Chapter 5

Giving Feedback

INTRODUCTION

"How long does it take you to grade a paper?" asked my niece. I started to explain that it depends on the length and type of the writing assignment, and made up a number: "Oh, an average of about 20 minutes, I guess, depending on how thorough I'm being in my comments."

I stopped myself there, realizing that she was not actually interested in the details. "Why do you ask?" I said. My niece said she was wondering how long it usually takes an English teacher to grade and return a set of papers. Again, I asked why she wanted to know. She proceeded to tell me that over the course of the previous school year, she never once received a paper back with comments in her accelerated English class. No one did. They submitted their papers and never saw them again.

"But how did you know what you needed to do better next time?" I asked, horrified. "Exactly," she replied. "I didn't." She explained that she and her fellow students could look up the grade for each assignment online, but they never received targeted feedback about what they had done well and how they might improve as writers.

This lack of feedback occurs more commonly than we might like to admit in online classes. Maybe it has something to do with not having an appointed time to see our students. When I teach

English in person, I determine in advance what class meeting I intend to return students' papers. In my first semester teaching, I actually returned all papers the very next day. I knew my first-year students were anxious about their performance. Out of compassion – and perhaps some perverse form of pride – I made it a point to grade and return papers the next time I saw them.

That practice didn't last long. But when we know we will see our students every Tuesday and Thursday at 9:30 a.m., we have a built-in mechanism reminding us to return exams and papers in a timely way. If we hold them too long, students start to ask when they'll get their work back. They can do this because they know where we will be and when they will see us. Class meets on Tuesday morning; they know we'll be in the classroom. They can pin us down and get a real-time response to whatever current questions they have.

The same does not necessarily hold true for online courses. It may not be clear exactly when we will be in the classroom, available to answer questions. And since we typically don't have a preset meeting time in an asynchronous online class, we don't see our students and remember that they are waiting to find out how they did on that major project, or even on their minor projects along the way. They can fall out of sight and out of mind.

These separate but related issues – teachers not providing feedback in a timely way, and students not having clear avenues to request or receive that feedback – contribute to a regrettably common experience of online students: feeling unsupported, on their own, with no real sense of how they are doing or how to get their questions answered when they have them. I've seen some egregious examples of this neglect. A colleague told me about the time he took a 10-week online class. He posted a question about the final project in the Q&A discussion forum in Week 2. In Week 8, he still had no answer.

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A couple of years ago, I participated in a six-month online professional development certification course. Acknowledgment of submissions and indication of whether I'd met expectations was intermittent. Perhaps the developers didn't think professionals needed feedback; it didn't seem to be part of the design of the learning experience. Or maybe, as has happened to many of us, assessing learning took longer than expected, and the facilitator struggled to keep up with participant submissions. Whatever the reason, my experience served to remind me of the importance of helping all learners in all contexts know just how they are doing at any given time.

Of course, we online instructors, many of whom might be teaching different courses at multiple institutions, must protect our time. When I first started teaching online I found myself in class first thing in the morning and last thing at night, checking posts, answering questions, and generally interacting with students. I had to learn that instructor presence does not mean being available 24/7. But it does mean supporting our students by responding to questions and providing feedback on their work in a reasonable amount of time. It means assigning grades and giving comments before too many other assessments are due. It means notifying our students if we expect to be offline due to conference travel, for example, and not to worry if a response is delayed.

You'll notice that we have primarily been discussing two very practical aspects of feedback: making sure students receive it, and making sure they receive it in a timely way. My experience as an online instructor, student, and coach of other online instructors has convinced me that these elements are often missing from online courses, so we'll focus on them in this chapter. But of course we want to make sure our feedback is meaningful and effective, so we'll consider first what the research tells us about

how to ensure our feedback helps our students learn, and then present models for providing that feedback in a consistent, timely way in your online courses.

