

14 WORKING WITH FEEDBACK

Throughout your education you have been receiving feedback on your work, either through comments on your school work, or through reports and exam results. This will continue in higher education and you must ensure that you make the most of that feedback right from the start of your studies. Responding to lecturer feedback on subsequent assignments by adapting your work appropriately can have a major impact on your marks. This chapter is aimed at increasing your awareness of feedback and improving your understanding of lecturer feedback comments.

This chapter will cover:

- the purpose of feedback
- formative and summative assessment and feedback
- making sense of lecturers' feedback
- contacting your lecturer
- consequences of ignoring or not understanding feedback.

USING THIS CHAPTER

If you want to dip into this section	Page	If you want to try the activities	Page
Introduction	256	14.1 Reflection on feedback	256
The purpose of feedback	256	14.2 Evaluating feedback on drafts and final scripts	259
Formative and summative assessment and feedback	259	14.3 Rating the importance of feedback	260
Making sense of lecturers' feedback	264	14.4 Feedback methods used in your context	260
Contacting your lecturer	269	14.5 Preparing for writing in a feedback notebook	264
Consequences of ignoring or not understanding feedback	270		
Summary	270		

INTRODUCTION

Most of you recognise that the main reason lecturers give feedback on your assignments is to improve your work and help you achieve a higher grade by showing you your strengths and weaknesses. You may feel there are secondary reasons too, such as feedback is a justification for the mark or it is intended to improve your confidence. There may be some of you who feel feedback is unnecessary as the work has already been done and marked. We hope that by the end of this chapter you will learn to appreciate the importance of lecturer feedback and be armed with some strategies for using it to your advantage.

THE PURPOSE OF FEEDBACK

We assume you are in higher education because you are interested in learning more about your subject as well as the overall experience. Whilst studying you need to show that you are indeed acquiring more knowledge and the way to prove that is through the assignments that you write and the tests that you sit. Lecturers also aim to increase your knowledge and your interest in the subject you are studying. They would like to see you succeed in your chosen path and therefore, in addition to the time they spend teaching you in class, they also try to give you more individual attention through tutorials and written feedback on your assignments. You may occasionally feel that they could be paying you more individual attention, but before you become overly critical, do consider the number of students they have to deal with on your programme. Lecturers are aware of their time constraints and they therefore devise ways of providing feedback which may at times seem rather generic (e.g. pro-forma feedback sheets with tick boxes). In most cases, nevertheless, further written feedback is provided on specific coursework. The overall aim of that feedback is to improve your future work. It is intended to help you build on your strengths and diminish your weaknesses. So, although the feedback given is usually on a completed, finished piece of work, the comments made by the lecturer should be taken on board for future assignments. It may be worth considering your current thoughts about feedback before continuing with the chapter. We clearly feel that feedback is extremely important, which is also why we are providing you with feedback on the activities in this book.

Activity 14.1 Reflection on feedback

- 1 Do you know where your assessed work is?
 - Yes, I know exactly where it is
 - Yes, I could perhaps find it if I needed to
 - Yes, I threw it away
 - No, I don't know where it is

- 2 How many times do you usually look at each piece of assessed work after it is marked? Circle one of the answers below
 Never Once 2–4 times Over 5 times
- 3 Why do/don't you look at your assessed work again?
- 4 Have you ever had the opportunity to get comments on *drafts* of your work?
 No Yes
- 5 If yes, how useful did you find the comments?

- 6 In which of the following ways would you prefer lecturers to comment on your work? Tick ALL that apply:
- Written comments on a separate piece of paper (assignment cover sheet)
 - Written comments throughout your work (e.g. on the relevant parts of the essay pages)
 - Written comments at the bottom of the page of the submitted text
 - Written comments throughout your work and on the assignment cover sheet
 - Written comments with an opportunity to talk to lecturer
 - Recorded (oral) comments
 - Emailed written comments
 - Would prefer to agree with individual lecturers on a specific method of receiving feedback
- 7 i) What type of comments do you *expect* to get on your written work? Tick ALL that apply. ii) What type of comments would you *prefer* to get on your written work? Tick ALL that apply.

