

Students as Co-creators Feedback Literacy Project

This small-scale project was undertaken as an exploratory investigation into students' experiences of feedback literacy, with the aim of informing UoW teaching practice rather than producing statistically generalisable findings.

Although only eight students completed the questionnaire, their open-ended responses provide detailed reflections on how feedback is experienced, interpreted and used in practice. The accompanying Likert-scale data offer descriptive context, while the qualitative comments allow themes to emerge that illuminate students' expectations of effective feedback and the challenges they encounter in acting upon it. The findings presented below should therefore be understood as an exploratory qualitative analysis supported by descriptive survey data.

Despite the small sample, there was a striking degree of consistency across respondents, with many of the same issues recurring independently across the comments.

Theme 1. Students value feedback but want greater clarity

This was by far the strongest theme.

Several respondents reported that feedback was often too vague, contradictory or difficult to interpret.

Representative comments included:

"Feedback isn't clear and sometimes not accurate."

"Information overload from the lecturer."

"Sometimes the feedback itself feels insufficient."

"Feedback put in simple and plain language."

Interestingly, students were not rejecting feedback itself. Rather, they wanted feedback that clearly explained:

- why something was weak
- how it could be improved
- how improvements related to marking criteria.

This links closely with feedback literacy literature, where understanding feedback is regarded as the first step before students can effectively use it.

Theme 2. Students actively use feedback

Contrary to the stereotype that students ignore feedback, every respondent described using feedback in some way.

Examples included:

- improving referencing
- following comments for future assignments
- checking against the rubric
- combining feedback across assignments
- improving structure and clarity

Illustrative comments include:

"I combine all the feedback from all assessments and use it for the next assessment."

"Used it to improve future assignments."

"I got feedback on improving my citation which helped me."

This suggests students are attempting to develop feedback literacy through applying previous feedback rather than simply reading comments.

Theme 3. Students want dialogue rather than one-way comments

Perhaps the most consistent finding concerns opportunities for discussion.

Students repeatedly requested:

- one-to-one meetings
- opportunities to ask questions
- offline feedback sessions
- draft feedback
- interactive discussion

Examples include:

"Allow students to have one-to-one meetings."

"Much more specific offline sessions for feedback."

"More opportunities to discuss feedback."

One respondent expressed frustration that requests for clarification were met with responses such as:

"Refer back to my feedback."

This illustrates a perceived lack of feedback dialogue, which is central to contemporary models of feedback literacy.

Theme 4. Feedback should include examples

Many comments suggested students wanted feedback to become more actionable.

Rather than simply identifying weaknesses, respondents wanted examples showing:

- what good work looks like
- how improvements could be made
- what markers actually expect

Illustrative comments include:

"By giving an example instead of just saying change this."

"Examples of good work."

"Sharing snippets of drafts."

Students appear to value concrete illustrations over abstract advice.

Theme 5. Feedback before submission is highly valued

Several respondents suggested they wanted more opportunities for formative feedback.

Suggestions included:

- two feedback opportunities before submission
- anonymous draft discussions
- draft feedback
- formative review sessions

This indicates students see feedback as something that should support learning during assessment rather than simply justify marks afterwards.

Theme 6. Consistency between marks and comments

Several students hinted at uncertainty regarding alignment between grades and written comments.

Comments included:

- feedback saying something was missing when students believed it was included
- wanting comments consistent with awarded grades
- wanting clearer links between feedback and assessment criteria

This suggests students are trying to interpret feedback in relation to assessment standards.

Theme 7. Trust in the feedback provider matters

Most respondents preferred feedback from the academic who would mark the assessment because they believed it reflected marking expectations.

However, one respondent valued peer feedback because it came from someone who had experienced the module themselves.

This suggests students attach importance to the perceived credibility of the feedback source.

Overall interpretation

The comments paint quite a coherent picture despite the small sample.

Students generally appear to:

- value feedback
- actively attempt to use it
- want feedback that is clearer and more specific
- prefer opportunities for dialogue rather than one-way written comments
- appreciate examples and formative guidance
- view feedback as something that should support future learning rather than simply justify marks.

This aligns with the feedback literacy literature, which argues that effective feedback depends not only on the quality of comments but also on students' capacity to understand, engage with and act on feedback.

Recommendations for Module Leaders

Stay close to the rubric

Introduce the assessment rubric at the beginning of the module when the assessment brief is first discussed. Encourage students to use the rubric as a planning tool rather than something they consult only after submission. Drawing students' attention to the descriptors for higher classifications (for example, 70% and above) can help illustrate what excellent work looks like, while also encouraging students to identify the performance band that represents their own current target.

The rubric should continue to be used throughout the module rather than appearing only at assessment points. During draft workshops or seminar activities, students can use the rubric to review their own work or provide structured peer feedback. This repeated use reinforces assessment criteria and helps identify aspects of the rubric that students find difficult to interpret.