IN THEORY

It's worth stepping back to remind ourselves of the general context in which feedback typically occurs: grading student work. Within that context, feedback serves one of two purposes: Justifying the grade we have given to students, or providing them with specific instructions on how to improve for their next assessment. The first kind of feedback relates more to *summative assessments*, which are the judgments we make about student performance; the second kind relates more to *formative assessments*, which are the opportunities we provide for students to try their hand at a task and get feedback on it *before* they are measured for their high-stakes grades.

Of course we have an obligation to measure the performance of our students through summative assessments, even though many of us would prefer to teach without that responsibility. Almost any online course you might teach will require you to provide summative judgments about the work of your students, and translate them into grades. We have seen very few instructors who completely shirk their obligation to grade student work, and to offer at least some explanation for the grades they have given.

But what students crave, and what too often they don't receive, is feedback specifically designed to help them get better – especially through frequent, low-stakes assessments. When we actively engage students throughout the semester with formative feedback on their work, we can significantly improve their learning. In their book *Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment in College* (2010), Barbara E. Walvoord and Virginia Johnson Anderson argue that student "involvement in learning

is in part determined by their perception of faculty members' interest and friendliness toward them, including the fairness and helpfulness of the testing and grading system and the teacher's communication about their work and their grades" (p. 14). If we want online students to actively engage with the course, we have to engage them as frequently as possible through fair and helpful feedback.

Two core principles should help guide your thinking as you consider how to provide such feedback to your students in online courses. First, make it timely. "Assessment without timely feedback contributes little to learning," write Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson in their seminal article on "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education" (1987, p. 4). The research on *how* timely that feedback should be is not entirely clear. One meta-analysis of more than 50 studies on this question found that feedback on lower-stakes assessments such as quizzes or classroom activities was more beneficial when it was immediate; feedback on more major assessments, such as tests, was more beneficial following delay, perhaps allowing students some time to rest their brains and process their performance before reviewing the assessment and hearing the feedback (Kulik and Kulik, 1988). So don't hesitate to take a little longer with those higher-stakes assessments, but stay focused on turning around the shorter, low-stakes material more quickly.

Second, ensure that all of your assessments of student work include clear directions for how to improve for the next time – and do not simply justify a grade or number you have stamped onto their work. Walvoord and Anderson call focusing on grade justi-fication a "common trap" that leads us to focus on the negative aspects of student work. But "our chief responsibility," they argue, "is to help this learner move forward." They recommend we ask ourselves this core question with every comment we provide on student work: "What does this learner need from me at this time?"

(Walvoord and Anderson, 2010, p. 110). Our response to that question becomes the driving force behind our feedback.

With all of that said, of course students will want to know why they have received the grades you have given them, and we should provide them with that information. But you might consider how you can distinguish for your students the summative and formative aspects of their performance on assessments. Jim has taken to dividing the comments on his students' major assessments into two categories, which are clearly labeled "This Time" and "Next Time." The comments under "This Time" focus on assessing their performance on the completed assessment; "Next Time" comments give students instructions for how to improve. Similarly, Flower's categories are labeled "Strengths" and "For Improvement." The comments under "Strengths" highlight what the student is doing well; "For Improvement" comments provide specific ideas for, well, improving. As you formulate feedback strategies for your online course, consider how you might help your students keep most clearly in view the feedback that will help them learn.

We stay firmly focused in this chapter on providing feedback to students, which means we won't delve much into the many thorny questions surrounding grades and grading systems. Walvoord and Anderson's book is an outstanding resource for considering such issues more deeply, and is worth a read if you are looking for help in those areas.

MODELS

Being available for our students, and providing timely feedback to support their learning progress, doesn't have to be an overwhelming time drain. If you're teaching a traditional in-person class, you will likely spend anywhere from a few to several hours

in the classroom and engaging with class-related activities each week. The models presented here help you spend a comparable amount of time effectively, strategically distributed throughout each week, in order to powerfully impact student learning and success.

