



> FOR SOCIETY

**(LEARN TO) ASK FOR FEEDBACK**

**THIS IS HOW YOU DO IT!**

**GUIDE FOR STUDENTS**

A photograph of five diverse people from behind, standing in a circle with their arms around each other's shoulders. The background is a bright, light-colored sky. Overlaid on the top half of the image are several large, colorful, semi-transparent speech bubbles in shades of blue, purple, pink, red, orange, yellow, and green.

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Lectureship Technology Enhanced Assessment

**MAY 2022**

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## ➤ Why is feedback important?

Feedback is important for your personal and professional development, but it is not a goal in itself. By asking for feedback, the intention is that you, as a student, gain insight into where you currently stand in relation to what is expected of you. Based on this, you can take action to meet the expected level. This guide gives tips on how to ask specific questions for feedback, so that you can become a competent professional who continues to develop throughout life.

## ➤ What role do you play as a student in the feedback process?

As a student, an active role is expected from you with regard to asking, receiving and giving feedback. As a student, you are in charge of your own learning process and you are an intended user of feedback and not a passive recipient. It is up to you to decide whether to do something with the feedback you collect and receive or not. In addition, your fellow students (peers), your lecturers and people in the field play an important role in your personal professional development, in which you play the leading role. Together, you form a professional learning community that wants to learn from and with each other. Also called the learning triangle (see figure 1).

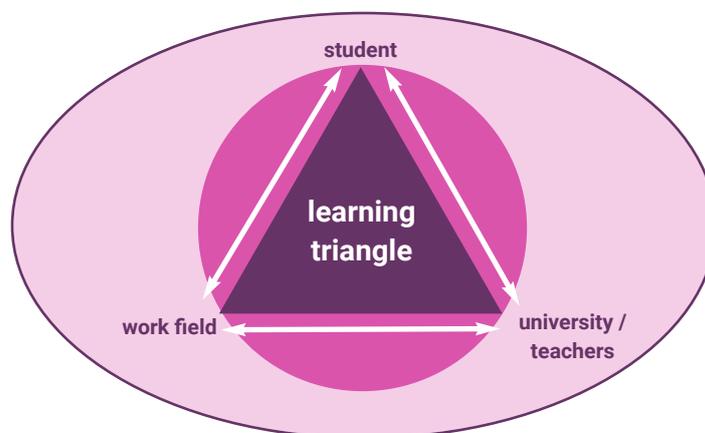


Figure 1 Learning triangle (Duvekot, 2016)

## ➤ What is feedback?

Feedback is not a goal in itself, but a means of obtaining information about your actions to date. You usually receive the feedback in the form of questions, remarks, or suggestions, communicated to you verbally or in writing by your peer(s), teacher(s) or work field partner(s). You yourself can play an important role in what you receive feedback on, because it depends to a large extent on the feedback questions you ask yourself and to whom you ask them. See 'What feedback questions can you ask?'

But feedback only becomes valuable to you if you actually understand it, accept it, process it and link actions to it (Carless & Boud, 2018). So it is up to you!

## ➤ When is feedback effective?

Effective feedback answers three questions for you as a student, which must be seen in conjunction with each other.

1	<b>Where am I going?</b>	<i>Feed up</i>
2	<b>How do I do it?</b>	<i>Feedback</i>
3	<b>How to proceed?</b>	<i>Feed forward</i>

By looking for answers to these three questions, you gather information on how you can develop yourself from your current level to the expected level. The questions you then ask are, for example, for the current situation 'How am I doing so far and what solutions do I see?' and for the expected situation, for example 'What actions can or do I want to take?'.

All three questions can also be asked on four different levels, with feedback requests during the process level (e.g. 'Have I involved the right people?') and self-regulation level (e.g. 'How have I taken control of my learning process?' 'What do I actually want to learn?') leads to learning, with feedback during the task level (e.g. 'Did I do the assignment well?') as a good third option. Feedback during the self regulation level (e.g. 'You are doing well.') almost never leads to improvement of your learning results and doesn't usually contribute to your personal professional development. This is illustrated in figure 2, in which the dark purple blocks are the most important aspects for your learning process.