Don't just explain the assessment once

Students repeatedly indicated that feedback and assessment guidance need reinforcing throughout the module. Key assessment messages should therefore be revisited regularly rather than being confined to the initial briefing. If, for example, students are expected to provide multiple examples, demonstrate critical analysis or engage with particular literature, these expectations should be highlighted whenever relevant teaching opportunities arise.

Similarly, reminders about formative feedback opportunities should be given frequently, as valuable opportunities are often missed simply because students postpone preparing drafts or underestimate the value of formative review.

Develop students' feedback literacy

The findings suggest that improving feedback is only part of the solution. Equal attention should be given to helping students become more effective users of feedback.

One participant reflected that the most valuable learning did not come from receiving additional comments but from developing the ability to evaluate the quality of their own work independently. This shift from passive recipient to active evaluator lies at the heart of feedback literacy.

Students could therefore be encouraged to begin each assignment by reviewing feedback received on previous work and identifying one or two recurring issues they intend to address. This positions feedback as an ongoing developmental process rather than something associated with a single completed assessment.

Use exemplar assignments to develop evaluative judgement

Several participants requested examples of good work, while one student described anonymised exemplar assignments as one of the most valuable learning resources encountered during their programme.

Rather than providing only exemplary first-class assignments, a range of anonymised work representing different classifications, for example, solid 60–68% work alongside examples achieving over 70%, could be made available. This enables students with different aspirations to calibrate their own performance and appreciate what distinguishes competent work from excellent work.

Importantly, exemplars should be used actively rather than passively. Students could compare their own draft against selected exemplars using the assessment rubric as a checklist, asking whether their own work demonstrates comparable levels of critical analysis, organisation and use of evidence. In this way, exemplars become tools for self-evaluation rather than models for imitation.

Promote dialogue around feedback

Students consistently valued opportunities to discuss feedback with academic staff.

Structured opportunities for dialogue can be incorporated through draft workshops, feedback clinics or small-group discussions.

After receiving verbal feedback on a draft, students could briefly annotate their work to record the changes they intend to make and explain how those changes respond to the advice received. This simple activity encourages active engagement with feedback and reduces reliance on memory when revising.

Strengthen peer and self-feedback

Students often regard lecturers as the only credible source of assessment guidance. However, the findings suggest considerable potential for strengthening self- and peer-evaluation.

Structured classroom activities could ask students to evaluate anonymous extracts of academic writing or short case responses against selected rubric criteria. Rather than awarding marks, discussion would focus on questions such as:

- Does this demonstrate sufficient critical analysis?
- Is evidence synthesised effectively?

- What revisions would strengthen the argument?

Because the discussion centres on anonymous work, students can practise making evaluative judgements in a low-risk environment before applying the same reasoning to their own assignments.

This process also serves to “reward” self and peer feedback by regaining a sense of control over the development of their drafts, potentially leading to a higher mark. This process could be formalised further in certain types of assessment through the use of a reflective statement which may account for 10% of the assessed marks.

The following anecdote gives a good example how learning can be reinforced, and there is an element self reflection implicit in the activity:

“On our research project module, the module leader makes us get into groups and prepare a presentation on the last week’s content. We have to be ready to present for 10 minutes at the end of the session. Everyone has to prepare, but he will just choose one group at random. It’s really good for helping us to remember what we have covered, as we have to put our learning into our own words.”

Close the feedback loop

Students should be encouraged to demonstrate explicitly how they have acted upon previous feedback.

Simple reflective prompts before submission, such as identifying the feedback addressed and explaining how it has influenced the current assignment, encourage students to see feedback as part of a continuous learning process rather than as a justification for previous marks.

The final recommendation below operates at the level of course leader or above.

Encourage students to maintain a feedback portfolio

Rather than allowing feedback to remain attached to individual assignments, students could maintain a simple feedback portfolio or reflective feedback journal throughout their programme. Some module leaders use the journal facility within Blackboard to maintain a feedback portfolio within a module. To extend this to cover all of the students learning on the course would require the journal facility to be embedded either within a module, or a separate, non-assessed, module framework.

The portfolio would record recurring themes identified across modules, such as critical analysis, structure, use of evidence or academic writing. Before beginning a new assignment, students could revisit previous feedback, identify common patterns and establish personal improvement goals.

This approach encourages students to recognise long-term development rather than treating each assignment as an isolated task.

Concluding remarks

Taken together, these recommendations suggest that we should move beyond asking *How can we provide better feedback?* towards asking *How can we help students become better users of feedback?*

The findings indicate that students value feedback, but derive greatest benefit when they are supported to interpret assessment standards, evaluate the quality of their own work and apply feedback across successive assignments. Developing these capabilities may ultimately have greater educational value than simply increasing the quantity of comments provided.

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