PROVIDING FORMATIVE FEEDBACK EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY

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Students need formative feedback to help them improve their work (Sadler, 2010) but they don't always pay sufficient attention to what we write/say (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; Handley, Price, & Millar, 2011). Providing rich, meaningful feedback which provides students with time to act upon it is time consuming for staff, so we want to ensure that there is high payoff. We have to accept sometimes that we can't satisfy all the desires of our students (they would often really like your undivided attention in a one-to-one context) and still maintain a decent work-life balance, so this activity is designed to help review what might work best for you and your students.

EXAMPLE DIAMOND 9 SHEET

RESOURCES NEEDED FOR THIS ACTIVITY

A room large enough to hold participants working in groups of 3-4, flipchart with stand and pens or whiteboard, Diamond 9 sheets[1]. For the activity to work well, at least a dozen participants need to engage; larger numbers up to around 60 can be accommodated, but the more people in the room, the longer the activity is likely to take. Allow around 60-90 minutes to get a good discussion going.

ACTIVITY

1. Working in groups of 3-4 for around 5-10 minutes, on a flipchart list what kinds of feedback features students tend to dislike.
2. In the same groups, list some of the ways in which we can give students feedback that doesn't involve assessors in endless drudgery.
3. In plenary, compile a long, composite list of these and as facilitator, feel free to add in other ones from the list in the discussion section overleaf.
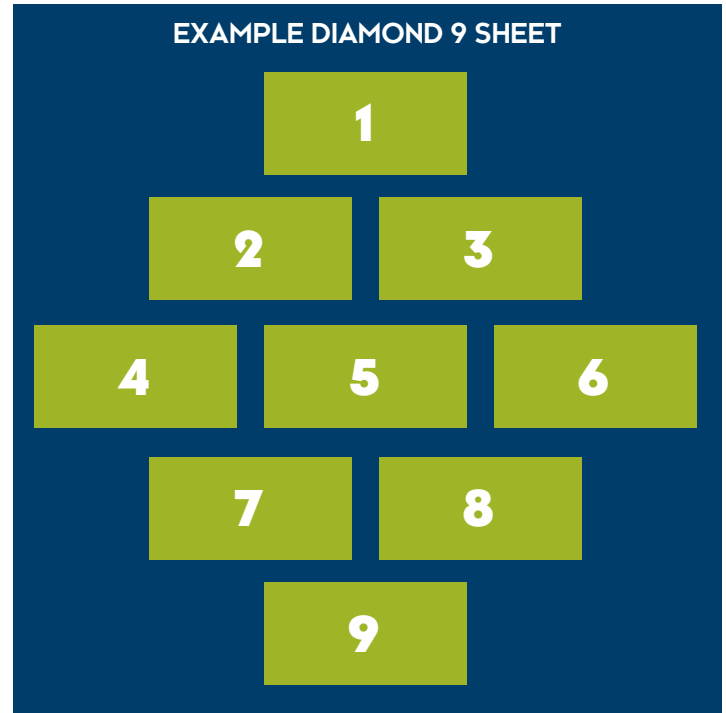
4. Ask participants in groups to select nine from this long list. Use a Diamond 9 grid to prioritise:
   a. first of all, which kinds of feedback format you think students would like best, with the likely favourites in positions 1, 2 and 3;
   b. the ones student are least likely to appreciate in positions 7, 8 and 9;
   c. The middle row is for participants' other selected feedback delivery formats.
5. In plenary, ask group reps to share their top and bottom items
6. Secondly on a new grid, ask participants to similarly Diamond 9 which ones they consider would be most manageable for themselves.
7. In plenary, again discuss top and bottom choices and discuss rationales for decisions.
8. Ask individuals or small groups to draw up action plans showing which two or three feedback formats they plan to use on their own programmes.

1. An example is reproduced here. To organise the Diamond 9 discussions you could make a grid on a flipchart then provide post-its or blank postcards which can be written on and re-arranged on the grid.

DISCUSSION

Here are some formative feedback approaches you might feed into the discussion (or provide as a handout if you think they will struggle to identify any themselves), remembering that we are trying to balance what is attractive to students and what staff will find manageable:

i. Ask them to email to you a full draft, and to identify one issue or one section on which they would like detailed comments from you;

ii. Require students to bring their draft literature reviews into class for facilitated discussion with peers working in pairs or threes, then the teacher can act as the 'help desk', providing answers to students' queries about how many works need to be cited, what balance between journal articles, websites and books is needed, what referencing format is required etc.;

iii. Use a variety of exemplars to let students see the diversity of what comprises good work and ask them to compare the quality of their own drafts with the exemplars provided;

iv. Ask students to bring in a sample 100 words from anywhere within their draft and discuss in class issues like tone, register, person (should they use 1st or 3rd for example), vocabulary and so on, so students can clarify such matters well in advance of submission;

v. In class, give students each a single piece of flipchart paper on which to briefly outline their initial thinking about their assignment, including references they plan to use, a draft plan, two or three issues they consider central to their argument and so on. Allow them no more than 10 minutes to prepare this and stick it up on the wall with BluTac or masking tape. The tutor can then tour the posters making comments audible to the whole group on a selection of them, providing commentary, commendations and advice on how to improve the work;

vi. Share via the course VLE a video of you talking about particular features of the assignment that you consider really important, and ask student to post alongside it comments, questions and aspects about which they are puzzled or confused. Reply to the whole cohort below the comments on the VLE;

vii. Ask a handful of students from a previous cohort to provide their anonymised assignments (ideally ranging in quality from brilliant to just about good enough) for you to place on the VLE with your own audio commentary on what differentiates a satisfactory achievement from a stunning one;

viii. In the lecture theatre, project extracts from previously completed assignments from previous years as above, and ask them to use audio response systems ('clickers') to vote on which are the best features in each case;

ix. Hold an open surgery in which students can come along and ask questions about their drafts, but with your responses to their queries shared in plenary with the whole group rather than on a one-to-one basis;

x. Organise peer feedback on presentations – a whole class or group can offer constructive peer feedback to their peers, and by adding this to your comments, it provides students with a larger amount of feedback to work from;

xi. Use face-to-face marking and feedback on formative assignments;

xii. Structure your feedback as dialogue on work-in-progress (e.g. consider using a feedback stamp or checklist to create the structure).

NOTES

REFERENCES

Gibbs, G., & Simpson, C. (2004). *How assessment influences student learning – a conceptual overview*. Available online at: http://www2.open.ac.uk/cehep/ssrg/reports/documents/42_02.Pdf

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Sadler, D. R. (2010). Beyond feedback: Developing student capability in complex appraisal. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35(5), 535-550.

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