The online feedback coin has two sides, both equally important: giving *timely* feedback and giving *effective* feedback. The first two models in this chapter provide practical advice on timeliness, the last two focus on the quality of feedback, and the one in between bridges both timeliness and efficacy. Some of these suggestions are simple, small, and relatively easy strategies to implement; some are more complex, something that may be more successful if you have more time to plan or more online teaching experience under your belt. Taken together, these five models should give you plenty of ideas about how to make small changes in your approach to provide useful guidance to your online learners.

Set Deadlines Strategically

I taught online for years before figuring out that if I didn't want to deal with panicky student emails on Sunday evening, I shouldn't make the weekly module assignments due on Sunday at midnight. Having learned that lesson, now I'm more strategic about setting assignment deadlines. For example, if I know I won't have a chunk of time to grade until Saturday, I don't make the project due the previous Sunday night. If I know I'm traveling abroad for a week, I don't assign a complex task during that time, one that will likely generate lots of student questions and an additional need for time-sensitive support.

In short, consider your own availability for providing feedback just as much as you consider appropriate pacing of learning activities when creating the course schedule.

This leads back to my earlier point about students not necessarily knowing when you will be online for real-time responses. Their lives online in other contexts have conditioned them to expect immediate responses. Traditional college-age students are used to sending their peers a text message or Snapchat and receiving an instant response. As one post on the website *Netsanity* pointed out, "When a teen sees that a friend or partner has received the message but hasn't responded, it can cause anxiety and frustration" (Netsanity, Are Messaging Apps, 2017). These students may carry their expectations about immediate feedback into your online course.

But this problem doesn't apply only to students in their late teens and early twenties; all of us have been conditioned to technologies that provide instant responses. Many online shopping sites, for example, offer real-time assistance through a synchronous chat function. When we're conducting transactions online, we almost expect there to be a way to get a fast and customized answer to our specific question. Yet some Learning Management Systems (LMSs) don't offer this kind of a chat tool. Even if yours does, there's no way you can be online at all hours of the day and night, as your students are. It's often the case that students can't get help in the moment that they need it.

I closely observed my husband's behavior in the online summer class he just completed. As a diligent and mindful student, full-time university employee and father of three, he carefully scheduled class time each evening after dinner. Often, he'd have questions about some of the finer points of the learning activity he was engaged in. But his instructor was not in class in the evenings, which is understandable, but still challenging. There would be no way for him to get an answer within his allotted class time for the day. Instead he would methodically analyze every angle of the assignment instructions, make a decision about the best way forward, and hope for the best.

We don't have to be available for student questions at any time of day or night. Instead, we can be intentional in how we set due dates and communicate expected turnaround times so that our students know not to panic if they don't receive an instant response.

My online modules now close on Mondays at midnight. This way I have time at my desk on Monday during the day to field last-minute questions prior to the deadline. I figure that many of my students, most of whom work full-time, will do their course-work over the weekend. If they email me questions on Sunday, I can reply on Monday; they can revise their work as needed Monday night and still submit on time.

Have Real-Time, Just-in-Time, Conversations

This small teaching strategy is also related to timeliness in responding to students' needs. It's relatively simple, but requires more planning than setting deadlines strategically. This approach makes sense for many online instructors, yet it is often overlooked.

Many of us are conditioned to think that online classes are asynchronous. Some online classes take place entirely (or almost entirely) synchronously, with live virtual class meetings, but most of today's credit-bearing online courses in higher education don't require a great deal of synchronous class activity. In other words, no one *has* to be engaged in any activity at the same time as anyone else. Indeed, this is a primary reason that online learners choose to attend class online, as I've noted elsewhere in this book. They need the scheduling flexibility in order to pursue a college degree around their current work and family obligations. But just because most of the course takes place asynchronously, it doesn't mean that synchronous, or real-time, interactions are completely off-limits.