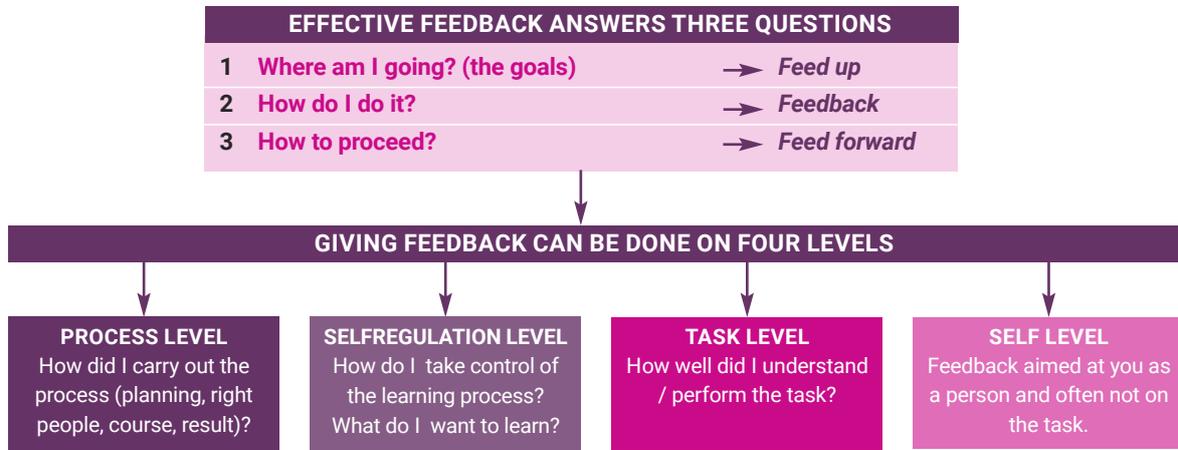


Figure 2 Effective feedback model (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), adapted by Mieke Jaspers and Fieke Tychon (2022)

## ➤ Zone of development: what are we talking about?

If you ask for feedback in order to demonstrate your learning outcomes, make sure that the answers help you as much as possible to get into the zone of closest development or current development, and into the panic zone.

In short: the feedback should contribute to your personal and professional development (see figure 3).



Figure 3 Zones of development (Vygotsky, 1994)

### An explanation of the zones of development in figure 3

- **Zone of actual development:** the middle circle represents what you can do independently and without help. You can do this and you are confident in doing so.
- **Zone of nearest development:** the circle around it is called the zone of nearest development and refers to what you can do with the help of fellow students (peers), teachers or work field partners or others relevant to you.
- **Panic zone:** the outer circle is the panic zone, where you are unable to learn, even with help. When you enter this circle, you have to ask yourself: why is this happening and how can I act differently in order to move out of the panic zone, and who can help me to do so?

## > Dare to ask questions

Many students think that they are the only ones who find it difficult to ask for feedback and to ask the right questions that will help you in your development as a starting professional. In fact, most students have difficulty with one or more aspects of their feedback. Ask your feedback provider questions about the feedback if you don't understand it. Dare to be vulnerable. And learning to ask and give feedback is something you have to learn, so don't panic!

## > Which feedback questions can students ask?

It is quite difficult to ask the right feedback questions that improve learning outcomes. Students usually ask feedback questions as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Four different feedback questions from students (de Kleijn, 2022)



When you ask the questions above and do not formulate a targeted feedback question, you leave it up to the other person what to do, and you also become too dependent on the other person's judgement, and that is not the intention. After all, you are in the lead of your own learning process. Depending on which question you ask, you will get a response. Therefore, consciously try to (learn to) ask the right question that contributes to your further development. Asking the right question takes practice.

The following explanations and mnemonics **POWER, CLOSER, SPARR** (devised by the authors as an aid) and **SUPER** will help you (learn) to ask the right question at the right time (de Kleijn, 2022).



# POWER

### RE 1: 'I AM STUCK, WHAT SHOULD I DO?'

Instead of 'I'm stuck, what should I do?' you can also show how far you have come and then ask for feedback. This can be a feedback question for your peers, teachers or people in the field. **POWER** is a mnemonic that can help you focus on your feedback question and how to ask it:

- **P**roblem description: *what is the problem I am facing?*
- **O**ptions or Solutions: *which solutions do I see (and have I tried)?*
- **W**eighing up options: *what are the consequences of these solutions?*
- **E**veryone's own choice: *Which solution would I choose without assistance?*
- **R**equests for feedback: *Can you give me some feedback on this?*

## 2 'Is this good enough?'

# CLOSER

### RE 2: 'IS THIS GOOD (ENOUGH)?'

Instead of *'is this good (enough)?'* it is important to make clear to your feedback provider in what context you are asking for feedback. It makes a difference, for example, whether you as a student see your work/performance as almost finished or whether it is a first rough draft. In addition, be clear about what you would like to receive feedback on and why.