Expect *Prefer*

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Praise. For example: 'Very good explanation!' |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Comments on your content and ideas. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Comments on the organisation of your ideas in the text. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Comments on your use of language e.g spelling, punctuation and grammar. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Corrections of grammar and/or spelling. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Naming of type of error with a correction. For example: 'Spelling: thrOUGH' |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Use of <u>underlining</u> to note errors but no correction. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Questions about the error. For example: 'Why?' 'Where did you find this information?' |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Request for further information. For example: 'Further explanation required/needed here.' |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Ticks (✓) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Use of a code to show what error has been made. For example, Gr = grammar, Sp = spelling, ? = unclear sentence/idea |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | No comments. Only a mark. |



14 Working with feedback

8 Would you like the opportunity to discuss with your lecturer the type of comments you would find useful?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Source: Martala and Parry (2008)

It is always worth spending some time reflecting on how you do things and why. Clearly, there are no correct answers to this exercise. Its main aim is to raise your awareness in terms of how you view feedback and how much further you are willing to embrace it. Compare your preferences and expectations to the actual feedback you receive and be prepared to discuss this with your lecturers. Research carried out at a university in Hertfordshire (Martala and Parry, 2008), for example, showed that the majority of students did not particularly like ticks whereas they expected written comments, especially on organisation, all over their work. They were, in fact, mainly receiving ticks on their work and feedback on assignment cover sheets. Moreover, whereas both students and lecturers had expressed an interest in negotiating feedback methods with each other, only a small proportion were given this opportunity. Feedback is intended as a two-way communication process but students need to approach their lecturers for this to occur. It is up to you to take that step towards improved communication methods with your lecturers.

TIP *Communicate your feedback preferences to your lecturers.*

Negative issues of feedback

We feel that current terminology may conceal the benefit of feedback because of emphasis on the 'back'. When the word 'feedback' is mentioned, it is clear that the comments relate to a finished piece of work rather than a future one. Also, despite lecturers' efforts to give constructive criticism relating to your text, the work you have created is extremely personal to you and any criticism of it may inevitably be taken personally. You may feel disillusioned by negative remarks and problems with your writing and you may push the feedback aside and ignore it. That would unfortunately weaken your academic prospects.

'Feedforward' as a suggested solution

To help change your view of feedback, start thinking of the process as 'feed forward'. Many lecturers are already engaging with this concept which shifts the focus onto future rather than past assignments. The aim of feedforward is to suggest solutions which can be worked towards in future assignments thus making a direct link with the improvement of forthcoming work. Even if your lecturers are using the current feedback method, you may turn that into feedforward. An example

may help. The lecturer comments: 'There are too many quotes on this page.' In feedforward terms you could interpret this as: 'I need to use fewer quotes by paraphrasing and summarising more.' Naturally if you want to improve your marks, you will need to make sure that you act on the feedforward. (Lecturer comments are 'interpreted' later in the chapter.)

←
See
Chapter 10

FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

You may be aware of the terms 'formative' and 'summative' assessment. These are ways in which your lecturers assess and feed back on what you are learning or have learned on your course. In broad terms 'formative' assessment is intended to help you improve though it may not necessarily carry a mark or contribute to your final grade. 'Summative' assessment is used for work that carries a mark which will contribute to your final score. The examples of both types of assessment can be the same. Therefore an essay, a multiple choice test, the writing up of an experiment, can all be ways of assessing you and providing feedback. With formative assessment however, the essay is more likely to be a draft and the test or experiment is more like 'mock exams'.

Activity 14.2 Evaluating feedback on drafts and final scripts

Consider the writing of an essay as one example of both formative and summative assessment. The column on the left lists possible benefits of feedback. The other two columns are divided into 'draft essay' where formative feedback would be given, and 'essay' where summative feedback would be expected. Look at each proposed benefit and decide whether it would 'D = definitely', 'P = probably' or 'N = not likely' be of benefit to you for each type of essay. Circle the one you feel is appropriate.

Benefits of feedback (Which of the following do you think can be achieved if you act on the feedback?)	Draft essay (Circle one letter)	Essay (Circle one letter)
An improved writing style	D P N	D P N
A better knowledge of the referencing system	D P N	D P N
More careful editing skills	D P N	D P N
A better structure with well-organised paragraphs	D P N	D P N
Wider reading to support your points	D P N	D P N
Adherence to assignment guidelines	D P N	D P N
An increase in your mark on subsequent essays	D P N	D P N

Activity 14.3 Rating the importance of feedback

Looking at your answers above, which of these two types of feedback do you think is the most important for your academic success: formative or summative?

If you have not circled any Ns then you feel that a number of benefits can be gained from both formative and summative feedback. However, if you have circled Ns you may feel that it is too late to change your essay now despite the feedback. Do remember, however, that any feedback you receive relies on you actually making use of it. You may not be able to increase the mark of your current essay, but the lessons you have learned through the feedback should help you in your future work. You may find that just better planning or editing alleviates the problem or that you need to do more reading and practise more with exercises such as those found in this and other books.