If you've ever picked up the phone to call a colleague after exchanging 12 emails without making progress on the topic, you'll know how effective it can be to have a quick conversation. When we talk to each other, we can answer questions, clarify misunderstandings, address issues, and reach consensus. Achieving resolution can take much less time when speaking by phone as opposed to a seemingly endless back-and-forth by email.

The same holds true in our online classes. Sometimes a short, real-time conversation is a far more effective mode of communication than the most thoughtfully created text instructions, recorded videos, or email replies can ever be.

Before looking at some small teaching ways of structuring synchronous interactions, it's important to clarify what I am *not* suggesting. You shouldn't *require* attendance at any event you've scheduled to take place on a particular day and time. Some instructors, with all the best intentions, mandate participation in office hours, a class orientation, or a study session, for example. But if your online learner works second shift at the local manufacturing plant, your thoughtfully scheduled 7 p.m. session will never be possible. You might think that's an ideal time for students who also have full-time jobs to meet with you, and even pat yourself on the back for giving up some of your evening to accommodate your learners' needs. But the truth is there will never be one single meeting time that fits all of your students' schedules.

Workarounds include offering multiple sessions for the same event, making attendance completely optional, or recording the synchronous session for later viewing by students who could not attend. Just don't mandate that online learners be able to commit to a real-time session – for many, it won't be possible.

For this reason, I don't tend to hold virtual office hours – but I'll offer some suggestions for how to do so, if you want to take this approach, in the next model. Personally, I've found that my content is not complex enough to warrant live sessions for

mini-lectures and Q&A sessions. My online courses are very practical, based on technology we use every day at work and at home.

Therefore, I prefer scheduling either mandatory or as-needed conversations with individual students. Recall our discussion in Chapter 4 on the importance of being present for your online learners. What better way to be there for students than to make time to talk to your student, when they're struggling with a particular concept or need a bit of individualized support? Whether you require a real-time conversation with each student or simply make the opportunity available for those who want to take advantage of it will depend on many factors. If you teach a large-enrollment class, you may not want to require a 10-minute conversation with each student. But let's say you have a reasonable class size and you anticipate student anxiety stemming from difficult content. It may be well worth your time to briefly connect with each learner in the first week of class.

You can ask students to sign up for a timeslot using a Google Doc or Sheet. Create a schedule on which you list several meeting days and times. Students select their meeting time on a first-come, first-served basis. Or, use one of many online scheduling services available, such as youcanbookme.com. The advantage of using a system like this is that it offers more functionality than a homegrown sign-up sheet. For example, it can interface directly with your calendar and sent automated reminders to your students before their appointment time. However you choose to schedule it, you and your students both may appreciate the oft-forgotten simplicity of a phone call. I've often found this to be the most efficient and convenient option since students have their phones with them all the time, or so it seems. It's an easy way to connect, sometimes even on short notice. Or, of course, you can use a videoconferencing solution available through your LMS, or a platform such as Zoom, which is quite easy to use.

Whatever communication tool you choose, spending just a few minutes talking with a student can have a significant impact on their engagement and learning.

I know some instructors who do this. They tell me the pay-off for investing those 10 minutes per student is significant. They communicate warmth, interest, and confidence in the student's ability to succeed, all in just a few minutes. If you add this element to your course, you may want to provide students with a prompt or topic for discussion, or perhaps a series of questions you plan to discuss. The conversation can be primarily social, or related to class content, or a mixture of both – you can decide what makes the most sense for your teaching preference and subject matter. After that call, your students will likely be more willing to reach out for help, knowing you, their instructor, is a caring human being who is committed to their success.

Although I see the value of scheduling a mandatory call with each learner, I have not used this method in my own classes. Instead, I reserve this option for students who need one-on-one attention. Perhaps a student clearly doesn't understand assignment instructions, as evidenced by an initial effort that falls far short of the mark. Perhaps someone is experiencing a set of unexpected challenges in their personal and professional life. In each case, a 15- or 20-minute call, which we hold during a mutually convenient time (you can make time slots available using the online scheduling service I mentioned above), can do wonders to help your student get back on their feet and resume progress in the class.

