

Writing engaging feedback

Dr Neil Sutherland, Associate Professor in Education, UCL School of Management on writing engaging feedback.

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One of the main critiques of student feedback in the 2022 National Student Survey is that students find the tone of markers' feedback unhelpful. Too critical, not personalised and often like a telling off – which means that they are more likely to switch off and disengage. For TAs who are new or inexperienced markers – how can we spread good practice on how to write feedback that students actually engage with and feel encouraged by?

One practice that we work with in the School of Management is a workshop where we share with every TA three examples of feedback– one that is sparse and unhelpful, one helpful but overly critical, and one that acts as a critical friend. They also get an opportunity to share an example of written feedback they have given in the past.

Through sharing various examples, our TAs then get the embodied experience of being on the receiving end of feedback, to remember that those words have a functional and emotional impact. They can take a short-cut to concrete techniques, strategies, ideas and phrasings for how to improve their tone and 'soften the blow'.

We are familiar with the importance of classroom observations for building practical pedagogic knowledge, but when was the last time you looked at, studied, and learned something from somebody else's feedback?