

What Works Best 2025

Practical guide

Effective feedback

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

How to use this guide

This resource is part of the **practical guide series** for [What Works Best 2025](#). It provides teachers and school leaders with practical ideas for implementing effective feedback in their school. It is not intended to capture all aspects of effective feedback, and it is important to consider how strategies and practices should be responsive to the learning needs and goals of students.

Before engaging with these ideas, it may be useful to first consider your current practice, and how it influences teaching and learning. What is working well, and which areas could be strengthened? The following ideas may support you when planning next steps.



What is effective feedback?

Effective feedback is timely, actionable and specific information provided to students that aims to communicate the gap between current and desired performance or understanding, as well as how to close this gap. It is culturally responsive and should align with the learning intention and success criteria of a task.

Effective feedback comes in many forms – for example, formal, informal, formative and summative – and modes of delivery, such as verbal or written. It can be provided individually or to the whole class.

Why does effective feedback matter?

Feedback is an integral component of teaching, learning and assessment, with research consistently highlighting its importance to student outcomes. Several meta-analyses report that it can lead to medium to high learning gains (for example, Hattie and Timperley 2007; Hattie 2009; van der Kleij et al. 2015; Wisniewski et al. 2020). Effective feedback is a core strategy of explicit teaching and also contributes to other factors that positively impact student learning, such as high expectations (The Education Hub 2018; CESE 2020), growth goal setting (Burns et al. 2021; CESE 2021) and everyday resilience (Anderson et al. 2020; CESE 2022).

It is important to provide high-quality feedback as part of personalised learning pathways (PLPs) and learning and support plans. In order for feedback to be effective, it is crucial to ensure that students are able to understand, engage and act upon it.

The relationship between effective feedback and explicit teaching

Effective feedback that confirms or corrects student responses is integral to explicit teaching both for learning and behaviour. Providing feedback in a timely manner is important to enhance student success and limit errors or misconceptions, as well as to give students opportunities to reflect on and apply the feedback to improve their work or behaviour. It also enables teachers to monitor students' growth and adjust goals as they progress, supporting student motivation, engagement and achievement.

Before you begin – fostering a trusting and safe classroom environment

For students to engage with feedback, it is important to foster a safe learning environment where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities and feedback is seen as an important part of growth and understanding (Brooks et al. 2021; Hattie et al. 2021).

Underpinning this is the cultivation of trust between teachers and students, as well as among students (Hattie and Clark 2019). To foster trust, teachers should establish positive teacher–student relationships by getting to know and understand their students, valuing their input and accomplishments and using culturally responsive practices (Perso and Hayward 2020; Merrill O’Brien et al. 2022). In developing trust and positive relationships, it is also important for teachers to employ effective classroom management practices to create a positive and culturally inclusive environment for students (Perso and Hayward 2020; Merrill O’Brien et al. 2022; State et al. 2022; refer to Chapter 6: Classroom management in the [What Works Best 2025 evidence guide](#)).

Provide students with detailed and specific feedback about what they need to do to improve

- **Provide students with timely feedback that is aligned with the learning intention and success criteria.** Such feedback is more specific, and therefore more helpful in celebrating students’ successes and identifying ways for them to improve (Hattie and Clark 2019). Teachers are encouraged to focus their feedback on what is critical to achieving the learning intention. For example, if the learning intention is to write a clear and concise summary, feedback is best aligned to the success criteria – this could include identifying the text’s main ideas and expressing them with clarity. Doing so ensures that students focus their efforts on the specific learning of that lesson, and keeps feedback actionable and targeted. Teachers may also provide incidental feedback on other aspects of student’s work, such as spelling or punctuation, but the primary focus remains on the success criteria.

Further examples:

Verbal feedback – Stage 1 English

EN1-CWT-01: plans, creates and revises texts written for different purposes, including paragraphs, using knowledge of vocabulary, text features and sentence structure.

Learning intention: We are learning to write a recount of an event.

Success criteria: I can:

- recount main events
- express my ideas clearly
- use time connectives (first, next, then, finally) to order the events
- use noun groups to describe people and things.

Feedback: “Your recount of our class excursion to the zoo includes the main events of the day, which is great! You also used words like ‘first’, ‘next’, ‘then’ and ‘finally’, which tells me the order in which the events took place. Next time, try to include some describing words to provide more detail about the animals you saw – for example, ‘the elephant had big, strong legs.’”

