



Interpersonal Skills

Receiving and Responding to Feedback

LINKED COMPETENCY: Emotional Intelligence - Responsiveness

When receiving feedback, it can be difficult to hear criticism or suggestions for improvement, especially if it is delivered in a way that feels harsh or confrontational. However, learning to receive feedback with an open and non-defensive attitude is a necessary professional skill to resolve conflicts, improve communication, and focus on personal and professional growth.

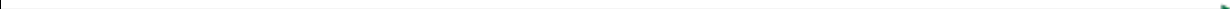
Graduate students receive continuous feedback throughout their program from their supervisor and others. It is important that they feel confident to respond professionally and respectfully, even if they don't agree with the feedback. This can help foster a productive and positive working relationship between students and supervisors.

Practicing receiving feedback can help learners develop the ability to remain calm and objective, instead of becoming defensive. By practicing receiving feedback, learners can also develop the ability to actively listen to others, understand their perspective, and empathize with their feelings. This can help build trust and rapport in relationships and make it easier to work collaboratively with others.

OUTCOMES:

- To identify effective and ineffective responses to feedback.
- To practice responding positively feedback.

Rubric

Building emotional intelligence, specifically with receiving feedback and responding to others			
Exploring		Exploring	
			
I am aware of differing emotional states in myself others.	I am beginning to identify differing emotional states in myself and others and be curious about what I can do to respond in positive ways.	I have accurate emotional awareness of self and practice healthy responses. I often use mistakes as learning opportunities.	I have accurate emotional awareness of self and others and respond in healthy ways. I consistently demonstrate positive thinking and a growth mindset.

Remind your students to reflect, add, and annotate evidence of competency to their portfolios.

- **Reflect** on their experiences and what they learned through the activities and feedback.
- **Add** evidence of competency to their portfolios.
- **Annotate** the evidence to highlight their specific competency.



Materials

- [Sift and Sort](#) statements.
- Printed out [case studies](#)

Time

55-min

Learning Activity: Responding to Feedback

Explain to students that the purpose of the activity is to have them strengthen their ability to respond to feedback.

Part 1: Table Groups-- Sift and Sort

Have students sift and sort which responses to feedback are helpful and which are not.

Debrief as a large group to discuss the top four that people want to discuss further.

1	I'm very confused about the comments you made on my work.
2	This feedback would have been good to know three months ago! I might as well just quit this program now before I waste any more time.
3	I don't mean any disrespect, but I don't think you know this area well enough to critique that.
4	I know that part of my presentation was bad but that's because we never had any courses that taught us how to present properly. This program doesn't prepare us properly.
5	Thank you for your feedback. You have given me a lot to think about. If I understand you correctly, the areas that I could work on include....
6	Your feedback is very critical. I've been putting in a lot of time and effort into this project and I don't think you realize that.
7	You've given me a lot of good feedback. Are these the two areas you think are the most important to focus on in the next two weeks?
8	You're wrong. I didn't say/write/do that.
9	Why would you say that? That's very hurtful.
10	Thanks for the feedback and I mean this with no disrespect, but I my original design is the best option.
11	I know that section of my report is terrible. That is because I took terrible advice from someone else. They are so incompetent.
12	I appreciate your feedback. Can you give me more specific details on what you mean by? Is it that I should....



Part 2: Case Studies

In small groups, have students use the case studies to practice how they might respond appropriately to the feedback and discuss any follow up actions the student might take. The case studies were adapted from responses generated by ChatGPT.

Strategy for responding to feedback:

Guidelines for responding to open and healthy feedback to get the most from the experience.

- **Listen to understand**, not to counter. This means not interrupting.
- **Do not try to explain or justify** 'why' you act or think the way you do.
- **Ask one clarifying question** if it helps you to understand the feedback itself. Be cognisant of not asking too many clarifying questions as this can make the feedback process onerous for the one providing feedback and can limit constructive feedback in the future. If the feedback is clear and you don't have a follow-up question, then head to the next step.
- **Summarize back** the main points of the feedback and ask if you have accurately understood the main points you need to work on.
- Thank them for their feedback.

These guidelines, although sometimes challenging to follow, are helpful to **review prior to receiving feedback**, as most of us tend to try and defend ourselves when hearing something surprising or critical. Adhering to the guidelines helps to build the relationship and encourages the person to consider future feedback – or even seek feedback from you!

Case Study #1

Background:

Samantha (pronouns she/her) is a psychology student working on her senior thesis project. She has designed a study to investigate the effect of music on memory recall, specifically whether listening to music while studying affects a student's ability to recall information. She has recruited 50 college students to participate in her study and has divided them into two groups: one group will study while listening to classical music, while the other group will study in silence. After a 24-hour delay, Samantha will test both groups on their recall of the studied material.

Feedback:

Samantha has just received feedback on her project from her thesis advisor, Dr. Smith. Dr. Smith has given her some constructive criticism on her methodology and analysis.

