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Making Sense of Student Feedback Guide



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Introduction

Postsecondary teaching is inherently complex, which makes it difficult to document and assess. Teaching in this context involves numerous areas of focus, and expertise is achieved through an ongoing process of growth and development (Kenny et al., 2017). Given this complexity, evaluations of postsecondary teaching ideally take into account robust evidence from multiple sources (Kenny et al., 2018); however, students' perspectives clearly provide an important piece of the assessment puzzle (Poproski & Greene, 2018; Winer et al., 2012). Gathering and making sense of student feedback can be complicated and challenging. Student feedback may be collected at various times for multiple purposes during a semester. Quantitative and qualitative forms of data are often combined, and debates about the validity of evaluation instruments are recently on the agenda (Flaherty, 2016). Despite the messiness of this terrain, student evaluations of teaching provide valuable information for individual instructors looking to self-assess, reflect on, and improve their teaching practice. Student feedback is also helpful in the more formal evaluation of teaching, providing that it is used and interpreted appropriately (Linse, 2017).

There is a current move away from framing student feedback as being about 'evaluating teaching' to more accurately reflecting 'student experiences of learning.' While we recognize the importance of this shifting frame, the phrase 'student evaluations of teaching' is used in this document because it is still commonly used to refer to end of term student feedback, which is the focus of this guide.

This guide provides tools and resources to organize and interpret student feedback so that meaningful and reasonable conclusions can be drawn about one's teaching development and expertise. The guide is intended for use by individual instructors and by those who are tasked with assessing their colleagues' teaching. Guidelines for productively discussing teaching in the context of assessment are also included as feedback conversations can be emotionally charged (Hendry et al., 2005) and challenging for administrators to effectively facilitate.

The discussion to follow takes a holistic approach to the topic of student feedback, defining it in broad terms and considering its relevance for the teaching development of individual instructors and the assessment practices of deans and department or unit heads (see Appendix 1). The focus is on end-of-term student evaluations of teaching, including both quantitative ratings and qualitative feedback comments. The aim is to support the meaningful use of student evaluations of teaching, including how best to make sense of, reflect on, responsibly use, and discuss them in the context of teaching assessment practices.

The sections in this guide include the what, why and how of making sense of student feedback, and provide several resources and examples. Feel free to select and adapt resources from this guide that are relevant for your particular context and purpose.



What is student feedback?

Student feedback has the power to inform and enhance teaching development, yet, negative instructor experiences often cloud this opportunity for growth (Gormally, Evans & Brickman, 2014).

Student feedback can be formative or summative or a combination of both. Formative feedback can be instructor initiated during a course with the intent to improve teaching, this could include a mid-term check-in, one minute paper, stop-start-continue, or other technique. Summative feedback is typically an institutional or department requirement at the end of course, often used to assess and improve teaching practices for future course offerings, such as the Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRI). Ideally, both types of feedback will occur. Cookson

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(2018) provides an indepth analysis of 50 years of work dedicated the terms formative and summative (feedback, assessment, and evaluation) and concludes despite the differences in meaning and interperatation of feedback, the intent is “...ultimately, to reaching the real beneficiaries of our efforts: the learners” (p. 940).

Formative feedback techniques can be implemented by an instructor to inform their teaching and students’ learning and make adjustments, if appropriate. Another benefit of collecting student feedback is that it can also be documented as one form of evidence of teaching effectiveness (Kenny et al., 2017).

Summative feedback, both quantitative and qualtitative, that focuses on student learning experiences and insights can also inform and enhance teaching development. Instructors can assess and reflect on the feedback to consider elements for their growth or to continue teaching as before (what is working, what can be improved upon?). Elements of summative feedback can be presented as evidence of teaching effectiveness and include potential for growth. A record of summative feedback can demonstrate trends or patterns over time, which provides the instructor an opportunity for critical reflection over the course of their teaching career.



Why do we collect student feedback?

Why we collect student feedback is steeped in the traditions, customs, and governance within our higher education institutions. Summative student evaluations of teaching are considered valuable and provide a collective summary of students' perceptions of their learning experiences in a course. USRIs do not provide a direct measure of teaching effectiveness or student learning (Linse, 2017). There are other approaches that can be utilized to evaluate teaching based on student feedback. Some examples of these are included in the next section of this guide.

Student feedback, both formative and summative, can be valuable for improving one's teaching practice. "Many dedicated faculty with a genuine interest in improving classroom instructor grope for better ways of doing their jobs" (Jungst, Licklider & Wiersema, 2003, p. 71), and student feedback can be a tool for instructors, and mutually beneficial to their institutions.

Smith (2001) maintains that student feedback is essential to teaching development. His argument is supported by many.

Student feedback:

- Enhances teaching and learning (Evers & Hall, 2009; Gormally, Evans, & Brickman, 2014)
- Should be developmental, supportive, timely, and specific (Shute, 2008)
- Provides a way towards continuous improvement (Weimer, 2013)
- Creates an opportunity for reflection, and developing reflective skills (Brookfield, 2015)
- Shapes course design (Linse, 2017)
- Promotes change (Gormally, Evans, & Brickman, 2014)
- Provides opportunities for dialogue (Carless & Boud, 2018)
- Helps develop feedback literacy (Sutton, 2012)
- Can be interpreted accepted, modified, or rejected by educators based on each particular context (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 82)



How do we make sense of student feedback?

