



Provide Opportunities to Use Feedback for Improvement

As instructors, we want to create a “safe” classroom where students can take risks and feel comfortable making mistakes. However, traditional grading practices often punish mistakes and make recovering from low grades early in the semester challenging if not impossible. Whereas grades can help students identify if they are achieving mastery, feedback guides them to take those next steps toward mastery, if they are given the opportunity to use it to improve.

As far back as 1968, Benjamin Bloom suggested that students receive one of two grades on formative assessments: “Mastery” or “Not Mastery” (Bloom, 1968). Bloom further explained that students in the “Not Mastery” or “Not Yet” category must receive feedback from teachers that identifies precisely what they are expected to learn, what they have learned well to that point, and what they need to learn better. Students can be encouraged to use feedback to improve the current assignment or incorporate feedback into their future work.

Using Feedback for Redos or Retakes

Learning depends on making mistakes and then having the opportunity to correct those mistakes. This process helps to motivate students to keep learning because they have a chance to recover from the initial performance and show improvement (Feldman, 2018).

To incorporate redos or retakes into your grading, consider the following questions posed by Joe Feldman in *Grading for Equity* (2018):

1. What score on an assessment qualifies a student for a retake?

It may be tempting to limit the ability to redo or retake assessments or assignments to students who, for example, score below a C. Is this an equitable approach if this student who earned a C- on the first assessment now scores a B+, higher than other students who were not allowed to redo? Should we limit the ability to continue learning to our lowest performing students?

To ensure equity in grading, every student should have the opportunity to continue learning and to improve their performance.

2. Should there be retakes on everything or only for certain assignments?

Redos for formative assessments such as homework are typically easy to accommodate. The purpose of formative assessments is to apply content and to practice skills, receive feedback, and improve. In these cases, asking students to apply the feedback and redo the work should result in deeper learning.

In some courses, students may be asked to create multiple assignments that are similar. For example, they may write five or six lab reports, or multiple reviews of readings. In these cases, it may be more effective and efficient to have students apply the feedback to future iterations of this assignment. You may even grade a subset of the total assigned so that students can use feedback on early assignments to improve their future work.

3. Should students retake the entire summative assessment or just the content they failed?

If the purpose of a summative assessment is to gather evidence of what the student knows, the retake would only involve the content the student did not master.

If our goal is mastery on course outcomes, and a student demonstrates that they have only mastered half of the content by scoring a 50% on an end-of-unit exam, we can either decide that



the student has stopped learning and enter the grade of 50% or we can use the summative assessment as a formative assessment opportunity and provide feedback and support to help them master the remaining 50% and provide a retake.

This approach can empower and motivate students as they realize that your goal is to help them learn and master the course outcomes.

Incorporating Feedback Into Future Work

Feedback improves student learning but only if they act on it. We can encourage students to use feedback by making sure they are motivated and equipped to act on it. Students often see feedback as criticism, and changing that perception can begin when you tell them that you provide feedback because you have high expectations for all of them and you are confident they can meet those expectations. When teachers share this viewpoint, students are more likely to resubmit work and receive higher grades (Yeager et al., 2014).

We can also encourage student use of feedback by:

- framing the feedback as positive by telling students, “Don’t miss out on the chance to improve” (Fletcher-Wood, 2021)
- providing specific steps students can take to improve their work
- sharing specific resources such as links to citation generators, writing centers, and video tutorials students can use to address the feedback
- offering open office hours where students can drop in and discuss their feedback
- asking students to share how they used your feedback to improve the resubmission
- having students work in groups to process the feedback on an assignment

Sources

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