



## Outline of the feedback policy of the University of Vienna

Feedback is an integral part of academic practice in research and teaching. With this policy the University of Vienna underlines the importance of feedback. The principles below aim to help enhance the feedback culture in study and teaching at the University of Vienna.

### Objectives and added value of feedback

Students are introduced to the process of giving and taking feedback as academic practice in teaching. Feedback gives students responses that help them learn. This means it is easier for students to see where they stand and what potential they can unlock. At the same time, beyond the evaluation of the course in question, as part of the feedback process students give their teachers important indications of possible ways in which the communication process can be developed. Feedback helps to promote a communicative teaching and learning culture.

Feedback, transparent performance requirements and differentiated performance assessments help students to gear their activities more towards achieving subject-related goals and standards. In this way they can assess the strengths and weaknesses of their own performance better and also take responsibility for their own learning process.

Feedback gives students the opportunity of feeling a greater sense of achievement in their studies and gives them a boost in the development of more active study behaviour. Motivated students gain more enjoyment from the joint learning process and are more willing to intensively deal with contents. This means they can participate more successfully in the academic discourse and become part of the learning community in the subject.

### Principles of feedback

The following principles indicate which aspects of feedback are considered particularly important in teaching at the University of Vienna. When implementing feedback, attention needs to be paid to practicability and feasibility: depending on the size of the course and on the learning objectives, different formats are recommended (cf. examples on the next page).

- 1) Feedback is given in a timely manner and is formulated objectively and based on the particular tasks while geared towards improvements.
- 2) In each course and in every examination there are possibilities of feedback (e.g. by grading for oral examinations, by viewing results for written exams.)
- 3) Feedback is closely connected to transparent performance requirements and assessment criteria.
- 4) Feedback is already contemplated when designing the course/examination. Students are informed before or at the start of the course about possibilities of feedback and its importance as part of the assessment process (e.g. peer feedback as a performance component).
- 5) In continuous assessment courses students are given feedback that is geared towards improvements. The greater the autonomous performance of students, the more room is given for feedback. Form and intensity are also oriented towards the number of participating students.
- 6) For written assignments as part of continuous assessment courses (seminar papers, bachelor's papers) feedback is given by the teachers in any case; for master's theses it is given by the supervisor.
- 7) Students actively seek feedback. They deal with feedback, use it for their development in their particular subject and assess their own work and the work of others (as part of peer feedback) based on criteria and guided by teachers.

### Examples of ways in which feedback is designed

**1) Individual feedback on written work:** This feedback by teachers is essential in particular at the start (question, components of the written work) and also at the end of the written work. At the start oral feedback in particular is suitable. As the course continues, written feedback can be given for example in electronic drafts using the commenting function. For students, lists of criteria / assessment schemes (on aspects such as the components and structure of the work, dealing with literature, presentation of the

problem, originality, etc.) prove useful and, for assessment purposes, these can also be provided with point systems.

**2) Peer feedback by students** leads to the academic practice of giving and taking feedback. In this process students learn to assess the performance of others (and therefore also their own performance) in a more differentiated manner. By adding written comments to the work of others, students can learn the format of peer review processes in the academic world. Students therefore improve their reasoning skills and exercise critical thinking. Guidance by the teachers is essential for the success of peer feedback. The format is recommended in particular for continuous assessment courses with a larger average number of students.

**3) Feedback in continuous assessment courses in the laboratory:** Feedback to students focuses on increasingly autonomous work in the laboratory (time planning, dealing with equipment, safety). The requirements in terms of records are communicated clearly and in advance, for example in the form of an assessment scheme. Teachers give early feedback on the records so that students can take this into account in their subsequent partial achievements as part of the course.

**4) Bundled feedback in continuous assessment courses with large groups:** Forms of pooled feedback by teachers on the performance of students are suitable here. These (e.g. tests, quizzes) are commented on by teachers in writing and/or orally. Teachers present anonymous work and ask students for suggestions for improvements. Successful answers are incorporated here, but frequent errors are also revealed. In addition to bundled feedback, peer feedback is suitable for large groups (e.g. via Moodle). In standardised tasks, e-learning enables the use of automatic feedback.

