

Giving constructive writing feedback

Giving constructive feedback is one of the most valuable contributions we can make to another person's learning.

To give constructive feedback, we need to:

- **read carefully** and note the places in the text where information breaks down
- **ask questions** to help the writer identify these breakdowns and sticking points in meaning
- **focus on the meaning** of the text, not on the writer.

Look at these examples of feedback. Will they help to identify the sticking points in the text?

Feedback Examples	Helpful	Not helpful
When you say 'it' here, what are you referring to?		
You shouldn't use the present tense here; you know that.		
The present tense here seems to mean that you are directly interested in this study. Are you? Or is the study one of a series of building blocks in knowledge you need for your work? Maybe past tense would be better; what do you think?		
Wow, your grammar is really bad, isn't it?		
You've explained the theory really clearly, but I'm not sure why. What do you want to say about it in terms of your own research?		
I can't really find the topic sentence in this paragraph. Maybe you have two or three topics that are important, for example...		

Protect the feelings of the writer – the aim is improvement

- Critique the writing, not the writer.
- Say something **positive** first. For example:
 - ‘The best part of this piece was...because...’
 - ‘This section is really clear.’
 - ‘The example you used here works well.’
 - ‘I like the way you’ve broken this into two parts.’
- When you frame **negative** feedback, use indirect ‘gentle’ language. For example:
 - ‘Perhaps this section could...’
 - ‘It might be useful to add...’
 - ‘Have you considered...?’
 - ‘You might like to think about...’



Image source: Microsoft images

Acknowledge that you are only one opinion; invite others to disagree with you.

Focus on the writing

- Make sure your comments reflect the requested feedback issues identified by the writer.
- Keep the focus on ‘what makes this text work/not work’, not on ‘what I like/don’t about it’.
- **Be specific.** Saying ‘This writing is good’ is meaningless.
- Focus discussion on two or three main points. Write other comments on the text for the writer to take away.
- Be honest and kind and clear with your comments.

Remember that it’s a work in progress, not a finished text.