There are numerous resources, strategies, and guidelines to assist us in making sense of student feedback. The following sections are included for you to adapt, revise, and incorporate into your approach or role in terms of making sense of student feedback, and help address the following questions:

- What can student feedback offer us in terms of assessing and reflecting on teaching? What are student ratings and comments about their experiences telling us (or not telling us) about teaching and learning?
- How do we talk about postsecondary teaching and learning? Do we have a shared language or starting point to draw upon in our conversations or reflections about our teaching? What does the research say?
- What are the limitations of USRI data? How might we responsibly interpret these data? Which measures are most useful for interpretation and assessment purposes and why?
- How can we make student comments data less overwhelming? How do we consolidate all this information into a coherent whole? What strategies allow us to draw helpful conclusions from student comments?
- How might we consolidate and summarize student feedback when all is said and done? What does this information mean for future practice and teaching goals? What have we learned and what will we do with this learning in the future? How best to share student feedback and summative reflections with department heads and deans?
- How do we engage in helpful conversations with colleagues about student feedback? Given that this is a vulnerable area to discuss, how is it best to approach this topic? What are some strategies and skills that can be used and developed?



Introduction to the process

What can student feedback offer us in terms of assessing and reflecting on teaching?

This introduction provides a useful starting point for instructors and those in leadership positions to think about interpreting and utilizing student feedback. It has been adapted from Linse (2017).



How does student feedback help teaching development and growth of academic staff?

- Student ratings provide academic staff with information to inform their decisions about teaching practices and course design. Summative and formative student feedback can be used to promote critical reflection and action planning.
- Constructive feedback from students can identify what's working and what could be modified to enhance course design, teaching strategies and the learning environment.



How should we interpret student feedback?

- Student feedback (both ratings and written feedback) provides an opportunity to understand students' perspectives of their learning experience in a particular context. Student ratings of their experiences are not an independent measure of teaching quality or student learning.
- There is no single source of evidence that ascertains teaching quality. Quantitative and qualitative student feedback should be components that are considered along with other sources of evidence provided through self-reflection, from peers and/or scholarly literature, in order to help instructors reflect upon and strengthen their teaching.
- Students' ratings and written feedback are influenced by many factors. Research shows that biases related to gender, class characteristics, race, age, and discipline of study can, in some cases, influence students' ratings of academic staff. Initiatives that bring awareness to these factors, such as including a statement on feedback forms and providing training for staff and students on how to detect and address bias, can significantly reduce effects of bias.



How can leaders encourage academic staff to use student feedback?

- Promote a culture where student feedback is treated as information that can help identify areas of strength and improvement, and assist with goal setting and on-going growth.
- Support academic staff to make meaning of their student feedback. Leaders should create opportunities for academic staff to intentionally reflect on and interpret the student ratings and feedback that they receive for the courses they teach.
- Actively support professional growth and development. Consider referring academic staff to your faculty's teaching supports or to resources at the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning. Encourage shared learning related to teaching through reflective mentorship and peer review/observation processes in your faculty/school.



What are the responsibilities of leaders in creating a positive culture for teaching and learning?

- Support a positive teaching and learning culture. Provide opportunities to develop the quality of teaching and learning experiences for students and academic staff. Encourage using student feedback as one source of information regarding which teaching practices could be recognized, encouraged and developed.
- Support mentorship and educational leadership among academic staff. Highlight teaching and learning achievements and efforts to enhance teaching and learning at unit functions. Encourage colleagues to support each other to inquire into and make meaning of student feedback. Provide opportunities for colleagues to share teaching practices that are working well.

Principles for teaching in higher education

How do we talk about postsecondary teaching and learning?

The following principles offer concepts and language that can be helpful as a starting point for reflection and discussions about characteristics of ‘good’ teaching in postsecondary education. They have been adapted from Chickering and Gamson’s (1987) seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education; Ramsden’s (2003) thirteen principles for effective university teaching; Weimer’s (2013) five key changes to practice for learner-centred teaching; Lizzio et al.’s (2002) conceptual model for an effective academic environment; and Tigelaar et al.’s (2004) framework for teaching competencies in higher education.

- 1. Actively Engage Learners:** ensure learning material is current, relevant and interesting; explain material clearly; use a variety of methods that encourage active and deep approaches to learning, as well as adapt to evolving classroom contexts.
 - 2. Demonstrate Respect:** show interest in students’ opinions and concerns; seek to understand their diverse talents, needs, prior knowledge, and approaches to learning; encourage interaction between instructor and students; exhibit respect for all students; has a positive attitude towards students, colleagues, and the discipline.
 - 3. Communicate Clear Expectations:** make clear the intended learning outcomes and standards for performance; provide organization, structure and direction for where the course is going.
 - 4. Encourage Student Independence:** provide opportunities to develop and draw upon personal interests; offer choice in learning processes and modes of assessment; provide timely and developmental feedback on learning; encourage self-directed learning and metacognition to promote self-assessment of learning.
 - 5. Create a Teaching and Learning Community:** use teaching methods and learning strategies that encourage mutual learning, as well as thoughtful, respectful and collaborative engagement and dialogue between all members of the classroom community; cooperate with teaching colleagues and actively contribute to curriculum.
 - 6. Use Appropriate Assessment Methods:** clearly align assessment methods with intended course outcomes and desired learning results; provide clear criteria for evaluation; emphasize deep learning; scaffold assessments and feedback to ensure progressive learning.
 - 7. Commit to Continuous Improvement:** gather formative and summative feedback on your teaching; practice critical self-reflection; draw conclusions from reflection to strengthen teaching; consult and/or engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning; engage in meaningful conversations with colleagues; identify clear goals for strengthening your teaching practice; be open to innovation.
- Chickering, Arthur W, & Gamson, Zelda F. (1987).** Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin*, 39(7), 3–7.
- Lizzio, Alf, Wilson, Keithia, & Simons, Roland. (2002).** University Students’ Perceptions of the Learning Environment and Academic Outcomes: Implications for theory and practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, 27(1), 27–52.
- Tigelaar, D.E.H, Dolmans, D.H.J.M, Wolphagen, I.H.A.P, & Van Der Vleuten, C.P.M. (2004).** The development and validation of a framework for teaching competencies in higher education. *Higher Education*, 48, 253–268.
- Ramsden, P. (2003).** *Learning to Teach in Higher Education*. New York: Routledge.
- Weimer, Maryellen. (2013).** *Learner-centered teaching: Five key changes to practice*. John Wiley & Sons.

