How to Provide Fair and Effective Feedback in Asynchronous Courses: 3 Best Practices for Online Teachers

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3 Best Practices for Online Teachers
By Elizabeth A. Gruenbaum
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There are several policies and procedures that online instructors can implement that will help them provide specific, fair, consistent, and effective feedback to their students in an online, asynchronous course.

Announcements Area
First, maintain a highly visible announcement and or conference area on the course site.

This announcement area is where the course instructor should post reminders regarding deadlines of assignments or discussion board posts. It's especially important to give specific information in these announcements during the first week of class regarding helpful hints and expectations of the students during the class to ensure success and level the playing field for all. Everyone reads the same message; everyone has the same expectations placed upon them.

The announcements area should also include a policy for late submissions. As an example:

Always hand in assignments and post discussions by the due date as listed in the syllabus/calendar. If you have an extenuating circumstance, I may agree to accept an assignment or discussion board post late.

However, that is at my discretion. It is up to you to contact me if a situation arises where you may need an extension. Up to two points may be deducted for an assignment that is handed in late if you have not contacted me, and it may not be accepted after three days of unexcused lateness.

Another use of the announcements space is to give general suggestions for assignments based on frequently-asked questions or areas where you have noticed the class as a whole needs a reminder or clarification. For example, if APA style is expected across all assignments, but several students are not using it, you should post: "Remember to use APA style in all written assignments." Using the announcement area in this way allows for the dissemination of general knowledge to all students in the course. The aforementioned example gives specific guidelines for all students so that they are all fairly being given the same important information.

Conference Area
A conference area promotes a similar idea, but with more student involvement. While, the announcement space is a podium for the instructor to dispense information, the conference area is where students can raise their questions and concerns.

Encouraging students to ask questions or raise concerns here instead of emailing you directly may be beneficial to not only themselves but their peers as well. Having a conference center helps prevent the same questions from being asked many times by various students within the course; it also promotes consistent and fair feedback because it ensures that you give exactly the same answer to all students.
Rubrics
Many students have great anxiety about how they will be graded and judged on their discussion board posts and assignments. To mitigate their uneasiness and promote an understanding of expectations, online instructors should not only create rubrics for writing, but also share them openly with the students.

A rubric lists the expectations and indicators matching a specific grade or point allotment. Some teachers create a rubric for each assignment or post, while others develop a general writing rubric and use it across all assignments and posts. Either way, give the students the rubric(s); make them public. Make it clear that the rubric's purpose is for grading the students' papers and posts.

Implementing the use of a rubric will assist you in providing fair, consistent, specific and effective feedback within your course. Instructors should be sure to return the feedback to the students in plenty of time before the next assignment is due to allow students time to use the feedback in improving their next assignment.

Here's a sample rubric for grading posts on a discussion board.

**Sample Writing Rubric for Discussion Board Posts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Exceeds Standards: Grade A</th>
<th>Meets Standards: Grade B</th>
<th>Minimal Meeting of Standards: Grade C</th>
<th>Insufficient/ Below standards: Grade D/F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thinking Skills</strong></td>
<td>Deep thought is apparent and there is a logical flow in the writing. Ideas are clearly and insightfully expressed.</td>
<td>Some deep thinking is apparent. Organization is logical. Most ideas are clearly expressed.</td>
<td>Some knowledge is apparent. Organization is somewhat lacking. Minimal explanation of thinking.</td>
<td>Basic knowledge is used. Lack of organization. Deeper explanation of thinking is lacking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interactions</strong></td>
<td>Astute insights provided to promote ongoing discussion on the topic. Asks inquisitive, productive questions.</td>
<td>Timely post with further contributions expressed on the topic.</td>
<td>Post was timely but simply expressed agreement with no further contribution to topic.</td>
<td>Post was late and did not provide for interaction. Disrespectful of others' ideas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ask students to use the rubric to evaluate their own work before submitting it, which implicitly encourages revision and editing, in addition to helping them meet your expectations.

When grading longer assignments, the kind for which you would provide more detailed feedback, include specific references to the rubric, or use words and phrases found in the rubric. For example, if topic development is part of the rubric and the student did well with this, the following feedback may be in order: "The topic was clearly developed, and ideas were presented in a logical sequence. Nice work!"

On the other hand, if a student had some difficulty with one of the indicators of the rubric, such as APA citation, the teacher may write: "Citations related to the readings but had some errors with APA (see rubric). Cite your sources within each slide of your PowerPoint document. Always cite even if you are paraphrasing and not directly quoting so that the reader can tell where your ideas came from."

**Summary**

There are several best practices that may be employed to supply students with fair, consistent, specific, effective feedback in an online course.

- Use the **announcement area** to disseminate information regarding expectations, general class-wide feedback, and concerns.
- Use a **conference area** to encourage questions or concerns from students.
- Create **rubrics** and post them in a public place.

**About the Author**

Elizabeth A. Gruenbaum holds an MS in educational leadership from Nova Southeastern University (NSU) and an EdD in organizational leadership and educational leadership also from NSU. Her prior experiences as a program director, coordinator, teacher leader, mentor teacher, and as a current adjunct professor for National University’s School of Education give her a distinctive background in understanding and motivating others for success. She welcomes constructive feedback and suggestions in the comments section.