

## ACTIONABLE FEEDBACK

Have you ever received an assignment back from a teacher or professor and only seen a number grade? What does a grade of 95, 85, or 75 really tell a student? Formative assessment is not about a number grade. *Feedback* can enhance the learning experience of students by providing information that addresses strengths, areas of need, and/or misconceptions. Feedback makes the cycle of formative assessment more transparent for teachers and students, as well as any other educators providing support to that child.

Teachers should not feel the need to provide feedback on every piece of student work, in every subject area, every day. Not only is this an unreasonable request to place on teachers, it would be overwhelming for students to sort through mounds of feedback on their work. Teachers should choose the pieces of student work requiring feedback strategically. For example, you might choose to leave a few comments on every student's document halfway through a unit where students are writing an English Language Arts research project on endangered species. For some students, you might

Lisa Dabel is an elementary school teacher in Cupertino Union School District, California. She uses the interactive tool Drawp for School with her students to check for understanding. In Lisa's classroom she can send out activities for students using Drawp for School and the children in her classroom can record their voice as part of their response. The recordings students make with Drawp for School provide a window into student thinking that shows Lisa whether or not her students understand a concept.

At the Philadelphia Performing Arts Charter School, the high school English Department uses iPads to check for student understanding. One particular assignment is a formative assessment about using the rhetorical devices of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* (i.e., how factual information, a speaker's credibility, and the emotional appeal to the audience, respectively, work together to persuade, inform, or entertain). Students are asked to write their own small speech of about four to five sentences and create an audio recording using the app Spark Video. Teachers can then review student videos to check for understanding and make a plan for future instruction.

decide to check in more frequently and alert them to be on the lookout for your feedback during the writing process. As you review student work and provide feedback to students, you are on a formative assessment fact-finding mission. The observations you make will help you figure out how to help students on their learning journey, while building their accountability as independent learners.

Feedback should be timely, relevant, and actionable:

- *Timely*: Students see your feedback a day or two after they've submitted work, with more time allotted for longer tasks.
- *Relevant*: Students see the point in your feedback, and they understand how it relates to what they are working on.
- *Actionable*: Students can use the information as a next step, to complete an action the teacher has clearly identified in their suggestions.

A star, sticker, or smiley face is not feedback—it is an acknowledgement or encouragement. It does not provide students with information on how they can improve as they work toward mastering content. Feedback should be simple enough for students to understand what

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Table 4.2 Feedback Examples

Grade	Topic	What strong feedback should look like . . .
First	Narrative writing	<i>I like the way you included details about your characters' feelings. Try adding a few pieces of dialogue so your reader knows what your characters were talking about during their trip to the beach.</i>
Fifth	Geometry	<i>You did a great job including labels on your graph. Next time, make sure to include domain-specific vocabulary in your explanation.</i>
Tenth	European history	<i>The draft of your research report includes a clear introduction and thesis statement. If you take a look at Chapter 17 in our textbook, you can find key details to support your argument.</i>



Stephanie Trautman is a middle school English teacher and writer for Common Sense Media who uses Kaizena to give feedback to her students. She attaches voice messages to student digital work to offer guidance to her students. One of her favorite features is the comment feature, where she can prefabricate comments for each class and then attach them to student work. The comments can include a thoughtful remark and then a link for students to visit in order to find out more about a topic.

have the same needs before you move on to a new topic. We'll talk more about strategy groups as an intervention for struggling students in Chapter 6.

#FormativeTech makes it easier to give students feedback in a timely manner. If you are collecting student work digitally, you can post a comment on their work, and they'll see your response in real time. Many technology tools give teachers the option to add voice notes to their students' work. This can save teachers time by giving them the opportunity to record feedback as opposed to sending an email or writing feedback on a sticky note.