Hopefully you have seen that both forms of assessment and feedback are equally important. They are both valuable ways of gauging your progress and identifying areas you may need to improve. It is unfortunately true that many students are more likely to take part in summative activities (which carry marks) rather than formative ones (which do not), thus missing out on valuable opportunities for improvement. Students often only look at the mark on a returned assignment and do not always pay sufficient attention to useful comments provided by the lecturers. The marks given for an assignment should be seen as a useful form of feedback rather than the main focus of your studies.

Activity 14.4 Feedback methods used in your context

It will help you to know the kind of formative and summative feedback methods utilised by your department. Look at the following list and tick all that apply. If you are not sure of some of the answers, try to find out by reading the course handbook and asking other students and your lecturers.

Formative feedback methods	Yes	No	Not sure
Lecturer feedback on drafts – this process is integrated into the course			
Lecturer feedback on drafts – non-integrated, informal comments made to students who ask			
Peer feedback* on drafts – this process is integrated into the course			
Whole class feedback on typical areas of difficulty			
Personal feedback – you are asked to rate and comment on your own work			

Formative feedback methods	Yes	No	Not sure
Feedback provided by academic skills unit (or similar student academic support centre)			
Other			
Summative feedback methods	Yes	No	Not sure
Lecturer feedback written on assignment cover sheet			
Lecturer feedback provided all over the assignment			
Lecturer feedback given on template forms			
Lecturer feedback on pro-forma tick-box grids			
Written lecturer feedback with opportunity for tutorial			
Whole class feedback on typical areas of difficulty			
Peer feedback*			
Personal feedback – you are asked to rate and comment on your own work			
A mark and feedback on your course website			
A mark on your course website followed by comments on your hard copy			
Other			

* Some students question the validity of peer feedback. In fact, peer feedback can be extremely valuable. A fresh pair of eyes may spot different things in the text. Moreover, if your peer cannot understand certain points in the text, it is highly likely that neither will your lecturer. At the same time, when you are reading a peer's work, you may pick up new ways of doing things.

TIP *Make sure you know what feedback methods are in place in your department.*

Knowing the various mechanisms in place better prepares you for the kind of help which is available. We would like to draw your attention to four areas, as follows.

1 Individual approaches to feedback differ

Despite the procedures in place for feedback, lecturers are all individuals and their approach may therefore be different. Some lecturers may make (coded) corrections on your text whereas others may only place ticks or write nothing. Some may only write on the assignment cover sheet whereas others may write on the top sheet, on the text, as footnotes and on a tick-box sheet at the back.

14 Working with feedback

Our advice is therefore not to rely on there being one particular type of feedback. Whenever your work is returned to you, carefully examine the pages from start to finish as you may miss something important.

2 Look beyond the overall mark

We strongly urge you not to rely purely on the mark you may have already received, whether poor or excellent.

Make sure you pick up your hard copy and examine it carefully. We suggest you keep a small feedback notebook and you dedicate one page to one repeated feedback comment, adding to it every time one of your assignments is returned to you. The following is an example of a student's entries into a feedback notebook.

Sample student notebook

Page 1	Page 2	Page 3
28 Oct Consult handbook for referencing conventions	17 Nov Make writing more cohesive – look at signalling words	17 Nov Use spellchecker
17 Nov Referencing conventions		

Two things to note here are:

- 1 The feedforward terminology used in the notebook (e.g. not 'lack of cohesion', but 'make writing more cohesive'; not 'inadequate referencing', but 'consult handbook for referencing conventions'). If your lecturer has written feedback, change it into feedforward terminology. Think of it in terms of what you can do in future work.
- 2 The repetition of the same problem on page 1. If you find that one area is constantly reappearing as an issue, you need to make sure that you tackle it for future assignments. Ask your lecturer or an academic skills unit (if applicable) for help.

TIP *This notebook will also be particularly useful if you choose to use the academic skills service, if one is available. The service will then be in a position to focus on the specific areas you need to improve.*

TIP *If you really want to impress, add a page at the start of your next assignment asking the lecturer to look at one particular area of your work which you are trying to improve on.*

3 Analyse positive and negative comments

Some lecturers may like to emphasise the positives whilst others may seem more critical.

