UCL

Preparing students for exams using feedback

How does it work?

The central idea is that students receive feedback on their coursework that is explicitly linked to the skills and knowledge tested in the exams. In other words, coursework and feedback may be regarded as an important learning opportunity that helps students improve and achieve better exam results.

Why is this approach beneficial to students' learning?

Students receive feedback that usually focuses on specific assessment tasks. Although it is obviously important for them to understand their performance in the tasks, students do not necessarily find feedback explicitly relevant for improving their performance in the future. With feedback that is forward-looking, or feedforward, students are more likely to engage with and act on the advice given by their teachers. Feedforward is focused on the student learning and assessments that follow.

Assessment & feedback quick guides

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Resources

Tong, V. C. H. (2011), Linking summative assessments? Electronic feedback and feedforward in module design. British Journal of Educational Technology, 42: E152–E155. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8535.2011.01226.x

Tong, V. C. H. (2014), Towards Technologyand Research-Enhanced Education (TREE): Electronic Feedback as a Teaching Tool in Geoscience. In Geoscience Research and Education: Teaching at Universities, Tong, V. C.H. (ed.). Springer, Dordrecht

What does it mean for module design?

Assessments are linked up, and feedforward is a teaching tool that connects the assessments. Feedforward should therefore be designed and planned as an important teaching element of the module and should not be regarded as an afterthought. It is obvious that teachers still need to comment on their students' performance in the assessment. However, their comments can effectively be combined with learning materials that will help students learn and achieve better performance in the future.

Does it mean that teachers need to spend more time on feedforward?

Teachers are likely to save time on providing more relevant advice to students based on their assessment performance. As feedforward is a planned teaching tool with learning materials, the teachers' role is to link students' performance, and hence learning needs, to the planned learning materials that connect the coursework to the exam. A 'feedforward database' with commonly-encountered mistakes and relevant learning materials is prepared in advance, thus saving time by not having to repeat similar materials that often require a lot of preparation time. When new 'mistakes' are identified, new learning materials can be added to the database. A database can take different forms, ranging from a modest Word file with text-based materials to sophisticated websites with multimedia contents.

What can I do to make it work in my module?

- Identify the links between coursework and exams
- Identify students' common mistakes/weaknesses
- Produce a database with commonly encountered mistakes and learning materials that help students improve
- Make links to learning materials in the database when marking assessments

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