Written feedback – Stage 4 mathematics

MA4-DAT-C-02: analyses simple datasets using measures of centre, range and shape of the data.

Learning intention: We are learning to calculate and interpret the mean, median, mode and range of a set of data.

Success criteria: I can:

- organise data into a list or table
- calculate the mean by finding the sum of values and dividing by the total number of values
- find the median by ordering the data and identifying the middle value
- find the mode by identifying the value that occurs most frequently
- calculate the range by finding the difference between the highest and lowest value.

Feedback: “Great job ordering the data and correctly finding the mean, median and range. Remember that there can be more than one mode! See if you can provide a more complete answer for the mode of the data.”

- **Provide actionable steps so that students can improve their learning process and enhance their understanding and performance on the task.** For example, refer students to an anchor chart,¹ chapter, practical problem or additional resources to help them practise, refine their understanding or structure their work.
- **Consider, where appropriate, different ways of delivering feedback that may be more time-efficient than providing individual feedback.** For example, verbal feedback can be provided to the whole class on overall strengths and areas for improvement that have been identified after reviewing or marking all students’ work. Alternatively, teachers can work together to create feedback presentations that can be delivered to an entire cohort of students after an assessment. Where individual feedback is most appropriate, consider using coded annotations or in-the-moment feedback.

¹ Anchor charts are visual tools used in classrooms to support learning. They can display key information, strategies or concepts from a lesson or unit of work. The charts serve as a reference to help students remember and apply what they have learnt.

Coded annotations (also referred to as ‘coded marking’) involve the teacher applying a letter or symbol ‘code’ to note common student misconceptions and prompt for improvement, rather than using whole words when providing written feedback – for example, using ‘sp’ to indicate a spelling error. When using coded annotations, it is important to ensure that they can be easily understood by students, and that students are clear about what action is then required to improve their work. For this reason, coded marking is likely to be more appropriate for students who have achieved a high level of proficiency than for novice learners or very young learners. Once the teacher has explicitly taught the meaning of the selected symbols and is assured that students will know what action is required for next steps, students can keep a copy of the marking key at hand. When receiving feedback, they can then identify the codes used, think about their meaning and take action to improve their work.

In-the-moment feedback (also referred to as ‘live marking’) involves the teacher reviewing work as they move around the room, providing instant verbal feedback and only writing on student work where necessary.

Provide feedback that reflects the task and students’ level of learning

- **Consider what type of feedback is most appropriate for students’ level of learning:**
 - **Task-level feedback** is focused on the specific requirements of the task, including whether the task was performed correctly or incorrectly. It is useful for novice learners as it can help them identify errors and whether they are on track to achieve a learning intention (Brookes et al. 2019; Mandouit and Hattie 2023). For example, “You have labelled the flower’s ovary correctly, but you have mixed up the stigma and the style. Please check your notes and revise your diagram.”

Further examples:

“Your discussion covers the natural causes of desertification, but don’t forget to include the human causes as well. Please expand your discussion to cover this.”

“The task asks you to list the events in chronological order, but you haven’t quite got it right. Please check the dates to see which of the 2 events occurred first.”
 - **Process-level feedback** is focused on the strategies used to complete a task. For example, “When concluding a body paragraph of a persuasive text, make sure you link back to your topic sentence.” As students gain proficiency, consider providing process-level feedback to enhance deeper learning. Here, teachers can work with students to find more effective approaches to understanding and completing a task, as well as ways of detecting errors and how to make connections between task strategies (Mandouit and Hattie 2023).

Further examples:

“Citing previous studies can enhance the credibility of your investigation. Consider discussing how your investigation fits within the existing research in the field.”

“Remember to use the order of operations to figure out which operations to perform first! It might be helpful to write the order out at the top of the page before you start so you don’t forget. Once you’ve done that, try some more problems for practice. Make sure you remember the rule with multiplication and division, and addition and subtraction – they have to be done from left to right.”

- **Self-regulation feedback** encourages students to manage their own learning through strategies such as self-monitoring, self-evaluation and help-seeking. It can be provided to students with high levels of proficiency in the content or skill they are learning. For example, “After each throw of your discus, think about the different factors that affect your direction and distance, such as grip, stance and how early or late you let go. Which of these could you improve on for the next throw?” Developing students’ ability to self-regulate their learning processes can increase student engagement and efficacy as it provides them with greater confidence to further engage in the task and rely less on the teacher for feedback (Hattie and Clark 2019; Merrill O’Brien et al. 2022).