Look through the positive comments with a fine-tooth comb. Some lecturers are so concerned about hurting students' feelings that they may 'cloud' the areas which need improvement with too many encouraging remarks. This may make you feel good, but it is not helping you much. For example:

Wide-ranging and interesting essay – well written and researched, covering the main points well, although perhaps lacking the necessary depth for analysis. But encouraging start.

Pat yourself on the back for the five areas done well, by all means, but do not overlook the sentence 'lacking the necessary depth for analysis'. As this is being mentioned, aim to do something about it whilst also continuing the good work.

On the other hand, when you read what seem overly critical remarks, do not take them to heart. Use the feedforward strategy we looked at earlier and choose one or two points to deal with in your next assignment rather than trying to fix everything at once. Most importantly, do not take the remarks personally. For example:

It is a shame you have restricted the majority of your discussion to information from lectures. You do not demonstrate your own understanding of the subject by simply regurgitating other people's examples. You must also use references throughout your work to acknowledge the sources of information/facts you discuss. You should also use more books/journals (academic sources) and fewer web references. This work does not reflect the 22-hour time burden.

Take a deep breath and appreciate that the lecturer has actually given you a great deal of useful feedback despite the negative language used. Rather than only mention two points in order to soften the blow, they seem to have covered every area that needs attention. This approach has probably saved you from poor marks in your future work as long as you make sure you carefully consider each point. Ask yourself if you would rather be marked down on five subsequent assignments for making mistakes you were not aware of. If you do not like the negative way in which this has been written, change it into feedforward language as described earlier.

4 Turnaround time

A specified turnaround time for assessed work forms part of university regulations. Five weeks is a common turnaround time, but you should check your institution's regulations. If the deadline has passed and you are still waiting, and as long as there has been no illness or other extenuating circumstances, you are entitled to ask your lecturer when your work will be returned.

If the work you are waiting for is in the form of a draft, then a one to two-week turnaround time is more appropriate.

Activity 14.5 Preparing for writing in a feedback notebook

Rewrite the following feedback comments using feedforward terminology.

- 1 Limited reading
- 2 Better structure needed
- 3 Lacking in critical depth
- 4 Lack of references
- 5 Spelling.

MAKING SENSE OF LECTURERS' FEEDBACK

Often the problem lies not with a lack of appreciation of feedback, but with a lack of understanding of what the feedback means and how to put it to use. This section attempts to clarify this.

We mentioned earlier that the mark alone is insufficient. Nevertheless, the mark also carries meaning as it is a quick indicator of excellent, good or poor work. (For grades and their meanings please refer to your course handbook. As a general guide, an 'A' = 70+, a 'B' = 60+, a 'C' = 50+, a 'D' = 40+, an 'E' = 35+ and an 'F' is a clear fail.) Regardless of your mark, you should then read the feedback. Feedback on excellent work will encourage you to use similar strategies in the future and feedback on poor work will pinpoint the areas you need to work on to improve your future grades.

Lecturers' comments

Provided you can decipher the lecturer's handwriting, common comments found on assignment cover sheets and on your text itself can be seen in Table 14.1. The comments are taken from actual student work. Reading through the comments you will begin to see the type of issues picked up by lecturers when marking your work, which may help you avoid making the same mistakes.

Table 14.1 Common comments

Lecturers' comments (usually found on assignment cover sheet)	What they mean (in feedforward terms)	What you need to do
<i>Good understanding apparent</i>	Keep up the good work.	Maintain the reading you are clearly doing.
<i>Good attempt to apply theory</i>	You are on the way to achieving good critical writing.	Read Chapters 10 and 11 on incorporating authors' ideas and on finding your own voice for further suggestions.
<i>A highly critical account</i>	Make sure you maintain this level of critical writing.	Keep reading critically (see Chapter 5) and make sure your own voice continues to come through in your work (see Chapter 11).
<i>Well-written</i>	Put the same effort into future work.	Continue to organise your work and to write well-structured, cohesive text. See Chapter 6.
<i>Lack of integrated references</i> <i>Please use an appropriate referencing style</i> <i>There are clearly two very different writing styles in this assignment</i> <i>You are in great danger of plagiarism due to lack of references</i>	Make sure you always acknowledge the authors whose words or ideas you are using.	You must never copy text from a source. You must always include the reference in the text and in the reference list at the end. Copied text tends to stand out from student writing. To avoid plagiarism issues, never include unreferenced material in your work. Check the referencing conventions used in your faculty. See Chapter 10.
<i>Try not to rely on quotes to make your points</i> <i>Stronger link between your point and the reference needed</i>	Incorporate authors' ideas into your writing. Make sure your voice is heard and your opinion is supported by a referenced source.	Try to construct your paragraph so it includes your point with support from a source, or use the idea from the source first and link it to your point. See Chapters 10 and 11.



