Evaluating Students and Giving Feedback

Do you grade students on their performance and offer feedback on how they can improve?

What you choose to evaluate in your courses and how you critique students' work can have an impact on their learning, as well as their long-term learning practices and study and work habits[i].

Research shows that getting the right kind of feedback helps students stay engaged. Feedback is most constructive when it is relevant, accessible, consequential and timely[ii]. Furthermore, providing feedback that guides students toward mastery, rather than toward a fixed conception of performance, helps sustain motivation[iii].

Whether you are grading papers, lab reports, tests, exams or other assignments, all students can benefit from evaluation and feedback that is clearly communicated.

Tips on evaluation

(Selections taken from the University of Guelph's Universal Instructional Design project, A Faculty Workbook).

- Identify and clearly express the essential course content.

- Recognize that students can express understanding of essential course content in multiple ways.

- Clearly communicate all deadlines, assignments and expectations well in advance.

- Ensure ample time between assignments for students to receive feedback. Consider the time required for your students to complete assignments, and for you and your teaching assistants to mark and return them.

- Consider having multiple means of student evaluation, such as exams, presentations, papers, etc. There may be more than one appropriate way to meet and measure learning objectives.

- Design course assignments so they are integrated. Long-term projects that build skills and understanding through a series of smaller, cumulative assignments are most beneficial for student learning.

- If you use multi-part assignments, make sure students are required to build upon past work.

- Consider asking students to assess themselves and their peers on both learning processes and outcome. Use accessible online conferencing, e-mail or file exchange to organize peer review of assignments.

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- When grading written work, use rubrics to ensure consistency of assessment criteria and feedback.

- Consider using accessible, web-based practice exercises/quizzes with automated marking for students to self-assess their understanding. Give explanations for correct and incorrect responses.

- When selecting online quizzes, check if there is flexibility in the time limit in case a student request an accommodation.

- Consider using an exam review game to demonstrate the type of questions that will be asked. Give students feedback on how well they have learned the material.

- Use e-mail or the course website to facilitate the submission and return of assignments.

- If you post grades, use a password-protected course website instead of a sheet of paper. Electronic and accessibly formatted documents will allow as many students as possible to obtain the information readily.

- Avoid allowing external factors such as penmanship to affect your grading.

Tips on giving feedback

(Selections taken directly from the University of Guelph's Universal Instructional Design project, A Faculty Workbook, the National Center on Universal Design for Learning section on mastery-oriented feedback, and the University of Toronto Scarborough's

Universal Instructional Design: Creating an Accessible Curriculum).

- The most accessible and useful feedback is frequent, timely and specific.

- Allow students to contact you by more than one method — an office-hours visit, e-mail, a phone call during office hours — if they would like more in-depth feedback or want to discuss their performance.

- Feedback that is typed and delivered electronically in an accessible format, by e-mail or through a secure sign-in to a course website, is accessible to the majority of students.

- Provide clearly legible (i.e. typed), informative and prompt feedback on both the student's demonstrated strengths and areas for improvement. Ensure the privacy of this feedback.

- Encourage mastery of material and the use of specific supports and strategies in the face of a challenge. Provide information on resources and supports available on your campus.

- Provide feedback that is substantive and informative, rather than comparative or competitive.

- Identify patterns of errors and wrong answers, and demonstrate how to incorporate evaluation into positive strategies for future success.

- Consider allowing students to turn in components or drafts of large projects for feedback before the final

project is due[iv].

- Give explanations for correct and incorrect responses if you're giving computer-generated feedback, or use accessible web-based practice exercises and quizzes with automated marking for students to self-assess their understanding.

- Help students form study groups or set up an accessible online forum where students can collaborate, share and evaluate one another's work, either formally or informally.

- Meet with students who don't do well on graded work to see if you can help them develop strategies to succeed.

More resources:

National Center on Universal Design for Learning: Checkpoint 8.4: Mastery-Oriented Feedback.

Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology (DO-IT) Center at the University of Washington: Universal Design of Instruction (UDI): Definition, Principles, Guidelines, and Examples.

University of Toronto at Scarborough: Universal Instructional Design: Creating an Accessible Curriculum.

To obtain this document in an alternative format, please contact:

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Office (AODA)
4700 Keele Street
Kaneff Tower, 1050
Toronto ON M3J 1P3
Tel: 416-736-5310
Fax: 416- 736-5094
Web: http://accessibilityhub.info.yorku.ca/

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[i] National Center on Universal Design for Learning. Checkpoint 8.4: Mastery-Oriented Feedback.

[ii] National Center on Universal Design for Learning. Checkpoint 8.4: Mastery-Oriented Feedback.

[iii] National Center on Universal Design for Learning. Checkpoint 8.4: Mastery-Oriented Feedback.

[iv] Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology (DO-IT) Center at the University of Washington. Universal Design of Instruction (UDI): Definition, Principles, Guidelines, and Examples.