Further examples:

“Listen to the recording of your violin performance. Are there any sections where your intonation and control could be improved?”

“Ahead of the half-yearly exam, look through your previous assessments to identify the questions you found challenging and amend your study plan accordingly.”

Praise is a form of self-level feedback (for example, “You’re such a great writer!”). While general praise can help create trust and positive teacher–student relationships, it is considered unhelpful for improving students’ learning because it is aimed at the student personally instead of the content of their task or the strategies they have used (Wisniewski et al. 2020; McPherson et al. 2022; Merrill O’Brien et al. 2022). Consider instead, “Your writing is great **because ...**”

- **Provide feedback to students in a timely manner.** The nature of the task impacts the timing of when feedback should be given. Immediate feedback should be provided for tasks where students are learning new skills or concepts, so they know straight away whether they have correctly understood what was taught (for example, correcting a student’s French pronunciation or correcting a young student’s grip on their pencil) (Collin and Quigley 2021). However, consider delaying feedback if students are already working well on a task to prevent them from getting distracted (Fletcher-Wood 2018; Wiliam 2018a). Delayed feedback is also beneficial for tasks that require students to apply knowledge they have already learnt (for example, a student’s control of narrative voice and use of characterisation in a short story, or a student’s use of regrouping to complete subtraction problems). This is because delayed feedback encourages retrieval of information and aids in long-term retention (Wiliam 2018b as cited in Collin and Quigley 2021).

Ensure that students understand and act on the feedback they receive

- Follow up with students to ensure they recognise and understand the feedback provided to them.** The benefits of feedback can only be realised if students are supported to understand, engage and act upon it (refer also to the following 2 points). One way of checking for understanding is to ask students questions such as “Can you tell me what I just said in your own words?” and “Do you know what to do next, or would you like another example?” It may also be helpful for teachers to model how to action feedback – for example, through think-alouds.² Secondary school teachers may also consider having discussions with students about the importance and purpose of feedback as it can make the feedback process more transparent and reduces the possibility of misunderstandings (van der Kleij and Adie 2020).
- Support students to engage with feedback, and encourage them to look beyond the grades they receive and view mistakes as opportunities to improve.** For example, delay giving students marks on assessments until they have demonstrated that they have reflected on the feedback – this can be done through informal discussions or by having students write reflection comments identifying how they can improve. Alternatively, students can be asked to engage with feedback and the marking rubric to self-assess their work before receiving their official mark.
- Provide students with in-class opportunities to act on strategies outlined in feedback so they can improve their learning, and so teachers can check that they have understood the feedback.** For example, students can be given time to rewrite their responses based on the feedback they have received on written tasks. Alternatively, teachers can ask students to attempt a similar task or skill with a different question.
- Ensure that feedback is culturally grounded and responsive, recognising that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students’ personal, cultural and linguistic backgrounds shape how it is received and acted upon.** Culturally grounded and responsive practices ensure clarity, cultural inclusivity and meaningful next steps for learners. For example, Aboriginal ways of giving and receiving feedback emphasise active listening, respectful relationships and honest conversations (including yarning).³ Some Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students may prefer to receive feedback privately rather than in front of the class (Perso and Hayward 2020).

² Think-alouds are a teaching strategy where the teacher verbalises their thought process while completing a task or solving a problem. For more information and illustrative examples, refer to the NSW Department of Education’s (2025) [Modelling – technique guide \(PDF 727 KB\)](#).

³ More information about yarning can be found on the department’s [What does Yarning mean?](#) webpage.

- **Ensure that feedback provided to students learning English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) uses language appropriate to their curriculum, English language proficiency and intercultural competence.** In addition to feedback on curriculum content, EAL/D learners benefit from effective feedback on their English language learning. Both of these aspects of learning are reported to families in the biannual school reports.⁴ Teachers can refer to the EAL/D Elaborations of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (ACTA 2015) for further information and considerations around providing effective feedback to EAL/D learners.
- **Provide opportunities for students to discuss the feedback they receive.** One way this can be done is by scheduling time for individuals or groups to meet (or ‘conference’) with the teacher while other students are working individually. These conferences can be spread across several lessons and can be short – for example, lasting 5 minutes per student or group. During the conference, students can ask questions about their feedback and workshop ways to improve with their teacher. Conferencing can help foster positive teacher–student relationships and can also be used to discuss individual learning goals (Shrum 2019).

