



INSTITUTE
FOR LEARNING
PROFESSIONALS
AUSTRALASIA

21 TIPS

For Giving & Receiving Learning Feedback

Part 1: Giving Feedback to Learners



Providing feedback to learners is a critical aspect of training.

Feedback, when delivered well, can help learners improve their engagement, retain information and build capability. This e-book contains 21 tips to help you give and receive learner feedback.

1. Be Upfront

Your feedback should come from a place of caring and is about helping the learner to develop.

Be clear with your learner from the start you're providing this feedback to help them improve their feedback – not to embarrass or offend them.

Advise your learners that your role is to help them develop and grow, so you will be providing them with feedback (when appropriate) on their progress.

Be clear and upfront with your learners about what feedback you will be giving,

- *how often,*
- *under what circumstances, and*
- *what methods you will use.*

If you plan to invite the learners to provide feedback to each other, let them know early on in the training. Ensure you brief them on how to provide constructive and helpful feedback.



2. Stop & think first

Remember the way you provide your feedback will impact on how it is received or perceived by the learner. The intent of your feedback is to help the learner improve their capabilities and achieve the learning outcomes, as well as keep them motivated. Make your feedback constructive, meaningful and encouraging.

Ensure you take enough time to prepare how you are going to give the feedback to make it valuable. Be clear about what you are going to say before approaching the learner to help you stay focussed on the behaviour or action and discussing ways to improve.

Think about what useful information do the learners need. What would help them to improve their actions or performance? How can they best learn from this experience?

3. Act quickly

Feedback (positive or negative) is most effective when it is provided as soon as possible after the behaviour or action was observed. The nearer to the actual situation, the more pertinent and relevant your feedback will be.

If there are high emotions involved, allow enough time for the learner/s to calm down so they will be more receptive to the feedback.



4. Choose the Right Location

Identify the best place to share your feedback with the learner.

Wherever you decide to discuss your feedback make sure it is private enough, so you can have a constructive conversation with the learner without worrying about other interruptions or unwanted ears.

Be considerate of who is within earshot and avoid drawing attention by asking the learner to join you outside. Wait until a break or when the other learners are occupied in an activity.

5. Keep your Intent Positive.

Make feedback a positive experience!

Remind yourself before giving feedback that you are providing it to help the learner improve their performance or situation. Your intent is positive.

Being critical or harsh will not help the learner and will not be constructive. You will get more from your learners with a positive approach focussed on improvement. Avoid focussing on whether your feedback is positive or negative, focus on it your positive intent to improve the learner's performance.



6. Be as Specific as Possible

Provide your learners with specific information on what you observed, what they did well, and how they could improve.

Rather than just saying “Good answer” or “Not quite right”, **provide insight on the action or behaviour** they need to modify and what they need to do differently to improve the outcome next time.

It is also helpful to discuss with the learner the effects their actions or behaviour has on others; discuss what the consequences might be if they modify their behaviour.

Ensure you are also specific with your suggestions on how they can improve the situation or behaviour. Where possible, make a connection with your suggestions (and consequences) relevant to the learner’s workplace.



7. Be Professional & Genuine

If you are constantly saying “well done”, “nice work” to the learners then you are risking your feedback of becoming pointless and not being taken seriously.

Ensure when you give feedback it is genuine and deserved, as well as we mentioned before, as being clear and specific and about the action or behaviour.

Sometimes you may get a learner who pushes your buttons or makes you feel frustrated. Always remain professional in your approach and do not raise your voice or show anger. Remain calm and in control.


8. Be respectful

All learners are different and will react to feedback in various ways. Some may embrace it, some might find any criticism hard to take. It might only take a gentle comment to get them to improve how they are doing, rather than a very detailed conversation.

Treat your learners as individuals and consider the best way to give them feedback.

Before you give unexpected feedback, ask the learner for permission. Simply by asking “*May I give you some feedback?*”, the learner may be more open to hearing the feedback.





Be careful with the words you choose.
They do matter!

9. Choose your words carefully

How you present the feedback will impact on how it is received, which means that sometimes even the most well-meaning feedback can come across the wrong way and reduce a learner's motivation.

Wherever possible avoid negative phrases such as *"You shouldn't ..."*, *"You don't ..."*, *"You won't ..."*, or generalised phrases such as *"You are not motivated enough"*, *"You never seem to put effort into the activities"*. These may cause the learner to become defensive and not receptive to the feedback. You do not want the learner to feel embarrassed or belittled.

The individual may know they have not performed well, so consider asking them *"How do you think you went?"*, *"Are you happy with what just happened?"* *What could you possibly do differently?"* may be more effective.

Use phrases that encourage the learner, for example, *"What would happen if you tried to do it this way?"*, *Have you thought about ..."* etc.



10. Focus on one thing at a time

Unless previously agreed, if you save up a lot of feedback on various situations, the learner may become overwhelmed.

It is better to simply discuss one or two behaviours or actions at a time and allow the learner to work on improving that behaviour.