Interpreting and using USRIs

What are the limitations of USRI data? How might we responsibly interpret these data?

The following points offer specific strategies for appropriately interpreting quantitative end-of-term USRI data (Linse, 2017).



Student ratings are not direct measures of teaching effectiveness.

- Student ratings represent perceptions of experience. Rating tools are designed to reflect collective views of students in a particular course. Students can provide excellent information on the effects that course design, learning and assessment strategies, and the learning environment had on them. USRI ratings can help identify areas of strength and growth in these areas.
- Student USRI ratings are not designed to provide data that allows for comparisons of teaching effectiveness amongst academic staff or to a unit average. Each academic staff member's rating should be considered individually.
- A wide variety of non-instructional factors can influence ratings. Sources of variation include differences in the students enrolled in the class, class size, course level, discipline and implicit bias. Consider ratings in context of these factors.



USRIs need to be contextualized in relation to the instructor and the course.

- Written student feedback helps contextualize ratings. At the University of Calgary, written feedback is collected through Faculty/School questionnaires often at the same time ratings are collected. As with ratings, written comments represent students' perspectives of their experience and help identify areas of strength and growth.
- Low response rates (i.e. below 20% or fewer than eight students) should not be considered in assessment processes.



Focus on the distribution of scores across the entire scale and over time.

- Look for patterns and consistency within a course and across time for individual academic staff. Do patterns show general improvement or a persistent issue? How have patterns in student concerns' been addressed?
- The frequency distribution of student ratings is typically skewed with the peak of the distribution above the mid-point of the scale. Mean scores can be misleading because a few low ratings can substantially lower the mean. It is recommended to review the frequency distribution of ratings across the entire scale (% respondents in each category) and the mode for each rating (the value that is chosen most often).
- Focus on the most common ratings and comments rather than a few outliers. Student ratings are best designed to reflect the collective views of students. Outliers should not be given more weight than the perceptions of most students.



Anomalies in ratings should be treated with caution.

- USRI ratings are not a precision tool. Small differences in ratings are common and not necessarily meaningful. A person can teach the same course under similar conditions in a similar way and receive different ratings. It is most meaningful to focus on the distribution of scores in relation to the rating scale, and the mode for each item in the USRI.



Your USRI report

This section includes information about the revised (2020) University of Calgary's USRI report which is generated by the Office of Institutional Analysis (OIA). The OIA report includes the following: Overall Section Rating, Frequency Distribution, Demographics for Rating Item 2-6, and Demographics for Rating item 7-12. A copy of an actual report is included in Appendix 2.

The following changes and rationale (approved by GFC) were implemented in the USRI report (2020):

1. Remove the overall instruction question (Question #1) from the USRI questionnaire and report (current and historical reports).

Rationale: It is not clear what Q1 is measuring and the rating score for Q1 is commonly lower than the ratings for Qs 2-12. A recent review of the Q1 rating scores for courses across the institution found this was the case for two-thirds of UCalgary courses. This highlights issues around the validity of this question, leading to the recommendation to remove it from the current USRI.

2. Remove rating comparisons.

Rationale: Comparing different people and courses can be misleading due to factors that can influence ratings and students' perceptions of their experience that are not related to the quality of teaching and learning. Removal of the comparators helps focus the use of USRI on the course being rated, which is the intended use of student ratings.

3. Replace mean scores with mode.

Rationale: Mean scores can be affected by outlier ratings and may not be representative of the most frequent response selected by students. Reporting the mode helps illuminate the most frequent response for each question and help focus attention on the distribution of scores across the questions and the trends of responses.

The table to follow provides an example of an Overall Section Rating, followed by a brief summary of the data presented.

Overall Section Rating

Course number and title:			
Survey Instructor:			
Number of times the instructor has taught this course (<i>last 10 years including the current term</i>): 9	USRI enrolment: 43	Valid Instruments received: 35	Response Rate: 81.40%

	This Section	Frequency Distribution							
RATING ITEM	MODE	STRONGLY DISAGREE (1)	DISAGREE (2)	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE (3)	NEITHER (4)	SOMEWHAT AGREE (5)	AGREE (6)	STRONGLY AGREE (7)	N/A (8)
2. Enough detail in course outline	7					3	12	20	
3. Course consistent with outline	7						17	18	
4. Content well organized	7						10	25	
5. Student questions responded to	6			1	2	10	15	7	
6. Communicated with enthusiasm	7						4	31	
7. Opportunities for assistance	5				8	15	10	2	
8. Students treated respectfully	7	1		1			5	28	
9. Evaluation methods fair	3		13	17	4	1			
10. Work graded in reasonable time	5			15		18			
11. I learned a lot in this course	7	1	1	1			9	23	
12. Support materials helpful	6	1		1	1	2	18	9	3

This sample report indicates the following:

- **Overall:** According to the mode, students most frequently selected the ‘strongly agree’ category in six out of 11 items. Two items’ modes fall into each of the ‘agree’ and ‘somewhat agree’ categories, and one item has a mode of ‘somewhat disagree.’
- **Communicated with enthusiasm:** 31 out of 35 students selected ‘strongly agree’ with all of the cases (the frequency distribution) falling into the ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ categories.
- **Students treated respectfully:** 28 respondents selected ‘strongly agree’ and it’s interesting to note that there were a few outliers that would have pulled the instructor’s score down if we were using the mean as a measure of central tendency. The vast majority of cases — 33 out of 35 — fall into ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree.’