School leaders are important to implementing a whole-school approach to effective feedback

Through whole-school approaches, school leaders can help strengthen the positive impacts of effective feedback practices. In particular, the creation of a supportive feedback culture across the whole school is fundamental to the successful implementation of effective feedback – it is important that students feel safe and encouraged to seek, share, receive and act on feedback. To foster such a culture, school leaders can work with teachers to implement strategies such as modelling how to seek and act on feedback, developing trusting and positive teacher–student relationships through open communication and framing mistakes as opportunities to improve.

School leaders can also work with teachers to establish a common understanding of what high-quality and timely feedback entails, and to ensure that effective feedback practices are being implemented consistently across the school. For example, through professional learning communities, teachers can collaborate to build and share knowledge about effective feedback strategies. School leaders can also build staff capacity to implement and refine effective feedback strategies through targeted professional development. These activities can take place within the school or within a wider community of practice with other schools.

⁴ For the purposes of this and other What Works Best practical guides and illustrations of practice, ‘families’ includes biological parents, adoptive parents, step-parents, legal guardians, kin carers, out-of-home (foster) carers, extended family members and other significant adults with caring responsibilities.

Other What Works Best 2025 resources on effective feedback

- [Evidence guide](#) – Chapter 3: Effective feedback
- [Illustration of practice](#) – Effective feedback at Cabramatta High School

Additional resources

- NSW Department of Education (2025) [Using effective feedback](#)
- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) (n.d.) [Feedback](#)
- Collin J and Quigley A (2021) [Teacher feedback to improve pupil learning: guidance report](#), Education Endowment Foundation
- The Education Hub (2018) [Feedback checklist](#)

Reflection questions

Teachers

- How do I ensure that students feel safe and encouraged to seek, share, receive and act on feedback in my class?
- How does my feedback link to the identified learning intention and success criteria?
- What opportunities for feedback do I provide to individual students and the whole class?
- How do I provide feedback that is appropriate to students' level of learning? For example, what do I consider when providing task-level, process-level and self-regulation feedback?
- How do I know if students have understood my feedback?
- What opportunities do I give students to reflect and act on my feedback?
- How am I responsive to my students' personal, cultural and linguistic backgrounds when providing feedback?

School leaders

- How are teachers in our school supported to have a shared understanding of what effective feedback looks like?
- What feedback practices are used consistently across the school? Are there opportunities to strengthen the use of consistent feedback processes?
- What opportunities does our school provide for teachers to build and refine their knowledge and skills of delivering effective feedback?
- How do we as school leaders work with teachers to create a supportive feedback culture where students feel safe and encouraged to seek, share, receive and act on feedback?

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High expectations

Explicit teaching

Effective feedback

Using data to inform practice

Assessment

Classroom management

Wellbeing

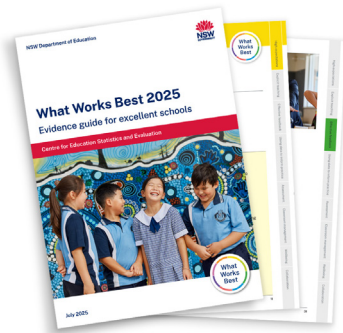
Collaboration

Access the full suite of What Works Best resources

What Works Best 2025 is a suite of resources for teachers and school leaders that outlines 8 effective practices that are known to improve student learning and wellbeing:

- high expectations
- explicit teaching
- effective feedback
- using data to inform practice
- assessment
- classroom management
- wellbeing
- collaboration.

The resources can be used individually or in conjunction with one another to implement evidence-based, quality teaching and learning practices and inform school excellence planning.



The What Works Best 2025 – Evidence guide for excellent schools provides an overview of the evidence that underpins each of the 8 themes.



The What Works Best practical guides translate evidence into practice by providing teachers and school leaders with practical ideas for implementing each of the themes in their classrooms and schools. The guides unpack not only ‘what’ should be done to successfully implement a theme, but also the ‘how’ and ‘why’.



The What Works Best illustrations of practice provide teachers and school leaders with examples of how some of our great schools from across NSW have implemented the themes.

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