14 Working with feedback

Table 14.1 continued

Lecturers' comments (usually found on assignment cover sheet)	What they mean (in feedforward terms)	What you need to do
<p><i>Your work became descriptive in places</i></p> <p><i>Need to increase the critical element</i></p> <p><i>You seem to lack critical review</i></p> <p><i>Needed to have shown critical depth</i></p> <p><i>Need to develop an analytical ability</i></p>	<p>Your ideas and opinions (your voice) must be made clearer in your writing. Question what you read.</p>	<p>Make sure you read sources with a questioning, critical mind which is consequently reflected in your writing. Ask questions such as 'how' or 'why' and weigh the strengths and weaknesses of an argument in your reading as well as in your writing. Avoid stringing ideas from sources together to make your point. See Chapters 5, 10 and 11.</p>
<p><i>There is a lack of evidence to substantiate your arguments</i></p> <p><i>Some wild assumptions made without back up evidence</i></p> <p><i>A very opinionated piece of work</i></p>	<p>Ensure that you have evidence from sources to support your points.</p>	<p>Do not make statements which are not backed up by evidence from sources. They will not be accepted. You need to balance ideas from sources with your own opinions. See Chapters 8, 10 and 11.</p>
<p><i>Your understanding of the theories is limited</i></p> <p><i>Limited reading</i></p> <p><i>You need to use a range of sources. Don't rely on one author</i></p> <p><i>You have restricted your discussion to information from the lectures</i></p>	<p>Read more sources to develop more ideas and arguments in your work. These include: books, journals and all relevant academic publications.</p>	<p>You should always read extensively on the subject and incorporate ideas from the relevant sources into your own thinking to form a valid argument. Do not regurgitate. Do not accept only one author's point of view. The lecturer's notes are not enough. See Chapters 4, 5, 10 and 11.</p>
<p><i>Fewer web references!</i></p>	<p>You should use more books and academic journals.</p>	<p>If the web references are of an academic nature the lecturer will be happy. Wikipedia and Google references are usually frowned upon. See Chapter 4.</p>

Table 14.1 continued

Lecturers' comments (usually found on assignment cover sheet)	What they mean (in feedforward terms)	What you need to do
<i>Plan?! You need to include structure of essay in intro Paper should have a better structure</i>	Write a plan. Group relevant ideas together and make sure the order they appear in is logical. Include structure in the introduction.	Your work would benefit from a plan before you start. You must attempt to organise your ideas more logically. Indicate the structure of the essay in the introduction and follow that structure in your text. Use signalling phrases to guide your reader. See Chapters 2, 3, 6 and 12.
<i>You need to improve your sentence structure</i>	Shorten your sentences. Avoid complicated sentences with subclauses.	When your spellchecker puts a squiggly line under a sentence, read it carefully and make any essential changes (not necessarily those offered by the program). Make use of appropriate conjunctions. See Chapters 6 and 15.
<i>Take pride when handing in work</i>	Imagine your work is a piece of art. Handle it accordingly.	Check your work thoroughly for spelling mistakes, correct order of pages, printing clarity and other proof-reading issues. See Chapter 15.
Lecturers' comments (usually found within the text)	What they mean (in feedforward terms)	What you need to do
<i>Circled or underlined words Poor sentence structure Spelling!</i>	Make sure you edit your work. Read everything carefully before handing it in.	Avoid use of informal language (including contractions, e.g. 'don't', or abbreviations, e.g. 'etc.'). Choose your words more carefully. Always keep the spellchecker switched on. It will help with correct spelling and grammar. Always allow yourself time to edit your work. See Chapters 6 and 15.
<i>Ref? Source? Page (number)?</i>	Use appropriate citation.	Make sure you provide references in the text when using someone else's ideas or words. Always remember to include the author, year of publication and the relevant page number of your quoted source. See Chapter 10.
✓	Good point. Well done.	This is good. Keep thinking like this.