- **Student questions responded to:** 15 students selected 'agree' and, although the frequency distribution spans 4 categories, the bulk of the cases fall within 'somewhat agree' and 'strongly agree.'
- **Evaluation methods fair:** The mode for this item is 'somewhat disagree' and the frequency distribution indicates that most cases (30) fall into 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree.'
- **Opportunities for assistance and work graded in a reasonable time:** Although both of these items have modes of 'somewhat agree', their respective frequency distributions reveal considerable differences between these items. In 'opportunities for assistance,' the bulk of the cases lie between 'neither' and 'agree,' while the frequency distribution for 'work graded in a reasonable time' is bimodal, with cases falling into 'somewhat disagree' and 'somewhat agree'. In view of this information, we can observe that 'work graded in a reasonable time' is less positively scored than 'opportunities for assistance.'





Interpreting and using students' qualitative comments

How can we make student comments data less overwhelming?

Students' end-of-term written comments add rich information to quantitative USRI data. At the same time, they are challenging to decipher and make sense of. Too often written comments are processed by scrolling through piles of student surveys leading to less than systematic conclusions. In particular, the tendency for negative comments to disproportionately capture and hold our attention (Artze-Vega, 2014) can be problematic, both for

individual instructors processing their qualitative comments and for those in an assessment role. Drawing conclusions about written comments requires that we systematically examine and analyze these data. While those in a position to evaluate teaching are unlikely to undertake this process, they would do well to introduce it to individual instructors so that they can both self-assess and offer helpful summaries of their teaching for evaluative purposes.

Asking good questions

There is no standardized set of questions for gathering end-of-term qualitative comments from students on our campus. Individual faculties, departments, and sometimes instructors are tasked with establishing open-ended questions that are typically administered alongside USRI surveys. It is often useful for instructors to ask questions pertinent to a particular teaching and learning approach, resource, and/or assessment that they may want feedback on. However, a broader set of more standardized questions is also recommended. Lewis (2001) recognizes the challenges in generating meaningful qualitative data from all students rather than just those at the extreme ends of loving or being dissatisfied with a course. She suggests using the following prompts to increase both the usefulness and frequency of student written comments:

- What helped your learning the most in this class?
- What hindered your learning the most in this class?
- What suggestions for changes do you have that would have improved your learning in this class? (Lewis, 2001, p. 31)

Organizing and analyzing data

In order to organize student comments into a coherent data set so that they can be made sense of, it is advisable to group them into categories that represent key themes. There are numerous coding schemes available and individuals might want to create their own depending on their teaching and learning priorities. Table 1 provides an example schema based on typically identified components of effective teaching. As illustrated in the table, within each key theme, student comments are grouped according to those that are positive versus those that indicate areas for improvement. An instructor might include a few exemplary comments within each cell of the table to summarize the main points of the feedback. Some cells may also remain empty. Finally, the 'notes to self' section allows for instructor reflection to be part of the analytic process.

Table 1: Example Qualitative Student Feedback Coding Matrix

Key themes	Comments: Working	Comments: Needs work	Notes to self:
Instructional strategies and resources			
Interactions / climate / engagement			
Subject matter / content			
Organization / clarity			
Assessments/ assignments/feedback			

Adapted from Lewis, 2001; Reid & Graham, 2014

Building on the above table, this framework (adapted from Reid & Graham, 2014) further breaks down key themes into subcategories. This schema provides ideas for how to get to specifics and can be altered so that subcategories pertinent to an individual's course can be highlighted.

1. Engaging learners: Instructional strategies

- a. Lectures/discussions/critiques/ group work
- b. Multiple means of engagement
- c. Opportunities for experiential learning
- d. Lab/seminar/studio activities

2. Appropriate assessments: Exams, assignments, projects, and grading

- a. Grading (transparency, clear expectations, fairness, feedback, etc.)
- b. Lab/studio assignments/projects
- c. Tests/quizzes/exams
- d. Papers/reflective journals/eportfolios
- e. Other: oral presentations/simulations/ video assignments/group work

3. Creating community: Learning environment

- a. Faculty-student interactions
- b. Student-student interactions
- c. Collaborative teaching and learning opportunities
- d. Respect for diversity and perspectives in the classroom

4. Course content:

- a. Current/relevant/interesting
- b. Organized/structured/logical flow
- c. Learning outcomes articulated/ appropriate
- d. Appropriate challenge

5. Support materials:

- a. Textbooks/readings/videos
- b. Lecture notes/study guides/FAQs
- c. Course outline/learning outcomes
- d. D2L site

Once the qualitative analysis is complete, Reid & Graham (2014) recommend connecting back to the quantitative USRI results and reflecting on the following questions:

- Does the qualitative student feedback help make sense of the USRI data?
- Are there additional sources of data that can be used to help assess the course?
- How does this feedback compare with feedback from similar courses taught before?

Receiving qualitative feedback

Openly receiving student feedback can be difficult when negative assessments and comments are inevitable. Attention to the process of reviewing student feedback as well as the content is useful. Here are a few recommendations in terms of thinking about the process of taking in and dealing with student comments (adapted from Vanderbilt University, n.d. and Artze-Vega, 2014):

- Pick a time when you have enough time to digest at least some of the information
- You might plan to read the comments with a trusted colleague or friend.
- Take your experience into account. For example, are you new to teaching, the course, the department or the university?
- Recognize how the characteristics of your course might influence student comments (level, size, elective/required, etc.).
- Know that almost all faculty members receive negative feedback, even those that are senior and appear to be highly successful.
- Allow yourself to acknowledge that negative feedback can feel hurtful or make you angry, but your responses to your critics may also offer you rich insight into opportunities to improve your teaching practice.
- Be aware that we tend to focus on the few 'loud' negative comments rather than recognizing broader themes in the data. There is likely counter-evidence to be found in positive comments that contradict harsh statements. Seeking out and dwelling on positive comments can also serve to rebalance the 'loud' negatives that we hold onto.
- Be proactive about organizing and analyzing student feedback so that those in a position to evaluate your teaching are guided by your reflective process.

