
Set and Meet Expectations for Timely Online Feedback

Effective feedback provides online students with the sense that you are paying attention and giving thoughtful consideration to their work and ideas (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016). Timely, specific, and personalized feedback from instructors is one of the primary factors associated with student retention and satisfaction in an online course (Kim & Moore, 2005).

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Students are motivated by timely feedback and may become demotivated if they don't receive feedback when expected (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016). Therefore, it is important for online instructors to both set reasonable expectations regarding when they will provide feedback and then consistently meet those expectations. When planning assignments, take into consideration when you will be able to evaluate the work and provide feedback, and then schedule due dates accordingly. Below are general guidelines:

Questions – It is a good idea to respond as quickly as possible to student questions so they will not have to worry about getting the information they need. For example, you might tell students that you will answer all questions within 24 hours (response time might be different on weekends) but will respond sooner when possible.

Discussion forums – Providing feedback on discussion forums within 24 hours of the due date for student posting and replying to peers is most effective. If students are being graded on their discussion forum participation, you will want them to have your feedback before the next discussion posts are due, which allows students to make appropriate adjustments if they are not meeting your expectations.

Projects and papers – The average turnaround time for larger assignments is approximately seven days (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016). If you have a large class, you may consider using staggered due dates so that you can provide feedback in a timely fashion. You can stagger due dates by allowing students to sign up for different due dates, randomly assigning students to different due dates (Glendower, 2016), or creating a tiered bonus system that awards points to students who submit during earlier time frames (Burnie, 2016).