**5) Feedback in courses supported by e-learning:** (Self-)assessments with standardised feedback give students information on the current status of their knowledge; structured peer feedback and discussion forums in online phases also stimulate the learning process. In units where the students are present, teachers give bundled feedback on the voluntary performance of the students, respond to open comprehension questions and initiate discussions with and among students. With short knowledge questions in the lecture hall (e.g. via student response system) students can assess their personal learning progress better.

**6) Feedback on test achievements in non-continuous assessment courses and in written module examinations:** The feedback on one-off achievements helps students have a better understanding of the performance assessment including criteria and draw conclusions from this for their future learning. The feedback is given, for example, as part of viewing of results or follow-up work on examinations (in the consultation hour). In addition, teachers can give information on the status of the individual performance in comparison with achievements in the entire group. Elaborated examples of solutions make it easier for students to assess their own performance.

**7) Feedback as part of oral performance:** Individual oral feedback for examinations saves time and enables direct dialogue between teachers and students. The latter can make queries, clarify individual points and ask detailed questions. In combination with oral feedback from peers and written (peer) feedback, students are therefore given a wider range of feedback. Respectful interaction is the important requirement for the success of oral feedback.

Other examples, materials and background information: <http://ctl.univie.ac.at/feedback/> (in German)

Response to „Outline of the Feedback Policy of Vienna University“

(Klaus Puhl, Director of Studies, Philosophy)

As a member of the university committee „Prüfungen – Feedback Policy“ I took part in drafting „the outline of the feedback policy of University Vienna“. I therefore fully accept this draft with the only exception that I don't think students should mark each other when giving peer feedback (§7).

Feedback was discussed at several meetings with students and colleagues and was also part of an on-line questionnaire we sent to all Bachelor students. As a result of all this, we will rewrite our Bachelor programm to provide better for individual feedback and to make it easier for students to finish in time. The idea is to reduce the number of courses by increasing credit points and to reduce the maximum amount of course participants in advanced courses from now 45 to 30 or even 25.

## Statement on the draft feedback policy of the University of Vienna

(Judith Schoonenboom, Director of Studies Education)

Department of Education: Degree program directorate and degree program committee, in cooperation with the participants at the institute's internal Day of Teaching, 30.1.2017

In general, we view feedback as part of process-oriented learning and as academic practice. Feedback is an interaction between instructors and learners, and not to be understood as something that an instructor gives to a student. Feedback should function as a guide to self-criticism, where learners and instructors learn to take a critical stance towards themselves and others.

This view has some implications for a feedback policy. Firstly, we see continuous, formative feedback as much more important than summative feedback at the end of a course. Formative feedback can, and should, lead to improvement within a teaching course, which is not possible for summative feedback. We consider the idea that improvement-oriented feedback refers only to written work and then only to the *final* version of a written product<sup>1</sup> less fruitful than feedback on intermediate products. It also means that we pay less attention to the fact that feedback should be "part of the assessment".

Within this interaction, we distinguish several forms of feedback: feedback from instructors to students, from students to instructors, and feedback among instructors. One important form of feedback is feedback among students, i.e. peer feedback. We view peer feedback as a form of discussion, and clarification, rather than a form of evaluation. In our opinion, grading and evaluation are tasks that are reserved for the instructor. This contradicts the principles mentioned in the draft feedback policy of the university, which states that "students [...] evaluate their own work and the work of others (within the framework of peer feedback)"

Because feedback can take on various forms, we do not want to prescribe one specific form of feedback. For the above reasons, we do not want to include feedback as an obligatory component of grading. Rather than part of the grading process, we consider feedback part of course planning, which has an impact on the type of study activities and their order and organization.

The implementation of our conception of feedback brings with it specific organizational conditions. Firstly, it should be recognized that giving feedback can be part of a lecture. When a course has a teaching load of two teaching hours per week, this does not mean that an instructor is obliged to lecture for two hours every week. In our opinion, feedback hours could be part of these teaching hours. Secondly, we need "grading-free space" within courses, where students receive and incorporate feedback to improve their work, without immediate consequences for their final grade. Thirdly, tutors play an important role in a feedback culture. This means, on the one hand, that tutors should be trained in giving feedback, and on the other hand, that a feedback culture entails a greater need for tutoring hours, especially for feedback in large groups.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ctl.univie.ac.at/materialien/hochschuldidaktischer-infopool/geben-und-nehmen-von-feedback/Feedback-of-teaching-on-writing-work>