



## Action-Oriented Feedback | Instructors' Bulletin

As the BC LINC community moves toward PBLA implementation, now is a good time to begin to incorporate action-oriented feedback—feedback that aims to move students from where they are now toward their future learning goals—into our teaching practices. Action-oriented feedback will be an expected part of PBLA, and yet the key principles of this kind of feedback can be seamlessly woven into any kind of teaching and assessment context.

### 7 Principles of Good Feedback

Nicoll and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) outline seven principles of good feedback, summarized below with suggested strategies for implementation.

Good feedback practice:

**1. helps clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, expected standards);**

- describe criteria/standards that define different levels of achievement
- allow for discussion and reflection about criteria before an assignment is due

**2. facilitates the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning;**

- have students reflect before and after a task to see their progress
- encourage peer-evaluation for tasks

**3. delivers high quality information to students about their learning;**

- give corrective advise, don't just focus on the strengths and weaknesses
- limit amount of feedback and prioritize

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### Action-Oriented Feedback and PBLA

According to the *Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA): Guide for Teachers and Programs* (2014), typical techniques for incorporating action-oriented feedback include the following:



- Provide “comments only” feedback. Research shows that marks and grades do not enhance learning.
- Provide action-oriented feedback that gives students a way forward. Ego-oriented feedback, such as “Good job!” may encourage students but does not move their learning forward.
- Use tools such as the feedback grid shown below on what the students should continue to do, what they should start to do or do more of, what they might think about as their next challenge, and what they should stop doing.

Offer feedback by beginning anywhere on the grid and working all the way around.

<p><b>Continue...</b> Comment on aspects of performance that were effective. Be specific and describe impact. Highlight things that you would like to see done in the future.</p>	<p><b>Start of do more...</b> Identify behaviour that the student knows how to do and should do, or do more frequently.</p>
<p><b>Consider...</b> Highlight a point of growth for the student, a “do-able” challenge for future interactions.</p>	<p><b>Stop or do less...</b> Point out actions that were not helpful or could be harmful. Be specific and indicate potential impact.</p>

- Prioritize feedback. Address the most critical needs first and limit suggestions to one or two specific ideas.
- Keep feedback succinct, specific, and related to goals and criteria. Three seems to be an optimal number of feedback comments if students are to act on them.
- Have students *do* something with the feedback: for example, “Correct the errors in your paragraph, and then rewrite it.”



*PBLA Guide* (2014), pp. 16-17

# Action-Oriented Feedback

## Feedback Techniques to Avoid



### The Sandwich Approach

The sandwich approach, where feedback is given in the form of positive/constructive/positive, can be confusing to students. Some may hear only the praise and ignore the criticism. Others may know that criticism is coming and completely ignore the praise. Critics of this approach call it the “sh\*t” sandwich” and advise against using it. Instead, they advocate giving timely, specific, and clear feedback.



### Vague Feedback

Similarly, using vague platitudes doesn't offer specific feedback to learners and may instead only serve to lift egos, or deflate them. While this kind of feedback isn't necessarily damaging, it should be used in moderation and not as the meaningful feedback that accompanies assessments and key assignments.

## Further Reading

“Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: a model and seven principles of good feedback practice” by David J. Nicol and Debra Macfarlane-Dick in *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 21, No. 2, April 2006, pp. 199-218.

*Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA): Guide for Teachers and Programs* by Joanne C. Pettis (2014).

## 7 Principles of Good Feedback (con't)

4. encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning;
  - have one-on-one student-teacher sessions
  - organize small groups for students to discuss feedback on assignments
5. encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem;
  - give comments only, not marks
  - commend effort and displayed strategies
6. provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance;
  - have students respond to feedback by redoing the assignment
  - give frequent feedback before an assignment is due
7. provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape teaching.
  - reflect on students' assessed tasks to adapt teaching
  - ask students to identify where they are being challenged

Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick (2006).

Shawna Williams, a LISTN Instructional Resource Coordinator, will be presenting on Action-Oriented Feedback at REALIZE, the national online forum for EAL/ESL professionals. The event runs January 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015. For more information, follow the link at [www.myenglishonline.ca/for-teachers/realize/](http://www.myenglishonline.ca/for-teachers/realize/).



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