I'm convinced that my understanding and supportive tone of voice does more to reassure the student of the feasibility of success than anything I actually say during the conversation. In Chapter 4, I described a recent phone conversation with a student who had fallen behind because of a health crisis. As I said there, in all of these kinds of conversations, the relief I hear in my student's voice

is palpable. In a short, real-time conversation I can literally hear pressure being relieved. With such phone and videoconferencing calls, I've done more to impact my student's learning and success than I can accomplish in a hundred written or recorded messages.

Get Creative with Virtual Office Hours

Holding online office hours can be a great way to support your students in their learning. These sessions can replicate what happens in the physical classroom better than any other method. However, many faculty members have found them to be less than satisfying, for several different reasons. As alluded to in the previous model, we face numerous challenges when attempting to hold online office hours. Students won't all be available at the same time, so attendance is frequently quite low – even when students could attend, often they choose not to. If they do show up, we may experience technology challenges such as audio and video problems that interfere with the learning opportunity and lead to frustration on the part of both you and your students.

Wondering why his attempts at holding online office hours were often unsuccessful, Patrick Lowenthal, together with his colleagues, investigated how to make video-based synchronous office hours most effective for online learners (2017). The researchers made several changes to previous, unsatisfactory attempts to hold online office hours, surveyed the students regarding what was working and what wasn't, and adjusted the new approach accordingly. The resulting virtual office hours were better attended, more interactive, and generally more successful in terms of students valuing the experience. Lowenthal and his colleagues make several useful design recommendations, a few of which I'll highlight here:

· *Rebrand your office hours.* Knowing that students rarely attend instructors' office hours, Lowenthal called his synchronous

sessions "Happy Hours." Other possible names he suggests include "Coffee Breaks," "Afternoon Tea," or "Consultations" (p. 188). Using a more inviting name can imply that these sessions are less formal, more supportive, and less intimidating.

· *Reduce the frequency of these events*. Although it's common to offer virtual office hours every week, Lowenthal found better success when he held 60-minute Happy Hours only four times per semester (p. 189). He scheduled these strategically, according to when the time together would be most useful. For example, you might offer a synchronous review session just before an exam. Or consider holding a live feedback session after a major project or paper is due, to address common errors and help students see how they can do better next time.

· *Announce the scheduled sessions ahead of time*. List them in the syllabus and talk about the schedule during the first week of class (p. 188). Encourage students to put these on their calendar and plan to attend.

· *Alternatively, use a scheduling tool like Doodle to determine times when most students can attend (p. 189)*. This strategy might be particularly useful if you have students in multiple time zones.

· *Encourage students to submit questions prior to the synchronous event*. This way, you can tailor your presentation or prepare some talking points to address common areas of confusion (p. 189).

· *Offer incentives such as the opportunity to earn points for attending*. Be sure to offer a "comparable learning experience for those unable to attend a live session. For example, give those students specific questions/prompts to respond to while watching the recording" (p. 189).

As I think you'll agree, the research conducted by Lowenthal and his colleagues offers a rich source of evidence-based and creative solutions to the common challenges associated with online office hours. If you're interested in many more design

recommendations based on this study, please read the full article, "Live Synchronous Web Meetings in Asynchronous Online Courses: Reconceptualizing Virtual Office Hours" (Lowenthal, Dunlap, and Snelson, 2017). You will likely find several ideas for how you can reimagine your online synchronous sessions so they're both timely and an effective means of providing feedback and guidance for your learners.

Use Tech to Streamline Grading

This model moves squarely into the category of providing quality feedback – the other side of the feedback coin. You can actually do some things better and more easily in online classes than you can face-to-face. Streamlining grading using readily-available technology tools falls into that category.

