# Making feedback inclusive

[Giving effective feedback](https://www.ctl.ox.ac.uk/giving-feedback) a useful resource to start with when thinking about how you can use feedback to influence students' learning. The ideas below expand on this resource, highlighting some specific steps you can take to develop an inclusive approach to feedback.

Be clear and encouraging
**Use clear, precise language.** If students don’t understand your feedback they won’t be able to act on it or may even try address it incorrectly. So that your feedback clarifies, rather than confuses, the key message you want to get across, use unambiguous language that your student will understand. If you're using terms such as ‘excellent conceptualization' to evaluate work, explain what this means and point to the relevant part of the work.

**Highlight strengths.** It is important that students are aware of the strengths of their work, so they can keep doing these things. It's also important for students' confidence - students can be overly negative or pessimistic about their work, particularly at competitive institutions like Oxford where everyone is a high achiever. Highlighting strengths rather than just focusing on next steps is motivational for students and is helpful for building a productive and supportive working relationship. If you're teaching students over a term or longer period of time, pointing out how they have improved is also important and motivating.

**Explain why.** Factual comments without explanation – for example ‘it would have been better to focus on fewer examples in your essay’ or ‘your argument is particularly effective in this section’ – don’t give students the information they need to understand why this is the case. This might seem evident to you, but it might not be for the student. By explaining **why** – for example ‘it would have been better to focus on fewer examples in your essay because then you would have been able to explore each one in more detail’ or ‘your argument is particularly effective in this section because you provide multiple sources of evidence’ – students will be able to apply your feedback to future work and understand why it is important to do so.

**Avoid limiting language.** As described above, it's important to avoid comments which simply state flaws without providing next steps as this could lead students to feel stuck or even helpless ('I know my work is bad, but not how to improve it'). Of course, it is important that comments avoid pejorative or unnecessarily strongly negative language. Equally, though, it is important to try to avoid praise which is focused on intelligence. For example, 'you are an excellent writer' or 'intelligent work' implies that the student's abilities are fixed. If they come up against obstacles or criticism in the future, they could take a defensive approach to protect this view of their fixed, high intelligence. It's much better to promote a view of intelligence as something which can be improved and grown, by praising progress, specific parts of work, effort, or the processes that student have undertaken.

## Focus on how the student can improve

**For every critical point, show the student to where to go next.** To be effective, feedback needs to be useable. Students need to be clear on what to do next. Comments such as 'lack of depth' or 'limited analysis' will raise students' awareness that these are issues, but not what to do about them. For every critical comment, provide a next step. This could be a clear instruction, or referring them back to a resource, e.g. lecture notes. Or you may ask the student to find their own solution, but it's a good idea to follow up with them that they have been able to do this. Alternatively, you could deal with next steps in a conversation with the individual or the whole group when you return your comments.

**Keep comments focused.** When assessing work, many things may come to mind that can be fixed or improved. However, pointing every single thing out to students can be overwhelming and demoralising. It is also not feasible for students to improve everything in one go. Therefore, it is far more productive to select, say, three steps which could improve the work. If you're teaching students over a period of time, you could reflect on how students tend to progress in this area, and decide which issues could be saved until later on. If you do decide to give students a list of issues to be tackled, decide with them which you should both focus on next.

**Give timely feedback.** Students will be better able to respond to and make sense of feedback if the work is still fresh in their mind; they are more likely to remember why they approached a problem in a specific way, what they meant by using a specific phrase, or what they found helpful in their reading. Moreover, providing feedback soon after the work has been submitted gives students a much better chance of being able to make changes to their work in time for the next assignment and so progress more rapidly.

## Use appropriate forms of feedback

**Ensure feedback is usable.** Just as a diversity of teaching methods engages a wider range of students, the same is true with feedback formats. For example, written feedback is clearer and more legible when typed, and this can even be provided in an electronic format so students can adjust the formatting to suit their needs. Some students may require feedback in a specific format due to a specific learning requirement. This will be outlined in their Student Support Plan, and the recommendation should always be followed to ensure they can access and use your comments. If giving verbal feedback, it is a good idea to ensure that students have time to write down your comments and can check details with you afterwards.

## Consider using audio or video feedback. Audio or video feedback can be effective both on their own and to accompany written comments, which allow you to use tone to convey meaning. This can be particularly helpful in situations where you cannot meet with each student face-to-face, for example, large classes, blended or online learning. Students often find that audio and video feedback is motivating, helps them understand nuances of meaning and build a productive relationship with tutors. Students can also replay the file to pick up meaning and make notes.

**Explore Canvas tools.** Canvas has built-in audio-visual feedback options for submitted work, and with use, these forms of feedback can also be time-effective, even more so than providing written feedback. Another form is screencasts, which combine audio and visual feedback, enabling you to talk through an annotated piece of work on the screen and highlight key parts.

## Involve students in the feedback process

**Provide examples.** When thinking about the wider context of feedback, providing opportunities for students to see and discuss example answers of varying quality and style is an effective way for students to better understand the criteria against which they are being assessed and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their own work.

**Encourage questions.** As [Giving effective feedback](https://www.ctl.ox.ac.uk/giving-feedback) explains, effective feedback is a dialogue. Encouraging students to ask questions about your feedback and also asking them questions – such as how they plan to address your feedback – provides a chance to check their understanding and that they know what to do next. Asking your students questions can also provide you with some feedback on the task set – for example, what do they think the assignment was asking them to do? Their answer could indicate whether anything could have been made clearer in the initial instructions, and whether the task was at the right level.

In addition, some students may have burning questions about particular aspects of their work which you might not comment on because you're not aware of it being important to the student. So encouraging students to solicit feedback can address this and clarify these aspects of their work.