Summarizing using reflective memos

How might we consolidate and summarize student feedback when all is said and done?

Developing a post-semester reflective memo allows an opportunity for instructors to consolidate what they've learned from their analysis of student feedback data and to reflect on the implications of this learning for their future teaching practice. The memo also provides a document that can be revisited for goal setting and growth, and shared with others — such as department or unit heads — to communicate proactively about one's teaching. Receiving this type of analysis and reflection can be helpful for department heads who would otherwise be tasked with making sense of student feedback data without a systematic analysis or contextual information that might be important.

An end-of-year letter:

One example of a reflective memo takes the form of a letter that is sent to the department head at the end of each academic year (Dr. Jim Stallard, University of Calgary, personal communication). Specifically, in this example, analysis of USRI and student qualitative comments from two courses are compiled into a two-page reflective summary letter and sent to the department head every spring. Jim's structure for the post-semester letter is as follows:

- **Introduction:** Identify two courses, one from the fall and one from the winter term, and explain why you've chosen these courses for your reflective letter. Provide a brief overview with information about the course, assessments, special circumstances, and any other appropriate contextual information.
- **USRIs:** Discuss each course separately using the following headings:
 - **Summary table of the USRI scores distributions** – discuss overall impressions of the course
 - › **Three lowest USRI mode scores** – discuss each separately
 - › **Three highest USRI mode scores** – discuss each separately
- **Student comments:**
 - **Positive comments about my teaching**
 - › **Identify key themes** including quotes for one course
 - **Areas for improvement in my teaching**
 - › **Identify key themes** including quotes for one course
- **Moving forward:**
 - Synthesizing quantitative and qualitative data, final reflections on moving forward.
 - › I am going to **STOP...**
 - › I am going to **CONTINUE...**
 - › I am going to **START...**
- **Conclusion:**
 - **Thank you for reading this** – offer to meet to discuss further.

Communicating about student feedback

How do we engage in helpful conversations with colleagues about student feedback?

It is useful to consider how to prepare for and have conversations about student feedback. In this section you will find, an overview of the concept of feedback literacy, a model for how to give and receive feedback, and some suggestions for coaching conversations. These resources can be adapted to meet your needs.

Developing feedback literacy

In an ideal world, the entire academic community would be skilled in giving and receiving feedback. Based on a meta-analysis of feedback seeking behavior (Anseel, Beatty, Shen, Lievens & Sackett, 2015), it appears that the ideal way to embrace feedback is through the development and understanding of the aims, purposes and processes of feedback, as well as skills in giving and receiving feedback. This multifaceted competency is identified as feedback literacy (Carless & Boud, 2018; Sutton, 2012), a “complex process” (Sutton, 2012, p. 39) for both the teacher and learner that requires dialogue, skill development, and practice.

Building on this description, Carless and Boud (2018) offered a working definition: “feedback literacy denotes the understandings, capacities and dispositions needed to make sense of information and use it to enhance work or learning strategies” (p. 1). They suggest providing opportunities for both instructors and students to develop feedback literacy skills can enhance teaching development and student learning. In their study on feedback for teaching development, Jeffs et al. (2021) support the value of feedback skills and encourage institutions to enhance opportunities towards a culture of feedback literacy.

Henderson et al. (2019, p. 1406), propose conditions that enable effective feedback such as the capacity, design and culture for feedback are enabled. The conditions they list will also contribute to developing feedback literacy.

Capacity

- Learners and educators understand and value feedback
- Learners are active in the feedback process
- Educators seek and use evidence to plan and judge effectiveness
- Learners and educators have access to appropriate space and technology

Designs for feedback

- Information provided is usable and learners know how to use it
- It is tailored to meet the different needs of learners
- A variety of sources and modes are used as appropriate
- Learning outcomes of multiple tasks are aligned

Culture for feedback

- It is a valued and visible enterprise at all levels
- There are processes in place to ensure consistency and quality
- Leaders and educators ensure continuity of vision and commitment
- Educators have flexibility to deploy resources to best effect

Giving and receiving feedback: A model

“One of the best ways to improve our ability to give feedback well is by improving our understanding of what it takes to receive feedback well”

(Triad Consulting Group, 2014, p. 6).

Giving Feedback	Receiving Feedback
PREPARE	PREPARE
<p>TIMING is everything: Plan, invite, provide notice, prepare, and schedule.</p> <p>FORMAT: Written, verbal, informal, and formal.</p> <p>INTENT: Approach as formative and developmental.</p> <p>APPRECIATE: Appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback.</p>	<p>TIMING is everything: Expect, seek, prepare, and schedule.</p> <p>FORMAT: Read, listen, and observe.</p> <p>EXPECT: Accept the intent as formative and developmental.</p> <p>APPRECIATE: Develop appreciation for feedback and seek out opportunities.</p>
GIVE FEEDBACK	RECEIVE FEEDBACK
<p>ROLE: Consider your role. Are you a teacher, student, coach, mentor, colleague, supervisor?</p> <p>GIVER: Be specific about the feedback: What do you want the receiver to do and/or change? When and how?</p> <p>AFFECT: The most difficult part of feedback to deal with is your apprehension of giving feedback, plus considering the feelings and emotions of the receiver.</p> <p>TONE AND ATTITUDE: Giving feedback requires an intentional, calm, and appreciative approach. Consider how you would like to receive feedback.</p>	<p>ROLE: Consider your role. Are you a teacher, student, colleague, employee?</p> <p>RECEIVER: Consider the feedback. Is it accurate? Take time to reflect, ask clarifying questions. Is there a deadline or preferred action? You make the judgment about the feedback received.</p> <p>AFFECT: The most difficult part of feedback is to deal with feelings and emotions. Practice and develop feedback skills, prepare for feedback, and be aware of one's triggers (self-awareness).</p> <p>TONE AND ATTITUDE: Receiving feedback requires a calm, non-defensive, open approach and time to process. Consider how you would give feedback.</p>
ACTION AND FOLLOW-UP	ACTION AND FOLLOW-UP
As a giver of feedback you will have asked, suggested, or required a specific action such as revision and/or change and provide a timeline. If appropriate, request to follow-up.	As a receiver it will be clear to you what the giver asked, suggested, or required you to do with guidance and a timeline. Your role is to consider and respond to the feedback. If requested, or as the receiver you can initiate a follow-up.

