

The Genre of Feedback: A New Approach to Instructor Comments on Academic Writing

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Feedback is a Genre

J.R. Martin

“a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture”

John Swales

“a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes”

Gunther Kress

“the term which describes that aspect of the form of texts which is due to the effect of their production in particular social occasions”

Instructors' View of Feedback: Language Similar to that in Genre Theory

“a communicative act [through which] the teacher is ultimately trying to give the student feedback on their strengths and weaknesses to help improve their writing” (Mack 34)

“a valuable awareness raising technique that prompts students to revise their writing” intended “to increase learners’ interest in writing as well as their knowledge about it” (Agbayahoun 1898)

How Students Use Feedback

This study shows that where feedback addresses a characteristic of form or content that can easily be incorporated without changing any other element in the text, then students readily incorporate this (e.g. a form of citation). However, where feedback addresses a characteristic that impacts on both elements of content and form (e.g. a conceptual requirement of the task), then its effectiveness depends on how well the feedback helps the students reconcile the interplay between these two elements (e.g. where to place and how to achieve analysis in the text). (175)

from Vardi, Iris. "The Impact of Iterative Writing and Feedback on the Characteristics of Tertiary Students' Written Texts." *Teaching in Higher Education* 17.2 (2012): 167-179.

TABLE II
THE STUDENTS' IMPRESSIONS OF THEIR TEACHERS' FEEDBACK

Nature of students' impressions	Paula's students			Mike's students		
	Selected responses	Numbers & percentages	Total	Selected responses	Numbers & percentages	Total
Positive	Clear	10 (14.70%)	24 (35.29%)	clear	07 (10.94%)	22 (34.37%)
	Useful	13 (19.12%)		Useful	05 (07.81%)	
	Clear & useful	01 (01.47%)		Clear & useful	10 (15.62%)	
Negative	Discouraging	19 (27.94%)	44 (64.71%)	Discouraging	15 (23.44%)	42 (65.63%)
	Confusing	15 (22.06%)		Confusing	12 (18.75%)	
	Useless	03 (04.41%)		Useless	10 (15.62%)	
	Overwhelming	07(10.29%)		Confusing & overwhelming	05 (07.81%)	
Total			68 (100%)			64 (100%)

from Agbahoun, Juvenale Patinvoh. "Teacher Written Feedback on Student Writing: Teachers' and Learners' Perspectives." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 6.10 (Oct. 2016): 1895-1904.

TABLE III
THE STUDENTS' FEELINGS ABOUT THEIR TEACHER'S FEEDBACK

Students' impressions	Paula's students			Mike's students		
	Selected responses	Numbers & percentages	Total	Selected responses	Numbers & percentages	Total
Positive	Interested in reading it	14 (20.59%)	24 (35.29%)	Interested in reading it	12 (18.75%)	22 (34.37%)
	Satisfied and eager to improve	10 (14.70%)		satisfied	05 (07.81%)	
				Eager to improve	05 (07.81%)	
Negative	frustrated	19 (27.94%)	44 (64.71%)	frustrated	33 (51.56%)	42 (65.63%)
	Lost	24 (35.29%)		Lost	09 (14.06%)	
	Lost and frustrated	01 (01.47%)				
Total			68 (100%)			64 (100%)

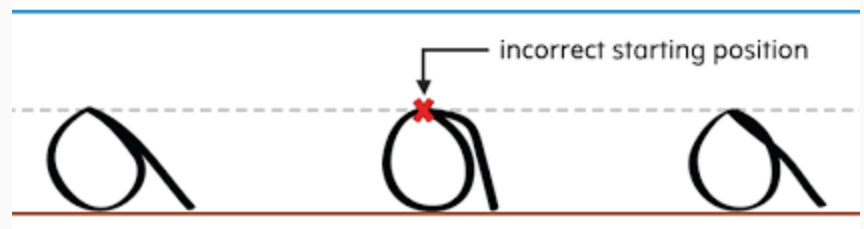
from Agbayahoun, Juvenale Patinvoh. "Teacher Written Feedback on Student Writing: Teachers' and Learners' Perspectives." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 6.10 (Oct. 2016): 1895-1904.

TABLE IV
THE STUDENTS' REACTIONS TO THEIR TEACHER'S FEEDBACK

Response options	Paula	Mike	Total
I read the mark and discard the paper	23 (33.82%)	30 (46.88%)	53 (40.15%)
I read the mark and the comments and I discard the paper	00 (00%)	00 (00%)	00 (00%)
I read the mark and the comments and I ask for clarifications	05 (07.35%)	08 (12.50%)	13 (09.85%)
I correct the mistakes that are easy to correct	05 (07.35%)	05 (07.81%)	10 (07.57%)
I revise taking into account the teacher's suggestions	12 (17.65%)	09 (14.06%)	21(15.91%)
I revise with the help of my home tutor	23 (33.82%)	12 (18.75%)	35 (26.52%)
Total	68 (100%)	64 (100%)	132 (100%)

from Agbahoun, Juvenale Patinvoh. "Teacher Written Feedback on Student Writing: Teachers' and Learners' Perspectives." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 6.10 (Oct. 2016): 1895-1904.

Basic Error Correction



Students' Thinking about Feedback

from Zheng, Yao and Shulin Yu. "Student Engagement with Teacher Written Corrective Feedback in EFL Writing: A Case Study of Chinese Lower-Proficiency Students." *Assessing Writing* 37 (2018): 13-24.

I am always expecting some kind of feedback from the teacher. If there is some feedback, it indicates that my teacher has read my assignment. I would feel my effort has been acknowledged whether her feedback is positive or not. It is much better than providing us nothing but a grade. (19)

I was stuck at where the teacher underlined a sentence and put a question mark in the margin. I guessed it meant there was an error or some errors in the sentence, but I could not decide where exactly it was. So, I did not make any modifications to that sentence in my second draft. (20)

Examples of My Comments

From end comments on a business letter assignment:

These are good starts on these letters, and they certainly indicate that you have done research on the problem of concussions and youth sport. But, what is needed in both of them is more attention to what you want from the letter recipient as well as providing them with the information they need to understand 1) your complaint (in the first letter) and 2) what action it is you want the receiver of the letter to take (in the second letter). These are good starts, but they don't quite complete what the assignment is asking you to do.

From marginal comments on a first-year writing synthesis assignment:

Which is what exactly? They aren't challenged—but “unfortunate situation” suggests something bigger. They will do well in school since it seems the material is too easy—so they should do well on the tests. So, what situation do they find themselves in that you would define as unfortunate?

What A Focus on Feedback Can Accomplish

[T]hree of the students got involved in a conversation lasting more than ten minutes about one student's draft. Focused on the criteria that had formed the basis of the critique, a substantive discussion took place about the writer's decision to use similes as opposed to metaphors. After seeking permission from the writer, one group member marked on the draft where she thought changes might be made with a view to improvement. This then led to a discussion about the importance of using the most appropriate descriptive words when constructing similes and/or metaphors. These three students then spent some time using a thesaurus as they looked up, discussed and debated which words were the most suitable to use in their poems. (75)

from Hawe, Eleanor M. and Helen R. Dixon. "Building Students' Evaluative and Productive Expertise in the Writing Classroom." *Assessing Writing* 19 (2014): 66-79.