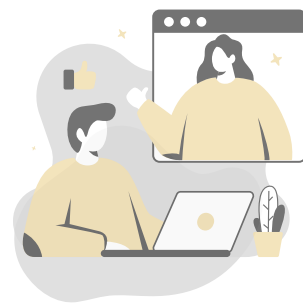


Characteristics of effective teacher comments



Teacher comments are only one form of feedback for students, but they are a significant one.

It takes staff time to comment on work, and student time to engage with those comments, so we want to be sure that this is time well-spent for both parties. The range of comments will vary but there are some shared characteristics that might contribute to their effectiveness.

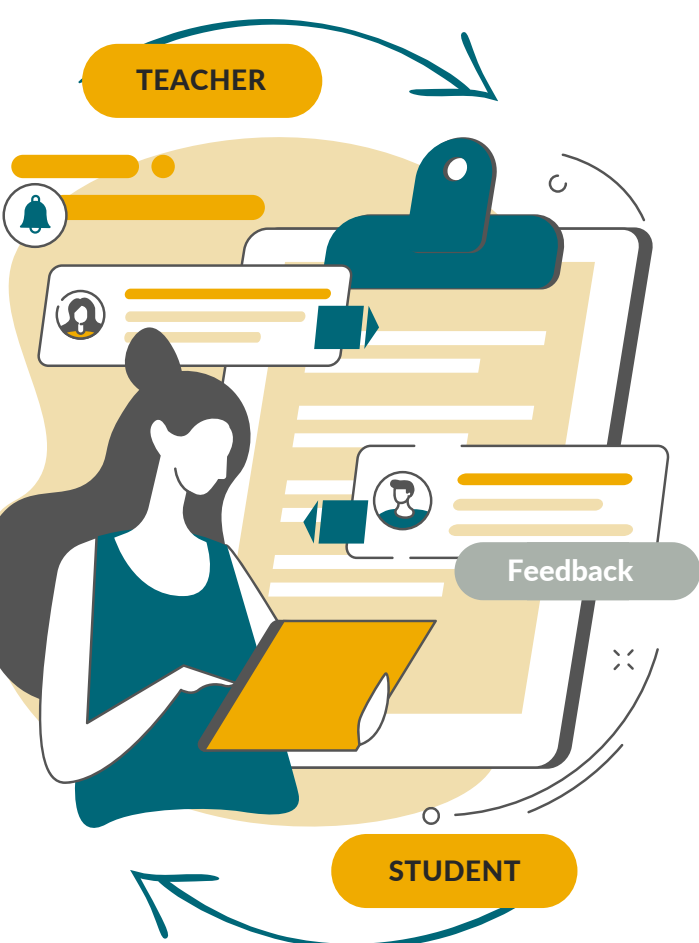
✓ CONSTRUCTIVE

Constructive and learning-focused. Comments are part of the learning process and they are supposed to help students to enhance their work. Constructive comments give students advice on how to do better.

✓ COMPASSIONATE, HONEST AND RESPECTFUL

Compassionate, honest and respectful in terms of tone. The vast majority of us have received feedback that we considered harsh and mean-spirited. While we might have agreed with the thrust of the comments, the tone may have been dismissive or downright humiliating. We might keep at the back of our minds, as we write comments for students, the question 'is this a comment I would like to read about my work?'

Effective teacher comments should be...



✓ ACTIONABLE

Actionable. Some of our comments should help students to know what to do if they want to improve.

✓ CLEAR

Clear, using accessible language and explaining terminology where required. We want students to learn the language of the discipline – this is an important part of studying a discipline. But we cannot expect that they will immediately understand the words that are commonplace for us as disciplinary experts. Feedback which students cannot understand can be alienating, demoralising and confusing.

✓ FOCUSED ON THE WORK

Focused on the work and contain specific advice on how the work could be enhanced or developed, while maintaining unconditional positive regard for the student. This also helps our students to learn about giving good feedback where the focus is on the work and not on the person.

✓ BALANCED

Balanced between strengths, areas for improvement and advice/steps for future work. Comments should provide some encouragement to students so that they feel they are not starting from scratch, some advice about where their work has potential to be enhanced, and guidance about how best to improve the work within the limits of what is feasible.

✓ MANAGABLE

Limited to a number of manageable action points. Students can feel overwhelmed when, with the best of intentions, staff comment on everything and not just a few specific areas. The research suggests it is better to limit feedback to a number of points which the student can address.

✓ ANCHORED IN THE WORK

Anchored in the work and not overly general. While there are certainly situations where general feedback is required, and this may be given as group feedback where the same issues are coming up across a cohort of work, there should also be comments included for students which relate directly to the piece of work that has been submitted by that individual.



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