Adapted from Carless & Boud 2018; Hirst, 2015; Triad Consulting Group, 2014.

Handout prepared by Jeffs, C. (2019). Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, University of Calgary.

A framework for coaching and mentorship

For those in leadership positions, it can be helpful to frame conversations about teaching and learning in a growth-oriented fashion. Characteristics of high-quality conversations include: trust, respect, reciprocity, open dialogue, careful listening, thoughtful responses, and room for people to find solutions to challenges and areas that inspire their growth. The following framework (Nowell, Kenny, & Reid, 2019) provides a comparison of approaches to a coaching or mentoring conversation.

	Coaching Conversations	Mentorship Conversations
DESCRIPTION AND GOALS	Coaching is about enabling and empowering others to identify goals, solutions and actions to address specific challenges or opportunities on their own. Coaching focuses less on sharing knowledge, experience, and advice and more on asking questions to help others unlock their potential and maximize their performance.	Mentorship focuses more on sharing advice based on experience to foster self-exploration, career advancement, confidence, competence, and socialization in a positive, mutually beneficial, and reciprocal relationship.
EXAMPLE GUIDING QUESTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me more about the challenge or opportunity you are facing? • What contributed most to this situation? • Why is this important and meaningful to you? • What strengths do you bring to this situation? • What opportunities for further growth do you see? • What is getting in the way of your ability to adjust or respond to this challenge or opportunity? • What will you do next? What is one small step you will take? • What help will you need to move forward? • What outcome would be ideal? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would you most like to learn more about? How could my expertise or past experiences be of benefit? • What are your future teaching and learning goals? • How can I be of support to you? • How can I help you achieve your goals? • How do you like to receive feedback? • Why did you first get into teaching? • What aspects of teaching do you find most rewarding? • What experiences and people have most influenced your aspirations to become a teacher? • What networks are you engaged in that help you with your teaching and learning interests? • What groups might you join or people might you get to know for development in the areas you have identified as most important?

Handout prepared by:

Nowell, L., Kenny, N., & Reid, L. (2019). *Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning, University of Calgary.*



Final thoughts: Comprehensive teaching assessments

It is our hope that this *Making Sense of Student Feedback Guide* provides practical information and resources that you can utilize in your role as an instructor or as an academic leader. The focus of this guide has been on end-of-term student evaluations of teaching — both quantitative ratings and qualitative comments — which offer students an opportunity to share perceptions of their experiences in our courses. Whether self-assessing your own teaching, or evaluating and providing feedback to colleagues, student end-of-term feedback offers valuable information.

We also recognize that end-of-term student evaluations are merely one of many possible perspectives on what might count as data from students. Not only can we expand on evidence of student learning, robust evaluations of teaching require a 360-degree view which involves drawing upon evidence from numerous sources including students, colleagues, community members, and instructors themselves. For a comprehensive perspective on how student feedback can be used in teaching assessments, and on how other sources of evidence can be included in reporting and assessment processes, we invite you to review the *Teaching Philosophies and Teaching Dossiers Guide* (Kenny, Berenson, Jeffs, Nowell, & Grant, 2018).

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Appendix 1.

Glossary of terms

The literature on feedback and assessment (summative and formative) includes many terms, which are sometimes used interchangeably. In this guide, the focus is on evaluation and/or assessment of the instructor. The following glossary of terms, adapted from Cookson (2018) and others, demonstrates a multitude of terms and applications for both student feedback for learning and instructor feedback for development.

As Cookson (2018) stated, even though “...these concepts are ... highly subjective and in a constant state of flux” (p. 934-935), it is useful to have an understanding of these various definitions and how these terms are used in different contexts in higher education.

Assessment as Learning

The process of using assessment to develop and support metacognition for students (Western and Northern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Education, 2006)

Assessment for Learning

Often used as a synonym to formative assessment, but also refers to the activation of the teacher to reflect upon their own teaching to advance student learning, meant to be a process. (Cookson, 2018)

Assessment of Learning

Typically used as a synonym for *summative assessment*, particularly when *assessment for learning* or *assessment as learning* is used.

Evaluation

Used to refer to the assessment of a program, lesson, or course, but may also be used interchangeably with the term assessment, which is more common in the American usage (Cookson, 2018).

Formative Assessment

Assessment used to discover learning gaps and provide information to guide future learning with a focus on curriculum objectives (Cookson, 2018).

Formative Feedback

Often used as a synonym for formative assessment through feedback (e.g., Leighton et al., 2013; Perera et al., 2008; Shute, 2008). May also refer to the feedback that teachers gather about their own teaching (e.g. Jeffs et al., 2018).

Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs)

Summative feedback given by the student about the instructor. Common terms include “student evaluations of teaching”, “student ratings of instruction”, “teaching evaluations”, and “course evaluations” (Linse, 2017, p. 94.)

