feedback to students on their latest performance, here are five [**effective teaching strategies**](http://www.teachhub.com/storytelling-classroom-teaching-strategy) that include critical items to try to include to help sharpen their skills.

[**Effective Teaching Strategies**](http://www.teachhub.com/teaching-strategies-essentials-giving-feedback)**:**

1. **Talk About the Positives**

It’s essential that we take time to focus on what students are doing right. Providing positive feedback and focusing on student strengths yields two benefits: First, it encourages students to continue doing what they are already doing well. Second, it tells students that they have, in fact, achieved to a certain degree and motivates them to keep it up. We all like that pat on the back and that feeling of “I did it!” Focusing on the positive strengths of students – even small ones – ensures that we aren’t solely focusing on the negatives.

It’s OK to praise even small details. Find something you genuinely want to reinforce and lavish your student with praise. Hearing positive feedback from a teacher goes a long way to encourage students, plus it helps balance the feedback they receive so that they are more receptive to the negatives as well.

1. **Open Up About the Weaknesses**

Students didn’t just turn in their work to hear how amazing they are – they submitted it to know where they can grow, too. As their instructor, it is your responsibility to kindly, strategically point out those areas of improvement for them. While you might want to start off with the positives, transition into explaining a few targeted areas that they should focus on in the future.

Sometimes teachers can get carried away with how many weaknesses we give feedback on. After all, it’s easy for us to identify a multitude of ways to transform student work into “perfection.” But perfection isn’t the point – growth is the point. Instead of pointing out every error and discussing every flaw, target about two or three key factors. Thorough explanation of a few factors goes much further than superficial discussion of many.

1. **“Next Time, Try …”**

Along with explaining why strengths are strengths and why weaknesses are weaknesses, try to include a clear action point for their next attempt. Sometimes our feedback can sound so burdensome when it points out rights and wrongs without setting students up for how they can grow from it. When we directly tell students to “try this next time,” or “Instead of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, do \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,” we provide a clear path to success by showing where to place their foot on their next step.

This also helps to reinforce positive steps and avoid negative ones. If we point out a student’s weakness but never explain what they should do instead, then there’s a strong chance they’ll repeat their weakness again. Just like we need to tell little kids what behaviors *to* do rather than strictly what *not* to do, the same applies to academic behaviors as well.

1. **Connect Feedback to Goals and Standards**

Our courses have goals or standards that students are expected to achieve. No matter where those standards originated from, they in large part contribute toward the outcomes we push our students to achieve. It is essential for our feedback to help students see how what they’ve just been “working on” is connected to what they’re “working towards.”

Your acknowledgement of the standards can be overt (like talking thoroughly about the standard and how exactly they measure up to it) or more passive (like referencing a standard number when sharing your comments). You may consider referring students to see other examples or including a rubric to help them understand how their work relates to the overarching goals of the course. You can even offer students and opportunity to think through this connection themselves.

1. **Time for Reflection**

While you might work hard to give students effective feedback through comments, there is one more component you could give that helps students to process their work: Time. So often students rush through producing their work. And so often we can rush through the feedback and return process. But if we intentionally allocate time for reflection, then students have a prime opportunity to understand your feedback and plan their next growth point.

Consider how you can provide time right there during class to allow students to carefully examine what they’ve produced as well as your commentary on it. Perhaps you can provide reflective questions, a survey, or several class examples that help students understand their progress within the larger context of the course. Students can easily glance at a grade and discard an assignment unless we teach them how to learn from their previous work.

**Additional Feedback Considerations**

Notice that nothing above includes a “grade” or “score” as essential elements of feedback. Grades can be helpful components of feedback, but sometimes focusing on a grade draws attention away from the more valuable aspects of feedback. If students are sidetracked by what grade they received or how many points they were awarded, then their attention to their strengths and areas of growth fades away. Grades can be a helpful component of feedback, but only if used within the larger context of feedback essentials.

Finally, consider what upcoming opportunities students will have to respond to your feedback. Perhaps students will have a chance to compose a reflective response. Maybe your next assignment or activity can draw directly from your previous one that students received feedback on. Or maybe even you can open up the opportunity for students to revise their work based on the feedback you provided. Whatever you choose, remember that feedback becomes a powerful tool when students can hold it in their left hand and their next opportunity in their right.

***What else qualifies as a “feedback essential”? Please share your thoughts about feedback in the comments below!***

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[Taken from: <http://www.teachhub.com/effective-teaching-strategies-5-feedback-elements>, accessed December 3, 2018]