

For Students: Offering Helpful Feedback to Instructors

When giving instructors feedback in a survey or other format, whether at midterm or different periods of the semester, you have the perfect opportunity to let them know what course structures or instructional approaches have been helpful. Tell them (nicely, of course!) what you want to keep seeing and what should be changed to create the best learning environment for you and your peers. Writing constructive, detailed feedback is the best way to ensure that your instructor can implement changes.

Tips for providing helpful feedback to your instructors

Be Specific

Specific and constructive suggestions that focusing on your learning are far more useful than general praise or critiques. Both positive and negative feedback is most helpful when it is very specific so that your instructor can envision *how* to adjust.

Be Constructive

Helpful feedback can point out challenges and potential improvements. Constructive criticism uplifts, offers suggestions, and even provides possible solutions, while destructive criticism is cutting, derogatory, and sometimes even mocks our failures. Remember to stay constructive!

Offer Solutions

Although the course may not be in your major or on topics you are passionate about, your comments and scoring should be based on things your instructor can control. The goal is to eliminate barriers to student learning. Consider sharing what you have experienced in other classes that have worked for you that this instructor could try.

Be Professional

Comments unrelated to your learning diminish the value of your feedback. For example, it is not helpful or appropriate to comment upon an instructor's appearance or accent or to include personal insults in your feedback.

Examples of more detailed feedback

Vague Feedback:	Detailed, Constructive Feedback
"I liked discussion in class"	"...I loved how Professor M made us comfortable enough to share our thoughts and disagree. She reminds us that the classroom is a safe space." "...It was really helpful that she kept notes on the board during discussions."
"Too much lecture"	"...I wish we got time to ask more questions, especially during example problems." "...I could better focus in class if we were given breaks between sections. A minute to collect my thoughts and reflect would help." "...Hands-on activities would help me understand the course content. The day we did small group discussions helped me understand how to fix my graph labels for our project."
"The professor was caring"	"...Professor H answered emails quickly and made all students feel welcome in class by saying hello when we walked in." "...I liked that Professor M held office hours at the library. It made it easier to talk about things that weren't class related."
"The homework was too hard"	"...The homework problems didn't match what we went over in the lecture. The homework had way more steps." "...The canvas modules were disorganized and hard to follow." "...It would be helpful if the professor went over how to solve a few of the harder homework problems in class."

Adapted from the Faculty Innovation Center at University of Texas at Austin, *Giving Useful Feedback to Your Professors*, 2016.

For Instructors: Collecting Helpful Feedback from Your Students

From The Office of Teaching Effectiveness and Innovation (OTEI) at Clemson University, 2023.

Let's think about your course as a road trip you and your students are embarking on. You will travel from the first to the last day of class together. How do you know if things are going well? There are two ways you could approach this journey:

1. **Formative Feedback:** You look for road signs along the way that help you check if you are going in the right direction, if your pace is okay, and if there are challenges ahead you don't know about. You can then make adjustments based on that information.
2. **Summative Feedback:** You ask how it went at the end of the trip. This is helpful for making changes for next time, but perhaps it would have been nice to make changes along the way.

Seeking student feedback early and often helps reveal what is helping or preventing learning. Regular check-ins with students create opportunities to adjust and create a better learning experience. Seeking feedback also allows us to demonstrate that we care about our students' success. It can help build trust and positive interactions and boost student motivation.

How to ask for Feedback:

- ❖ **Open-ended response questions help reveal unexpected issues or explain why something is important.** Try a question like, "Which Canvas module from this chapter felt clearest to you and why?"
- ❖ **Close-ended scale questions let you scan feedback quickly.** Try a question like, "On a scale of 1-5 (1 being not helpful at all), how helpful were the study guides in preparing for the exams?"
- ❖ **Print or upload the attached For Students handout to Canvas prior to requesting feedback.** Going over the handout with students will make your expectations clear and will likely result in helpful responses to prompts like these.

Strategies to Collect Feedback:

- ❖ **Digital Survey:** Set up an anonymous survey on Canvas to allow students to respond as suggestion ideas arise. You can also use the Qualtrics and Google Forms platforms to collect feedback digitally.
- ❖ **Paper Prompt:** At the beginning of a class, give students a slip of paper with 1 or 2 prompts for specific feedback. This will allow them to write feedback at any point during class. Have them drop off their feedback in a box before leaving class or step out of the room as they turn in the papers.
- ❖ **Feedback & Self-Reflection:** Using the *Start, Stop, Continue* approach, have students write down examples of things they would like YOU to start doing, stop doing, or continue doing in class to support their learning. Then, have them answer the same questions for what THEY should do or change.
- ❖ **Weekly or Monthly Feedback:** Implement something like "Feedback Fridays" once a month to allow for regular, expected opportunities for feedback from students.
- ★ You can also contact Clemson's Office of Teaching Effectiveness and Innovation (OTEI) and [request a consultation](#) for our team to conduct a class interview about your instruction.

Important Considerations for Collecting Honest Feedback:

- Always allow students to **answer anonymously**. Anonymous responses let students be honest without fear of retribution.
- Thank students** for giving you input, **summarize** their feedback or suggestions during the following class period, and **describe** what adjustments you will implement (or explain why you cannot make changes).
- Try to **include both types of questions** (open-ended response and close-ended scale questions).

Resources:

[Early course feedback](#) from the Eberly Center at Carnegie Mellon University.

[Teaching assessment by modeling different assessment techniques](#) by Cynthia E. Tobery, Dartmouth College.

Angelo, T. A., & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers*. 2nd Ed. Jossey-Bass.

Taylor, R. L., Knorr, K., Ogradnik, M., & Sinclair, P. (2020). Seven principles for good practice in midterm student feedback. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 25:4, 350-362. DOI: 10.1080/1360144X.2020.1762086