Summative Assessment

Refers to assessments that are used to provide a judgement on student learning (Cookson, 2018).

Prepared by Britney Paris, PhD Candidate, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary. (June, 2020).

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Appendix 2. USRI sample report

Overall Section Rating

Course Number - Course Name
COURSE INSTRUCTOR

Term /Year

Number of times the instructor has taught this course (last 10 years including the current term):	2	USRI enrolment:	243	Valid instruments received:	85	Response rate:	34.98 %
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Rating Item	This Section Mode	Frequency Distribution						
		Strongly Disagree (=1)	Disagree (=2)	Somewhat Disagree (=3)	Neither (=4)	Somewhat Agree (=5)	Agree (=6)	Strongly Agree (=7)
2. Enough detail in course outline	7		1	1	1	11	31	37
3. Course consistent with outline	7				1	9	28	43
4. Content well organized	7		1	7	2	14	26	31
5. Student questions responded to	7			1		9	29	44
6. Communicated with enthusiasm	7				2	6	21	54
7. Opportunities for assistance	7			1	3	11	22	46
8. Students treated respectfully	7					1	14	69
9. Evaluation methods fair	7	1	1	2	2	13	20	46
10. Work graded in reasonable time	7			1		2	28	52
11. I learned a lot in this course	7		2	3	5	15	21	38
12. Support materials helpful	7		2	4	9	11	23	33
								1

UNIVERSAL STUDENT RATINGS OF INSTRUCTION (REPORTING ONLY)

Frequency Distribution

Rating Item	Rating Item	Rating Item
2	<div><div>0</div><div>Strongly Disagree</div><div>1</div><div>Disagree</div><div>1</div><div>Somewhat Disagree</div><div>1</div><div>Neither</div><div>11</div><div>Somewhat Agree</div><div>31</div><div>Agree</div><div>37</div><div>Strongly Agree</div><div>0</div><div>N/A</div></div>	<div><div>0</div><div>Strongly Disagree</div><div>0</div><div>Disagree</div><div>0</div><div>Somewhat Disagree</div><div>0</div><div>Neither</div><div>1</div><div>Somewhat Agree</div><div>14</div><div>Agree</div><div>69</div><div>Strongly Agree</div><div>0</div><div>N/A</div></div>
3	<div><div>0</div><div>Strongly Disagree</div><div>0</div><div>Disagree</div><div>0</div><div>Somewhat Disagree</div><div>1</div><div>Neither</div><div>9</div><div>Somewhat Agree</div><div>28</div><div>Agree</div><div>43</div><div>Strongly Agree</div><div>0</div><div>N/A</div></div>	<div><div>1</div><div>Strongly Disagree</div><div>1</div><div>Disagree</div><div>2</div><div>Somewhat Disagree</div><div>2</div><div>Neither</div><div>13</div><div>Somewhat Agree</div><div>20</div><div>Agree</div><div>46</div><div>Strongly Agree</div><div>0</div><div>N/A</div></div>
4	<div><div>0</div><div>Strongly Disagree</div><div>1</div><div>Disagree</div><div>7</div><div>Somewhat Disagree</div><div>2</div><div>Neither</div><div>14</div><div>Somewhat Agree</div><div>26</div><div>Agree</div><div>31</div><div>Strongly Agree</div><div>0</div><div>N/A</div></div>	<div><div>0</div><div>Strongly Disagree</div><div>0</div><div>Disagree</div><div>1</div><div>Somewhat Disagree</div><div>0</div><div>Neither</div><div>2</div><div>Somewhat Agree</div><div>28</div><div>Agree</div><div>52</div><div>Strongly Agree</div><div>0</div><div>N/A</div></div>
5	<div><div>0</div><div>Strongly Disagree</div><div>0</div><div>Disagree</div><div>1</div><div>Somewhat Disagree</div><div>0</div><div>Neither</div><div>9</div><div>Somewhat Agree</div><div>29</div><div>Agree</div><div>44</div><div>Strongly Agree</div><div>0</div><div>N/A</div></div>	<div><div>0</div><div>Strongly Disagree</div><div>2</div><div>Disagree</div><div>3</div><div>Somewhat Disagree</div><div>5</div><div>Neither</div><div>15</div><div>Somewhat Agree</div><div>21</div><div>Agree</div><div>38</div><div>Strongly Agree</div><div>0</div><div>N/A</div></div>
6	<div><div>0</div><div>Strongly Disagree</div><div>0</div><div>Disagree</div><div>0</div><div>Somewhat Disagree</div><div>2</div><div>Neither</div><div>6</div><div>Somewhat Agree</div><div>21</div><div>Agree</div><div>54</div><div>Strongly Agree</div><div>0</div><div>N/A</div></div>	<div><div>0</div><div>Strongly Disagree</div><div>2</div><div>Disagree</div><div>4</div><div>Somewhat Disagree</div><div>9</div><div>Neither</div><div>11</div><div>Somewhat Agree</div><div>23</div><div>Agree</div><div>33</div><div>Strongly Agree</div><div>1</div><div>N/A</div></div>
7	<div><div>0</div><div>Strongly Disagree</div><div>0</div><div>Disagree</div><div>1</div><div>Somewhat Disagree</div><div>3</div><div>Neither</div><div>11</div><div>Somewhat Agree</div><div>22</div><div>Agree</div><div>46</div><div>Strongly Agree</div><div>0</div><div>N/A</div></div>	

Course Number - Course Name
COURSE INSTRUCTOR

Term / Year

UNIVERSAL STUDENT RATINGS OF INSTRUCTION (REPORTING ONLY)

Demographics For Rating Item 1 - 6

Note: Starting Fall 2010 student EMPLID's are not being collected, therefore, only selected demographic data are reported.

