



Feedback comes in many shapes and forms. **Feedback clarifies expectations, helps people learn from their mistakes, and builds confidence.** Positive feedback is easy – it's not hard to find the right words to tell someone they've done a good job, or congratulate them on completing a goal. However, giving negative feedback is not so easy. It is human nature to put off difficult conversations or to try to soften the blow. However, when you don't address an issue quickly, the problem compounds over time and eventually it becomes even harder to provide the necessary feedback.

In life as much as work, it is important to know how to give and receive feedback effectively and constructively. You don't need to be someone's boss or manager to regularly give feedback. In fact, it is important for feedback to go both ways – **meaning you can give feedback to those above and below you.** There are many opportunities in life for providing others with feedback, from commenting on the way that your colleague has carried out a task, to discussing your children's behavior with them.

Additionally, we all receive feedback constantly, throughout our work and personal lives. Therefore, it is a vital skill to know how to **graciously receive feedback in order to learn and grow from it,** rather than take it personally. This guide will help you understand some best practices around both giving and receiving feedback effectively.



Giving Effective Feedback

Whether you are an employee or a manager, the people you work with will make mistakes at some point. While many people tend to shy away from trying to correct the behavior of others, you will have to address the issue at some point. No one can read minds, so unless you provide feedback when necessary, the issue or mistake might never be corrected.

Feedback can be positive, negative, or constructive. **Positive feedback** is when you let someone know they did a good job by giving them praise or rewarding them in some way. It focuses on what someone is doing well. **Negative feedback**, like criticism, points out mistakes, inappropriate behavior, or areas for improvement. However, when delivered incorrectly, negative feedback can do more harm than good.

Alternatively, **constructive feedback** addresses a mistake or problem with someone's behavior and provides suggestions to help them correct it. Constructive feedback is one of the best ways to correct behavior in the workplace. The purpose is to achieve a positive outcome by providing someone with comments, advice, or suggestions that are useful for their work or their future.

Your feedback also does not have to be limited to the people who report to you either. It is possible to give constructive suggestions to co-workers and even superiors, as long as you position it in a helpful and insightful way.



Use these tips to give constructive feedback to anyone you work with:

- **Feedback should be about behavior, not personality**

The first, and probably the most important rule of feedback is to remember that you are not commenting on what type of person they are, or what they believe or value. You are only commenting on how they behaved. Do not be tempted to discuss aspects of personality, intelligence or anything else. Only behavior.

- **Feedback should describe the effect of the person's behavior on you**

Presenting feedback as your opinion makes it much easier for the recipient to hear and accept it, even if you are giving negative feedback. After all, they have no control over how you felt, any more than you have any control over their intention. Statements like "it made me feel" and "I noticed that" are more difficult to argue with, and using those phrases will keep the feedback session from devolving into a debate.

- **Feedback should be as specific as possible**

Avoid general comments that may not be useful to the receiver. Think about specific occasions and specific behavior that point to exactly what the person did, and exactly how it made you feel. Instead of saying, "You acted unprofessionally during that meeting", use specific examples that focus on what they actually did, whether it was showing up late, interrupting, or using their phone during the meeting.

- **Feedback should be timely**

Seek an appropriate time to communicate your feedback. Being prompt is key since feedback loses its impact if delayed too long. Delayed feedback can also cause feelings of guilt and resentment in the recipient if the opportunity for improvement has passed. However, you still need to take the time to prepare what you will say or write when providing the feedback.

- **Pick your moment wisely**

There are times when people are feeling open to feedback and times when they are not. For example, an angry person won't want to accept feedback, even when given effectively. Wait until they have calmed down. It is also a good idea to begin the conversation by asking permission to give feedback. You would be surprised how much of a difference this can make. A simple "Hey, do you have a minute for some quick feedback?" can help the receiver be mentally ready for it, be it positive or negative.

- **Suggest Concrete Next Steps**

Give a small number of actionable suggestions (ideally only one or two) that the other person can take in the future, to change this behavior. They will appreciate that you are giving them the first step to improving the situation.

- **Ask how they feel about what you've said**

Give the recipient an opportunity to respond and reflect. If feedback has been given respectfully, this shouldn't result in defensiveness. If it does, reiterate your intention behind the feedback – to help them understand areas that they can improve on or ways that their actions may be interpreted.



Like all things, practice makes perfect when it comes to providing feedback. **Feedback should be spontaneous and regular.** For more serious issues, a formal meeting is appropriate or a discussion as part of performance review, but building feedback into your day-to-day encounters with co-workers is a great way to develop rapport, and encourage an environment in which people feel comfortable to give and receive feedback.

Receiving Feedback Effectively

Most of us usually want to know when we are doing a good job, and where we can improve. If that is the case, you need to make it easy for your co-workers to tell you. If they know you will be receptive to their feedback, they will be more likely to give it frequently.

That's a good thing because thoughtful feedback helps you grow both personally and professionally. Feedback a gift that people who care about your success can provide for you. But, they'll only provide feedback if you are approachable and allow them to feel comfortable when giving you the feedback.



Use the tips below to receive feedback graciously and effectively:

- **Ask for it—often**

It is important to ask directly for feedback after finishing a project or task, especially when starting out in a new position. Without doing so, coworkers and managers may not know your comfort level with receiving constructive criticism. Requesting feedback sets the tone that, going forward, you *want* it – positive or negative – to improve.

- **Actively listen to the feedback given**

Active listening is a key component of receiving feedback well. This means not interrupting. Hear the person out, and listen to what they are really saying, not what you assume they will say. Ask questions for clarification if necessary. You can absorb more information if you are concentrating on listening and understanding rather than being defensive and focusing on your response.

- **Don't take it personally**

While it is easy to take feedback personally, strive to perceive it as a learning opportunity. Feedback is about specific actions, not your intention. Comment on your own understanding of

the action itself and take blame if appropriate. For example, instead of saying, “But I tried that, and it didn’t work!” or “I didn’t have enough time,” you can say, “That’s a great idea – next time I will try harder to make that happen.”

- **Be open**

This means being receptive to new ideas and different opinions. Often, there is more than one way of doing something and others may have a completely different viewpoint on a given topic. You may learn something worthwhile.

- **Reflect and decide what to do**

Assess the value of the feedback, the consequences of using it or ignoring it, and then decide what to do because of it. Your response is your choice. If you disagree with the feedback, consider asking for a second opinion from someone else.

- **Follow up**

After receiving feedback, thank the provider for taking the time to acknowledge your performance. Then it is time to follow up on feedback. Sometimes, your follow-up will simply involve implementing the suggestions given to you. In other situations, you may want to set up another meeting to discuss the feedback or to re-submit the revised work.



Conclusion

Giving and receiving feedback are important skills to master. In both our personal and professional lives, it is essential to know how to provide feedback to others, effectively and constructively, without causing offence. Constructive feedback that is given frequently and respectfully is one of the best ways to help others understand what they did well and what they can do better.

It is also vital to practice receiving feedback gracefully. However, processing and acting on negative feedback is not always easy. It can make us defensive, angry, and self-conscious, It helps to start asking for feedback more frequently from those you work with and reframing constructive feedback as an opportunity for growth.