An effective yet surprisingly underutilized tool for assessing student work in online (and blended, and face-to-face) classes is the rubric tool within your LMS. When I was full-time faculty, I graded hundreds of online students' research papers manually before I became aware that I could create a rubric in the LMS. In my current role as an instructional designer, I see numerous faculty grading with a rubric created in Microsoft Word instead of using the LMS rubric tool. They are doing better than I was when teaching full-time: at least their students are provided with a rubric. But downloading, marking, saving, and uploading a rubric in Word for each student submission takes far more time than it does to assess work using the LMS rubric.

As is often the case with grading, investing a little bit of time and effort up front can save you an exponential amount of time when evaluating student assignments or discussion posts. Spend some time creating an effective rubric in your LMS. This may not be as simple as it sounds. Rubrics are complex assessment tools: Used appropriately, they can save you a significant amount of

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grading time while still providing rich, robust feedback to your students. Invest the time to research and design your rubric—you'll be able to use it for several semesters to come.

An excellent resource to help you with this task is *Introduction to Rubrics: An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convey Effective Feedback, and Promote Student Learning* (2012) by Dannelle Stevens and Antonia Levi. This practical guide includes how to create effective rubrics, the advantages of using rubrics, using rubrics with faculty colleagues and teaching assistants, and discipline-specific rubrics. If you are new to creating and grading with rubrics, this book is likely to prove invaluable.

To facilitate the design process, you may find it helpful to create the original rubric in Microsoft Word or similar. Once you're happy with the criteria, levels of achievement, the wording and the scoring distribution, it doesn't take long to create an LMS rubric. Copy and paste the text from your document into the tool. Often, you can choose whether each column, or achievement level, shows points possible, a percentage of the total points possible, or a range of points or percentages. You have the option to customize your rubric and scoring method to align with your subject matter and your outcomes.

Depending on your LMS, you may need to associate the rubric with the assignment. In other words, it may not happen automatically. Once this is done, you can set the rubric to be visible to students, which helps them explicitly see your expectations for their work.

As you begin grading with the LMS rubric, you'll find that your time spent engaged in the task is reduced significantly. LMS rubrics are typically easy to use. They calculate a student's grade automatically as you click the radio buttons for the appropriate level of achievement for each column, and they import the score or percentage directly into the LMS grade center. The rubric tool makes it easy to give robust and specific feedback on strengths

and areas for improvement in a remarkably short amount of time. Keep in mind, this time-saving tool is equally effective in your face-to-face or blended classes, too, if you have students submit their assignments online instead of on paper.

Of course you want to make sure that your rubric aligns closely with your instructions, and that the descriptions you provide in each cell are useful for students. If you can be sure of that, you can save yourself a lot of grading time without shortchanging the quality of feedback your students receive.

Give Meaningful Comments via Media Tools

Another approach to providing quality yet efficient feedback is to record your comments using audio or video tools. Although I'm clearly a fan of the written word (hence the book you are reading), nuances can get lost in translation when feedback comes only in written form. No matter how clearly you write, no matter how careful your word choice and sentence style may be, writing lacks additional cues that help to orient both partners in a conversation. Vocal intonations add emphasis, or empathy, or enthusiasm. Facial expressions convey encouragement, concern, optimism. Body language communicates interest, attention, support. All this is forfeit when the only thing we have is written text.

To compensate for this loss of nuance in your feedback, consider giving comments using audio or video. A pair of researchers evaluated the impact of audio versus written feedback in one undergraduate biology class and one postgraduate biology class, both of which took place in person (Voelkel and Mello, 2014). In the undergraduate class, a treatment group of students received audio feedback on a formative essay; in the postgraduate course, all students received audio feedback on their formative essay. The researchers found no significant difference in the learning gains of the undergraduate students who received audio feedback;

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undergraduate students performed almost exactly the same on the final exam regardless of whether they'd received audio or written feedback on the formative assessment (p. 25). However, all student respondents indicated increased satisfaction with the audio feedback; it felt more personal, they reported, and they found it to be more useful because the audio feedback included more explanation and suggestions for improvement than the written feedback did.

