



## GIVING FEEDBACK THAT ENCOURAGES A GROWTH MINDSET

York University Teaching Commons  
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Arshad took one look at the comments on his first assignment and decided to drop the course. When asked why he said, 'I knew I wasn't going to be any good at this and now I have proof. Look I got a terrible grade.' 'What did the prof say about your work?' asked a friend. 'Nothing, I just got a grade.' Arshad believes that he is not able to reach the required grade in this course. His mind may not have been changed even if the professor had made comments, but there is a chance that he would have continued and done well had the feedback encouraged a **growth mindset**. A growth mindset is one that assumes that it is possible to improve. The opposite is a mindset that takes a less than perfect grade as evidence of inability to achieve. We can help our students to believe in their ability to improve if we are mindful about the nature and timing of the feedback that is given.

1. **Give feedback that the recipient can use** – give concrete advice as to how to improve, the student can take this and apply it to the next piece of work. Some professors intentionally build assessments so that the feedback from one can inform performance in the next.
2. **Be specific as to how to improve in the future** – what would make this work better? For instance instead of saying 'the grammar is poor', suggest that the student work on their use of commas or apostrophes. If the student appears to have misunderstood a concept, refer them to the basics.
3. **Criticize the work not the student** – be specific about the work that is under review, rather than making comments about the student, for example 'your writing is terrible' is less helpful to focus on the submitted work and the strengths and weaknesses in the work, rather than implying this is a reflection of the person themselves. A growth mindset thrives when students can see that it is possible for them to improve.
4. **Expect that the highest standards are achievable by all** – Students are quite skilled at telling themselves they can't do something, we can raise aspirations by assuming that everyone can achieve.
5. **Appreciative feedback is valuable** – This doesn't mean avoiding telling hard truths, but it does mean mentioning what was done well and why instead of only focusing on the negatives.
6. **Provide timely feedback** – For feedback to be useful the student needs to remember doing the work, so providing a small amount of feedback within a couple of days is more useful than a lot of feedback two or three weeks later.
7. **Low stakes assessment with feedback early in the course** – let students know how they are performing and how to improve with an assignment in the first few weeks of the course that is low stakes in terms of grades.

If you would like to explore this topic further consider these events at the TC :

- Workshops on Course and Curriculum Design, see: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/for-cds/workshops-and-courses-for-cds/workshops/course-design-york/>

#### Further reading on this topic:

- See Formative Assessment in Fry, Ketteridge and Marshall 2009  
*A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Routledge.

#### Resources on this topic:

- Assessment resources, see: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/resources-2/assessment/>