In addition to maximising the learning outcome, the learner may be less likely to see the feedback as a personal attack and will have more opportunity to work on the suggestions you discussed. **Be sure the actions or behaviours are things that the learner can actually influence or change.**

A good tip is to let the learners know what actions or behaviours you will be observing and providing feedback on, instead of having to provide feedback on all actions and behaviours.

11. Stick to facts, not feelings

When giving feedback focus on the actions or behaviours that need to be improved.

Address these and not your frustrations. For example, “You get me so frustrated as I have told you several times how important it is to come back on time”. It is not about you, but what can help the learner.

If you need to express your feelings given they are from your perspective and use “I” statements, for example, “I was disappointed that you returned late from a break again”.

Be clear on the consequences of the learner’s actions on their performance or the impact on achieving the learning outcomes.

For example, “*When you are 10 minutes coming back late from the break, it impacts the whole group as we do not have enough time to get the most out of the activity*”. Then work with the learner to figure out how this can be resolved for future incidents.





12. Involve Learners in the Process

We are usually our biggest critics, *so it is important to involve the learners in the feedback process.*

Share the performance standard required with them; then ask them how they feel they are progressing.

When learners have access to this information, they develop an awareness of their learning, and are more easily able to recognise areas for improvement and eventually develop strategies for tackling weak points themselves.

Ask questions, such as:

- *What were you trying to do/achieve?*
- *What worked well?*
- *What could you do differently next time to improve the outcome?*

Good feedback to learners should not be just one way, it should be an interactive conversation.



13. Focus on the Solution

When you are giving feedback to learners your focus should be the solution – improving their performance and the learning outcomes.

So, if you see an opportunity to provide feedback and help the learner correct the behaviour, address quickly. Also help provide opportunities to rectify the behaviour once it has been discussed, so you can give feedback on their effort and outcome.

14. Balance the Feedback

I am sure you have heard the rule about starting with something positive when giving feedback. Naturally this will help the learner to be more receptive and put them at ease. Just be careful not to be too obvious and overdo it.

If you finish the feedback session with negative feedback, you may leave the learner feeling like a failure. So think about how you can finish on a positive or encouraging note, by saying something like “I am sure you will be able to tackle this ...”. Reinforce the impact of the correct behaviour and your confidence that they will be successful with implementing the suggestions you discussed.



15. Check the learner's understanding

Once you have discussed the feedback with the learner, ensure they agree with the feedback and the actions suggested.

For example, *"I just want to check that we agree what are the next steps you will be taking?"*.

Ask them why this action or behaviour is important to their role. Make it relevant.

At times, a learner may not agree with your judgement of their performance or behaviour, so it is important to ask their perspective about it.

"I notice you appear not to agree with me, what is your perspective of what happened?".

Focus on the outcome and work out a solution together on what could be done next time to improve the situation.



16. Be consistent & Fair

Ensure all learners receive the opportunity of receiving feedback. Be careful not to just focus on just your high performers because it is easy to give them feedback. Your focus should be on helping all the learners to enhance their performance.

Look for, or plan opportunities to give feedback throughout your program. Learners need to know how they are performing and what they need to work on or do differently to improve.

17. Follow Up

Lastly, like all feedback it is important to follow-up to see if the suggestions that you agreed with the learner helped improve their performance or the situation.

Their willingness and attempt to try something different needs to be acknowledged. Following-up gives you the opportunity see how they went, what improved and, if needed, to give additional feedback.

If there are still some adjustments to be made, ask the learner to reflect on what they learnt, and if they can see how the new action or behaviour will improve the situation.



Part 2: Receiving Feedback from Learners



Feedback is not a one-way street.

As learning and development professionals, we should always be looking for ways to improve ourselves and therefore embrace feedback opportunities. Guaranteed, direct feedback will be more authentic than your evaluation sheets.

So, as well as giving feedback, you need to demonstrate that you can receive it constructively.

18. Listen Openly

As a L&D professional or trainer, sometimes feedback is not good to hear.

If a learner is giving you some negative or constructive feedback, do not become defensive. Suspend any responses (emotional or verbal) until the learner has finished.

19. Focus on how it will help you

Any feedback can be helpful, as it allows you to find out how you are perceived.

Whether you agree or not, the learner's feedback is how they see you. Be sure to treat the feedback as valuable information that will help you to gain insights on where you can improve.

If you need to, ask other learners if they have the same perception, and perhaps what would have been more helpful for them.



20. Seek specifics

As feedback may not be easy for the learner to give you, seek more information or examples if necessary. Be careful that you do not come across as defensive (through your body language or tone of voice) but are keen to find out more. For example, “I really appreciate this feedback, can I just clarify with you ...”.

21. Check your understanding

Share with the learner your understanding of the feedback they have provided. This will confirm that you have listened and that you want to clarify that you heard their message correctly.

Lastly, don't forget to thank the learner for the feedback and how it was helpful. If appropriate, you might share what you will do as a result of the feedback.



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8. Be respectful
9. Choose your words carefully
10. Focus on one thing at a time
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12. Involve Learners in the Process
13. Focus on the Solution
14. Balance the Feedback
15. Be consistent & Fair
16. Check the learner's understanding and acceptance
17. Follow Up

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