

# Compassionate feedback

Enhancing  
assessment  
for equity

Ideas for prompting reflection on  
compassionate approaches to feedback

## Why this resource?

This resource supplements the podcast '[Compassionate Feedback](#)' and lists the ideas and suggestions made by the contributors to the podcast as well as additional ideas arising from discussions involving colleagues from Glasgow School of Art as part of the 2021 QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project entitled '[Belonging through Assessment: Pipelines of Compassion](#)'. It is meant to serve as a springboard for discussions rather than as a guide on how to enact compassionate feedback.

## How can you use this?

The list can be used by individual tutors, as they reflect on their practice, or in team discussions, or in discussions with students.

You may think of additional or different approaches to compassionate feedback; and you may notice some apparent contradictions, or tensions, between different prompts. This is because there is not one single way of approaching compassionate feedback. Again these are only prompts and suggestions to help you start thinking about what your approach might be.

## Design

Is feedback happening at times when it can be useful to students?

Does formative feedback play a prominent role in the student journey?

Can formative feedback acknowledge past learning, and support students in achieving their learning goals?

How is students' engagement in assessment supported (e.g. self- and peer-assessment, co-creation)?

Are students supported to decode assessment structures and approaches?

Is assessment done with students, rather than done to them?

## Relational Aspect

Think about who the student is, what is special about them, what challenges they may have overcome, and what their goals and interests are - and reflect this in the feedback.

See things from the student's perspective.

How does feedback convey that you hold the student in high regard, that you care about their learning and that you believe in them?

Invest time in creating a welcoming space for all students.

## Promoting Student Agency

Explore co-construction in formative feedback.

What agency, voice and choice do students have in the feedback process to disrupt power hierarchies? For example, ask students what they want from feedback, what form would be most helpful, what aspects of their work they would like feedback on.

Discuss with students and encourage them to write feedback to you using the same principles you enact in your approach.

Support students in recognising and celebrating their achievements, mitigating against the effects of grades and feedback being a proxy for belonging.

Make space to model and foster compassionate feedback between students to support peer and self assessment; think about where the opportunities are to support this in the studio, in tutorials and in crits to facilitate compassionate approaches to feedback.

## Equity

Am I speaking similarly to a student who is getting higher grades as I am to those getting lower grades?

Give feedback equally to all students (e.g. in tutorials / crits).

## Tone and Language

How does the tone of the feedback demonstrate respect to the student as an active learner?

Compassion does not mean giving only positive feedback.

Be precise. Avoid tentative wording.

Frame authentic questions (e.g. in crits).

Be attentive to the fact that the words we use might affect student identities.

Demonstrate that you care about the student's learning.

Connect with your own feelings when you are writing the feedback and be aware of how they affect our approach – analyse feedback after you write it.

When giving feedback, beware of the first person - feedback is about the student's work, not the feedback giver.

Avoid adverbs and superlatives (e.g. unfortunately).

Don't judge the work, evaluate.



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