Interestingly, the researchers found that the audio feedback, which they captured using digital voice recorders, took on average five minutes longer to create than did the written feedback. However, the audio feedback was more robust: "On average 34 words per minute were produced by spoken feedback whereas only four words per minute were written in the form of comments" (Voelkel and Mello, 2014, p. 28). An analysis of the audio and written feedback confirmed the students' sense that the audio feedback was more detailed and personal. The researchers concluded that "it might be well worth spending the additional time necessary to provide high quality feedback. Staff training and increasing experience may over time shorten the time needed to produce audio feedback" (p. 29).

Another study of audio versus written feedback found similar results, that audio feedback did not significantly impact student performance (Morris and Chikwa, 2016). However, an important finding for online teaching in particular emerged in a study of instructor and student perceptions of audio feedback in online composition classes (Cavanaugh and Song, 2014). As in the study of biology students, these researchers found that students had more positive perceptions of audio feedback than they did of written comments and noted that audio feedback may be particularly effective in online classes. In the physical classroom, they point out, if a comment is unappealing to a student, "there is at least the opportunity for the instructor to present a

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friendlier face in class and cushion the student's impressions" (Cavanaugh and Song, 2014, p. 126). Providing audio feedback allows online instructors to add encouraging vocal intonations and oral markers of support.

A great example of this strategy in action is my colleague's use of recorded comments in her online First-Year Seminar class. I was unfamiliar with this idea when she first told me about her approach, but as I've considered it I've come to see that it is quite simple yet highly effective.

My fellow instructor explained that recording her comments about students' papers allowed her to convey support for her students in an impactful way. She knew that her freshmen online students were likely feeling some level of anxiety and doubt, so she went the extra mile to encourage them. She demonstrated to me how she said things like, "I can see that you tried to include supporting evidence here, and I know this can be hard, but we really need to surround the evidence with explanation to make a strong argument." Even here this sentence communicates only so much. When my friend spoke this to me out loud, she infused empathy, understanding that the task was challenging, appreciation for the effort put forth, but also clear emphasis on what the student needs to do to improve. She used vocal intonation and an authentic intention to help her students succeed to great effect.

In Canvas, you can record audio or video comments directly from the grading screen. Look for the "play" button under the text box for comments. Clicking that button allows you to record audio or video, or to upload media you may have already created.

If you're not teaching in Canvas, you may not have such a seamless way to create the comments, but it may be worth looking into the options. If your institution has licensed a media service such as Kaltura or Panopto, you can create audio comments using that tool and then provide the link in the comment text box. Or consider using a digital voice recorder and emailing the .mp3

files to students, as some of the researchers did in the studies just cited.

Alternatively, you could capture a quick video of yourself talking to your student using YouTube or similar apps on your phone, or using a media recording solution available in your LMS. In a 2015 study on the use of video feedback in undergraduate and postgraduate education courses, researchers found that both students and faculty found video feedback to be more useful and motivating than written comments (Henderson and Phillips, 2015). An efficient way to share your video comments with your students is to paste the link from your recording into the text comment box. Adding the visual of your face, ideally wearing a positive expression and conveying optimism in your students' ability to succeed, enables you to provide a richly nuanced and effectual way to communicate with your online learners.

As you're reading this, you may be uncertain about whether to try video or audio feedback, if recording comments is a new skill. Some of you may prefer to use video instead of audio. Another variation is to record a screen capture in which you talk through a student's paper as displayed on the screen. Great idea – but it requires a little technical know-how. If you like the idea of providing media comments, start small. Audio recordings take less prep and therefore less time than video, yet still deliver a powerful bang for the buck.

