# Developing students’ feedback literacy: exercises and worksheets

The activities outlined below can be adapted to suit your teaching context. Printable worksheets for each activity are provided as appendices.

## Exercise 1: The purpose and function of feedback

Activity format: Small group and whole class discussion

Learning objective: To enable students to consider the many sources, forms and functions of feedback, and to develop a shared definition of feedback.

The end point of this activity is the development of a working definition of feedback that is shared by students and the teacher. To achieve this, students should first be invited to consider responses to the following questions:

* What is the function of feedback? (for student, for lecturer, for the School, etc)
* What is feedback?
* From where and whom does feedback come?
* What effects does feedback have?

These questions should be considered by students individually, or discussed in pairs or small groups. Students then feed back their responses to the class and the teacher manages discussion, to develop a shared working definition of feedback that incorporates the students’ responses to these questions.

## Exercise 2: Overcoming barriers

Activity format: Small group and whole class discussion

Learning objective: Learning objective: To enable students to consider the factors that prevent them from engaging with feedback, and to develop an understanding of strategies to overcome these barriers.

The session should begin with a general discussion about what makes using feedback so difficult. It might be useful for the facilitator to guide discussion, such that students do not solely focus on criticising the feedback they receive. Features of the feedback may be one of the barriers to implementing it, but students should be encouraged to think more broadly about the potential factors that might make it difficult to make use of feedback.

Next, students should be divided into groups, and each student given a copy of Worksheet 2.The facilitator should explain that these are quotes from actual students, when talking about their experiences with feedback. In their groups, students should discuss the quotes and extract commonalities between them. Ideally, students should try to generate four broad themes of barrier to using feedback, and sort the quotes into these groups.

Each group then feeds back their themes to the rest of the class. It might be useful to discuss differences between the themes extracted by each group. The session could then conclude with a discussion about potential solutions that could be offered to overcome the barriers that have been identified.

## Exercise 3

Activity format: Small group and whole class discussion

Learning objective: To enable students to develop a ‘bank’ of actions that they can take in response to feedback they receive.

Students should be presented with a list of illustrative feedback comments (see Resource A2 for examples). The workshop facilitator should split students into small groups, and

Students should be presented with a list of illustrative feedback comments (see Worksheet 3). The workshop facilitator should split students into small groups, and assign a few comments to each group. Each illustrative comment should highlight an area of practice in which a hypothetical student need to improve, and groups should discuss each comment and come up with a list of ‘actions’ that could be taken to improve on this area of practice. The students could can either write these directly into the spaces on Resource A1, or list their actions on a large piece of paper to facilitate sharing amongst groups.

For example, if the comment is ‘you need to evaluate your points more thoroughly’, then possible actions might include ‘make notes on points of evaluation as I am studying’; ‘talk to my lecturers about what they are expecting to see in terms of evaluation’; ‘speak to a study advisor about strategies to improve my evaluation’.

If students struggle to come up with actions, then the facilitator could scaffold the discussion by providing headings under which to list action points, such as ‘things I can do in my own study time’; ‘people I could go to for further support’, ‘resources I could use’, etc. Each group should then share with the whole class the action plans for the comments they received, and the workshop facilitator should encourage class discussion. At the end of this activity, students should be able to take away a ‘bank’ of actions they could consider taking the next time they receive similar feedback comments.

Worksheet 1: The purpose and function of feedback

**What is feedback?**

**From where and from whom do you receive feedback?**

**What should be the benefits of feedback…**

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| **… from the perspective of the student who receives it?** | **… from the perspective of the person who marks your work?** | **… from the perspective of your university?** |
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| **Definition of feedback** |
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Worksheet 2: Overcoming barriers

*These comments are taken from focus group discussions with students, about their experiences with feedback, as reported in the following paper:*

Winstone, N.,Nash, R., Rowntree, J., & Parker, M. (2017). “It’d be useful, but I wouldn’t use it”. Barriers to University students’ feedback seeking and recipience. *Studies in Higher Education.* 42:11 p.2026 – 2041

In your groups, discuss the quotes and look for commonalities between them.

Try to generate four broad themes of barrier to using feedback, and sort the quotes into these groups.

You will be asked to feed back to the whole class on your discussion and the themes you identified.