To ask your peers, teachers, work field partners a question rich in information you can use the mnemonic **CLOSER**:

- **C**ontext: *How much time and energy have I put into this work? Is this my best version?*
- **L**earning **O**utcome: *Which part do I want feedback on?*
- **S**elf-Evaluation: *'to what extent does my performance match the description of the learning outcome / assessment criteria / success criteria?'*
- **R**equest feedback: *Can you give me feedback on this?*

## 3 'What do I need to improve?'

# SPARR

### RE 3: 'WHAT DO I NEED TO IMPROVE?'

If you ask *'what do I need to improve?'* you are risking entering the outermost phase of the zone of development: the Panic Phase (Figure 3). It may be that reading/hearing the answer will give you more feedback than what you are actually waiting for at that moment.

When you ask your feedback question, you want to focus on the most important points of improvement for you at that moment.

With the **SPARR** mnemonic, you can ask your feedback question in a targeted manner:

- **S**tatus of **P**erformance: *how far have I got with my work/performance so far?*
- **A**chieved: *I think it is already finished / meets the expected level?*
- **R**equest questions and **R**eflection: *Can you give me feedback on this?*
  - *As a feedback provider, what do you think are my most important blind spots at the moment?*  
*What do I not yet see and where can I improve?*
  - *How do I reflect on this, what are the consequences for possible actions that I will undertake?*

## 4 'Is it good (enough) now?'

# SUPER

### RE 4: 'IS IT GOOD (ENOUGH) NOW?'

If you have asked for feedback before and have taken action, you may want to know afterwards whether it is good (enough). Because the person whom you ask for feedback, probably provides feedback to several students, he or she may not remember exactly which feedback was given to you before. That is why you make it easier for the person giving the feedback, but also for yourself, to (digitally) summarize the feedback you have been given previously, including the actions you have taken or will take and who can support you in this. Also check whether you have understood the feedback. You can also indicate what emotions the feedback has evoked in you (positive/ negative / activating / deactivating). Not every feedback contributes to your learning process. To ask your peers, teachers, work field partners this feedback question you can use the mnemonic **SUPER**:

- **S**ummary: *What feedback have I received before?*
- **U**sage: *How did I use that feedback?*
- **P**roduct/Performance: *How is that reflected in my improved product or performance?*
- **E**motions: *What emotions did it evoke and how did I deal with it?*
- **R**equest questions: *Has my work really improved as a result? I think so!*

## ➤ Using the feedback

When you receive feedback, it may feel uncomfortable. It can really affect you and even make you emotional. During these moments, you are unreceptive to feedback. It's better to put it to one side for a while, and also to report it to the feedback provider. You can re-evaluate the feedback and put it into perspective later on. What do you recognise or what don't you recognise in the feedback? Are you able to put things into perspective? Why did the feedback affect you so much? Does it hint at a blind spot?

If you regularly receive the same sort of feedback and don't recognise it straightaway, you can ask a feedback giver for an example. What does this actually say about me? Should I or do I want to do something with this? And who can support me in this? Also remember that the feedback relates to something you did and not to you as a person.

## ➤ Giving feedback to peers: some specific tips

Asking for feedback also has another side: **giving feedback**.

Sometimes you find it difficult to give feedback to peers, but if you do so in a positive and constructive way, then you start to appreciate each other as colleagues in training. You will improve together! Peer feedback can be seen as a form of learning together. Getting feedback from peers makes you better as a starting professional. After all, you speak a common language and work in the same environment.

And... when you graduate, it is also important to (continue to) provide feedback to your colleagues and to (continue to) ask for feedback, so that you can continue to develop together throughout life. The feedback questions you ask your peers can be the same as those you ask yourself (see table 2).

**Table 2** From feedback question to yourself to feedback question to peers

FEEDBACK QUESTION FOR YOURSELF (TO OTHERS)		PEER FEEDBACK
What is the problem I am facing?	➔	What is the problem you are facing?
What solutions do I see?	➔	What solutions do you see?
I don't think it's all sufficient.	➔	Why do you think it isn't all sufficient.

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