Want to help your online students know what you really mean in your feedback? Talk to them. It's as simple as that.

PRINCIPLES

Given the unique dynamic of an online class, intentional effort must be made to support students through regular and ongoing feedback. These principles can shape your way forward.

Be Timely and Responsive

At the risk of repeating this point too often, let me reinforce the importance of being available to answer questions and to help students know how well they are doing in the class. When you teach in person, students know where and when to find you, and, importantly, they have also committed to that meeting time in their schedules. The same is not true in an online class. Reduce student anxiety by being responsive to questions and returning assessments as soon as is reasonable. Explicitly state in your syllabus when students should expect you to reply to emails and return graded work. If you become unexpectedly unavailable, let them know. Explain why and when you'll be back. A little transparency goes a long way. Make yourself accessible for students. The payoff – increased student commitment and effort – will be well worthwhile.

Take Advantage of the Tech

We can do many things more effectively when teaching online than we can when teaching in person. Using technology to provide highly efficient yet powerfully meaningful feedback is one of them. Put the affordances of technology tools to work for you. Take advantage of embedded or readily available technologies such as LMS rubrics, audio- or video-recording capabilities, and even the oft-forgotten phone to communicate with both efficiency and impact. You can give individuals targeted specific input on their work. Doing so doesn't have to dominate your schedule when you apply the right tech tools to the task.

Put Yourself in Your Students' Shoes

Think of situations in which you've been anxious about your performance – such as from your own student experience, or

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from waiting for the peer review comments on the article you've submitted to a respected journal in your field. Perhaps in your employment, your supervisor is opaque; you don't have a sense of how you are doing or where you may need to improve. Not receiving guidance or timely answers, not having a clear sense of your standing in a situation, can increase anxiety. Equip your students for their best success by calling to mind how it feels when you lack the input you need to move forward productively. Demonstrate empathy and caring by being available to help.

SMALL TEACHING ONLINE QUICK TIPS: GIVING FEEDBACK

Your students need your targeted and timely guidance in order to develop a sense of self-efficacy. They need to know how they are doing in your class and what they can do to improve. Don't let them languish under a cloud of doubt. Instead, empower your students to achieve greater success through efficient and effective feedback. Help them see how their performance matches your expectations. Your students will detect your support and respond with renewed effort.

- Schedule deadlines to coincide with your availability to answer questions in advance and return graded work after.
- Talk to your students in real time, by phone or using any number of videoconferencing tools. Schedule a call for each student, or offer this on an as-needed basis for students who need additional support. Create the human connection and achieve greater understanding through the simple means of talking to each other.
- Take a creative approach to offering virtual office hours, working to ensure they are meaningful and a productive use of your time as well as your students' time.

- Create LMS rubrics to swiftly evaluate student work while simultaneously providing detailed individual feedback.
- Record audio or video comments on assessments to provide richly nuanced input, adding emphasis and empathy through your voice.

CONCLUSION

"The uncertainty is the hardest part," my 14-year-old daughter said to me over dinner one night. "Put that in your book. Uncertainty is the worst." She was referring to the unknown of beginning her first year of high school, but her point seems especially relevant to this chapter.

Indeed, this was the greatest challenge my husband faced in his online summer class described earlier in this chapter. Although he was diligent to do his work, he received very little feedback from his instructor, whether in the moment he had a question or otherwise. Sad to say, he completed 75% of his course without hearing from his faculty member on his performance or progress. Given this striking lack of guidance, this uncertainty about how he was doing, my husband was tempted to conclude that he must be failing the course. But he persevered and eventually earned the reward for his hard work and self-directed learning in the form of an A for the class.

Although my husband, who is both mature and highly motivated, was able to persist in the face of such uncertainty, many of our students won't. When they don't know how they are doing, it's hardly surprising if they become anxious and unmotivated. Eliminate the uncertainty. Administer small feedback to help your students thrive.