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| *If the marker tells me that parts of my argument are hard to follow I wouldn’t know which bits were hard to follow, and which bits I need to look at to see why it wasn’t quite right. This might be quite tricky to find yourself, as obviously you’ve written it, so you think it’s alright.* |
| *If I need to improve the structure of my work, I need more teaching. It’s something that’s innate.*  |
| *There are so many lecturers and so many subjects; I don’t think I’ve ever got feedback that’s been the same.* |
| *I get angry with my feedback. Like, I got a mark back the other day, on my last piece of coursework and I wasn’t happy with it. I read what the marker had written and thought ‘Oh well – that’s your opinion!’* |
| *I think it is so hard to take on feedback on board, as you've got your own specific writing style and you're so stuck in your way.*  |
| *Sometimes you don’t know what to do with the comments. Although the marker might have made a valid point, you don’t know where in your essay they want you to have done something.* |
| *I generally just take the mark as more important than the written feedback. I mean, the feedback is useful, but if I've got a mark of seventy, I don't really care what the feedback says!* |
| *When I was writing an essay, I probably wouldn’t ever go back and look at the feedback I’d had before. Which is something I probably could do more.* |
| *It’s horrible. The feedback you get is really harsh! And it’s just like, ‘Well, okay! I’m not looking at that, it’s just negative!’* |
| *Sometimes feedback is written in really fancy language. They’re just saying it in a really roundabout way rather than just ‘You need to make clearer arguments’.* |
| *If I feel that feedback is generic to everyone, I just discard it. If I think its individual to me, I will read it and probably use it again.*  |
| *I haven’t spoken to lecturers before, but I know that you can do that, I mean they do offer feedback in that sense.* |
| *If there is feedback on something negative, but there’s something clear enough that I can change, I would give it a lot of attention. But if it’s something negative and really general, I feel like I can’t change it, and I won’t pay attention to it.* |
| *I should read it. And then have it out when I’m then writing the next bit of coursework. But realistically, I normally sort of skim over it. I suppose I do probably take in points from it, but then you kind of file it away with your coursework.* |
| *I think sometimes it can be a bit difficult to read your feedback in front of friends, because you quite easily make comparisons between you and other people.* |
| *I’m very careful to find out who’s marking it and then I try to phrase my work in the way I think they want it.* |
| *When I get a piece of work back, I'm really bad, and I'm just like, 'Oh, that's my mark, put it away now.'* |
| *I get quite a lot of markers saying, ‘You need to expand on this more.’ And it’s like, ‘Well, if I expand on this, I’m going to have to lose something else. So, what should I lose?’ Because it’s sort of that balance, which can be quite frustrating.* |
| *I think markers expect us to read all of the feedback, but I don't know if they realise how little we understand the stuff that they say.* |
| *I hate when they say stuff say about your use of commas, because I have used commas, like I'm not stupid, I know how to use commas. Just say 'This could be clearer.' Don't say 'Your use of commas is not always appropriate.'* |
| *I know people, and they put on Facebook, ‘I got a first! I’m so pleased!’ And you think, ‘Oh, I wonder how you did that?’* |
| *I think it’s fine if markers make a critical comment, but then they need to make a suggestion how to improve the critique that they’re making of my work. Otherwise I’m not going to pay much attention to it* |
| *I think for me it was mostly about the mark, rather than the details of the feedback that you got. I don’t know, but that’s what I talk about with my friends.*  |
| *Feedback is too specific to that particular piece of work. I definitely wouldn’t use it on another piece of work.*  |
| *I usually get quite angry whenever I read feedback, because they say things like 'This isn't clear’. I know what I'm trying to say, and I think 'What do you mean it's not clear, like, it's right there on paper!* |
| *Sometimes feedback says that there’s a lot of errors, but it doesn’t necessarily say which bits are errors and which bits aren’t. So it’s quite hard moving forward, I guess, as the feedback is just a bit too vague and non-specific.*  |
| *I do tend to go pick up my coursework with one person but, like, there’s a guy I usually sit next to in lectures, and I’ll go and get it with him. But, he tends to do a bit better than me, so I think sometimes you don’t really want to talk about your feedback.*  |

Worksheet 3: Taking action

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| You need to be more evaluative in your writing |
| Aim for a more coherent argument |
| Your writing could be more concise |
| You could achieve a better balance between description and evaluation |
| You can make stronger use of research evidence to support your argument |
| Your structure could be clearer |
| Check that your sentence structure is correct |
| Make sure that you are fully meeting the learning objectives for each assignment |
| Revise your understanding of punctuation and grammar |
| Make sure that you consider counterarguments to the positions you present |
| You need to ensure that a clearer answer to the question comes across to the reader |
| Try to use a wider range of sources to provide support for your argument |