14 Working with feedback

Table 14.1 continued

Lecturers' comments (usually found within the text)	What they mean (in feedforward terms)	What you need to do
? <i>This doesn't make sense.</i> <i>I don't follow/understand.</i> <i>Why is this relevant?</i> <i>How does this relate to the essay topic?</i>	Make sure you edit your work. Read everything carefully before handing it in. Group relevant ideas together and make sure the order they appear in is logical.	Make sure your points are relevant and your argument is clear to a person other than you. Provide a good link between your point and the assignment topic and make the links between ideas more obvious. Imagine you are explaining to someone outside your field. See Chapters 6, 10 and 11.
<i>Stay focused</i> <i>Rambling</i>	Make sure your points are relevant and your argument is clear to a person other than you.	Do not veer off the topic in an attempt to increase your word count. Is this piece of information vital to your argument?
<i>Why? / How?</i> <i>Explain</i> <i>Examples</i> <i>Such as?</i> <i>More details needed</i>	Provide evidence from sources to support your points.	When you make a point, you must support it with examples and evidence. Use these lecturers' questions and apply them to your points when you proof-read your work. Make sure you have provided relevant answers. See Chapters 10 and 11.
<i>No!</i>	Make sure you have your facts straight before making any claims.	Read sources carefully and make sure you understand the point they make before you use it in your work. See Chapter 5.

The majority of the authentic feedback shown in Table 14.1 seems to relate to one of the following areas:

- reading
- planning and text organisation
- critical writing
- referencing
- editing.

We have attempted to cover these areas in this book to help you succeed in your studies. Try the activities in the suggested chapters and search for other material which may help you further as early in your course as possible.

CONTACTING YOUR LECTURER

It is essential that you see your lecturer if you do not understand the feedback. You should not use that time to try and haggle with the lecturer in order to increase your mark as you will be wasting your time (and the lecturer's). Many lecturers indicate their availability in one or more of the following ways:

- in the course handbook
- on their doors (often there is a grid for you to write your name for an appointment)
- on the course website
- by specifying 'open door policy'.

In case none of the above is applicable, talk to your lecturer after the lecture and arrange a suitable time to meet. Do appreciate however that the lecturer may be going to another lecture and may not have time for you at that moment.

Emailing your lecturer

It is always best to email your lecturer in order to make an appointment. Ask for confirmation as sending the email does not necessarily mean it has been received or opened and you would not want to have made a wasted trip. Also make sure that your email explicitly states the reason for requesting an appointment, for example: 'I would like to see you regarding the feedback on my assignment, TITLE OF ASSIGNMENT. There are a few areas I would like to clarify and I would appreciate your time' (or words to that effect). Make the subject line pertinent too. Subject lines with 'hi' or 'urgent' or 'question' or 'CN I C U?' are both inappropriate and often considered SPAM and so trashed; 'coursework feedback' should be acceptable.

At the meeting

Make sure you go prepared with exactly what you want to say. Take your feedback notebook with you both to remind you of areas you would like to discuss and to make notes of any advice. If you have been allocated a 15-minute slot for example, you do not want to waste the first few minutes trying to formulate your thoughts or expecting your lecturer to play a guessing game. You could perhaps say one of the following:

'I would like to prioritise my areas of improvement and wanted to check with you which ones affect my work most.'

'I am not sure I understand this comment fully. Does it mean...?'

'I'm sorry, I can't quite read your writing here. Does it say...?'

Do not leave the room until you have fully understood what you need to do with your future assignments (clearly within reason).

CONSEQUENCES OF IGNORING OR NOT UNDERSTANDING FEEDBACK

Clearly, if you ignore the lecturer's feedback, the main consequence will be that you will continue to produce work of a similar standard. In Chapter 3 we asked you to decide what kind of marks you are happy with. (If you are excelling, congratulations; keep up the good work.) Do look at the feedback all the same as it will identify what you do well and you can therefore do the same in future. Look out for lecturers' feedback which uses words such as 'almost', 'mostly', 'somewhat', 'an attempt' as they indicate that further improvement is needed.

If you are averaging 'C' and 'B' grades and would like a higher mark, utilising the feedback will help you improve.

If passing is sufficient for you and you are managing to pass, you may be able to get away with not taking any feedback on board. As feedback also forms part of your personal and working life however, failing to use it does question your whole attitude to study and work.

SUMMARY

We have tried to show you that marks are not a sufficient indication of how you are progressing with your studies. You need to know the reasoning behind a particular mark if you want to learn from it. The feedback you receive both explains and justifies the mark with a view to helping you improve your future work. Clearly, in order for you to improve, it is essential that you understand the feedback and that you respond to it in your later assignments. Keeping a record of that feedback for you to refer to may be a useful aid to your future academic success.

References

Martala, M. and Parry, J. (2008) *Lecturers' Written Feedback and Students' Use of Feedback – A Match Made in Heaven?* Hatfield: The University of Hertfordshire.