Note: In order to protect student confidentiality, category results are withheld (indicated by WH) if there are 3 or less respondents in any cell for that category.

		Rating Item										
		2		3		4		5		6		
Program Requirement	Required	18.9	6.24	0.76	6.41	0.68	5.69	1.44	6.28	0.80	6.50	0.72
	Choice of several	2.9	6.00	0.89	6.00	0.76	5.14	1.25	6.17	0.69	6.00	0.76
	Not required	12.3	6.21	1.19	6.50	0.73	6.33	0.72	6.55	0.72	6.67	0.70
	Unknown	0.8	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH
Course in Department	Yes	9.5	5.95	1.02	6.23	0.79	5.68	1.10	6.23	0.60	6.32	0.70
	No	22.6	6.30	0.92	6.44	0.69	5.92	1.25	6.46	0.81	6.61	0.68
	Major unknown	2.9	6.33	0.75	6.57	0.73	5.86	1.73	6.29	0.88	6.57	1.05
	Unknown	0.0	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**
Class Attendance	0-40%	0.0	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**
	41-80%	3.3	6.38	0.70	6.25	0.66	5.88	1.45	6.63	0.48	6.63	0.70
	81-100%	31.3	6.19	0.97	6.42	0.74	5.86	1.25	6.38	0.78	6.53	0.74
	Not Applicable	0.0	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**
Workload	Unknown	0.4	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH
	Much lower	0.0	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**
	Lower	5.3	6.23	0.70	6.38	0.62	5.92	1.07	5.92	1.14	6.54	0.93
	About the same	19.8	6.38	0.64	6.41	0.68	5.91	1.28	6.50	0.62	6.54	0.68
Expected Grade	Higher	6.2	6.00	0.97	6.38	0.74	5.46	1.28	6.20	0.75	6.43	0.73
	Much higher	3.3	6.13	1.36	6.25	1.09	5.88	1.36	6.75	0.43	6.57	0.73
	Unknown	0.4	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH
	A+,A,A-	16.5	6.34	0.98	6.62	0.54	6.37	0.67	6.61	0.63	6.60	0.66
	B+, B, B-	15.2	6.19	0.91	6.19	0.84	5.63	1.35	6.24	0.85	6.49	0.81
	C+, C, C-	2.5	5.83	0.37	6.17	0.69	4.33	1.60	5.83	0.69	6.17	0.69
	D+,D,F	0.0	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**
	Pass	0.0	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**
	N/A	0.4	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH
	Unknown	0.4	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH

Course Number - Course Name
COURSE INSTRUCTOR

Term / Year

UNIVERSAL STUDENT RATINGS OF INSTRUCTION (REPORTING ONLY)

Demographics For Rating Item 7 - 12

Note: Starting Fall 2010 student EMPLID's are not being collected, therefore, only selected demographic data are reported.

Note: In order to protect student confidentiality, category results are withheld (indicated by WH) if there are 3 or less respondents in any cell for that category.

		% of Resp	Rating Item											
			7		8		9		10		11		12	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Program Requirement	Required	18.9	6.32	0.85	6.80	0.45	6.15	1.12	6.51	0.58	5.80	1.35	5.60	1.45
	Choice of several	2.9	6.00	1.07	6.71	0.45	6.00	0.76	6.50	0.50	6.29	0.70	5.50	1.26
	Not required	12.3	6.37	0.98	6.83	0.37	6.30	1.29	6.67	0.79	6.03	1.19	6.17	1.05
	Unknown	0.8	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH
Course in Department	Yes	9.5	6.29	0.88	6.82	0.49	6.04	1.23	6.50	0.58	5.78	1.18	5.43	1.14
	No	22.6	6.36	0.84	6.82	0.39	6.20	1.20	6.61	0.52	6.06	1.22	5.94	1.34
	Major unknown	2.9	6.00	1.41	6.71	0.45	6.29	1.16	6.43	1.40	5.71	1.58	5.86	1.55
	Unknown	0.0	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**
Class Attendance	0-40%	0.0	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**
	41-80%	3.3	6.38	0.86	6.88	0.33	6.38	1.65	6.57	0.49	6.00	0.87	5.38	0.99
	81-100%	31.3	6.30	0.93	6.80	0.43	6.13	1.15	6.56	0.68	5.96	1.29	5.86	1.36
	Not Applicable	0.0	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**
Workload	Unknown	0.4	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH
	Much lower	0.0	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**
	Lower	5.3	5.92	1.14	6.69	0.46	6.31	0.91	6.23	1.12	5.85	1.17	5.69	1.49
	About the same	19.8	6.48	0.74	6.85	0.36	6.44	0.86	6.68	0.47	6.06	1.24	5.98	1.31
Expected Grade	Higher	6.2	6.07	1.06	6.67	0.60	5.87	0.81	6.33	0.60	5.53	1.20	5.60	1.08
	Much higher	3.3	6.38	0.86	7.00	0.00	5.50	2.00	6.86	0.35	6.13	1.36	5.25	1.39
	Unknown	0.4	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH
	A+, A, A-	16.5	6.44	0.81	6.82	0.38	6.38	1.13	6.67	0.73	6.41	0.87	6.32	1.00
	B+, B, B-	15.2	6.28	0.96	6.78	0.47	6.05	1.14	6.46	0.60	5.78	1.25	5.58	1.32
	C+, C, C-	2.5	6.17	0.90	7.00	0.00	5.67	1.80	6.80	0.40	5.17	1.07	4.67	1.25
	D+, D, D, F	0.0	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**
	Pass	0.0	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**
	N/A	0.4	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH
	Unknown	0.4	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH	WH

Course Number - Course Name
COURSE INSTRUCTOR

Term / Year



The Making Sense of Student Feedback Guide

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