- Dr. Smith suggests that Samantha consider adding a third group to her study, which would study while listening to a different genre of music, such as rock or hip-hop.



This would allow her to compare the effects of different types of music on memory recall.

- Dr. Smith also suggests that Samantha consider controlling for individual differences in musical preference by having participants rate their level of enjoyment of the music they listen to during the study session.
- Finally, Dr. Smith advises Samantha to be careful in her analysis of the data. She notes that it may be difficult to draw strong conclusions about the effect of music on memory recall based on a single study and suggests that Samantha discuss the limitations of her study in her final report.

Samantha's thoughts:

Samantha is overwhelmed by the amount of feedback and is unsure where to start. She can feel her face getting hot and her heart is racing as she is listening to all the constructive criticism.

*Case Study #2***Background:**

Jared (pronouns he/him) is a biology student conducting a research project to investigate the effect of different fertilizers on the growth of tomato plants. He has set up an experiment in which he uses three different fertilizers: a synthetic fertilizer, an organic fertilizer, and a control group with no fertilizer. He is measuring the growth of the plants by recording the height and number of leaves every week for six weeks.

Feedback:

Jared has just received feedback on his project from his research supervisor, Dr. Lee. Dr. Lee has identified several flaws in Jared's methodology and has provided negative feedback on these issues.

Negative feedback:

- Dr. Lee notes that the sample size in Jared's study is too small. He advises Jared to use more plants in each treatment group to increase the power of his analysis.
- Dr. Lee also questions the use of tomato plants in the study, given that they are a common research plant and may not be representative of other types of plants. She suggests that Jared consider using a variety of plant species in his study.
- Finally, Dr. Lee expresses concerns about the way Jared is measuring the plant growth. She notes that simply measuring height and number of leaves may not capture the full complexity of plant growth and suggests that Jared consider using additional measures such as biomass or fruit production.

Response:

Jared is initially disappointed by Dr. Lee's negative feedback.



Case study #3

Background:

Julia (pronouns she/her) is an education student conducting an action research project to investigate the use of technology in the classroom to enhance student learning. She has implemented a new online learning platform that allows students to complete interactive activities, access online resources, and receive personalized feedback from their teacher. She is measuring the effectiveness of the platform by comparing student performance on pre- and post-assessments.

Feedback:

Julia has just received feedback on her project from her instructor, Dr. Kim. However, the feedback is unclear and confusing, making it difficult for Julia to understand what she needs to do to improve her project.

Unclear feedback:

- Dr. Kim notes that Julia needs to work on her research question but does not provide any specific guidance on what needs to be improved.
- Dr. Kim also suggests that Julia consider using a different methodology, but again, does not provide any specific suggestions or reasons why her current methodology may be problematic.
- Finally, Dr. Kim advises Julia to think more critically about her data analysis but does not explain what she means by this or provide any concrete examples of how to improve.

Response:

Julia is initially frustrated by Dr. Kim's unclear and seemingly unhelpful feedback.

Case Study #4

Background:

Fatima (pronouns she/her) is an art student working on a mixed media portrait of her favorite musician. She has combined acrylic paints, ink, and collage to create a layered and dynamic composition. She has shown the piece to a member on her advisory committee, who does not specialize in this area of visual expression and asked for feedback.

Feedback:

The committee member has provided feedback on the portrait, but Fatima believes that the member's lack knowledge about this area makes the feedback less credible.

Perceived non-credible feedback:



- The committee member notes that the portrait is "too busy" and suggests that she remove some of the collage elements to simplify the composition.
- The committee member also advises Fatima to use more muted colors, stating that the bright colors clash with the musician's image.
- Finally, the committee suggests that Fatima crop the portrait to focus on the musician's face, rather than including the entire body.

Response:

Fatima does not agree with the feedback and is very disappointed almost to the point of being angry.

*Case #5***Background:**

Dion (pronouns they/them) is an engineering student working on a bridge design project as part of their senior capstone course. They have received feedback from their previous design review, where their faculty advisor praised their design for its strength and stability. However, during their latest design review, their supervisor has provided feedback that contradicts previous feedback.

Contradictory feedback:

- Dion's supervisor notes that while their design is strong and stable, it is also too heavy and could result in a costly and time-consuming construction process.
- She suggests that Dion consider alternative materials or design options that could reduce the weight and cost of the bridge.
- Additionally, she suggests that Dion should focus more on the bridge's aesthetics, as it will be visible to the public and needs to be visually appealing.

Response:

Dion is unsure how to address the contradictory feedback in their design and is frustrated as they don't have time to make any adjustments and finish the project on time.

Large Group Debrief:

Ask for volunteers to share some of their takeaways from the process.

- What was hard?
- What areas of feedback might they be uncomfortable responding to?

Encourage them to think about what they might say in a future interview to highlight their interpersonal skills through their ability to respond positively to feedback.



Use the additional information as needed to respond to their questions.

Case Study #1

Samantha should thank Dr. Smith for her feedback and summarize the main points she will focus on in the next two weeks. Samantha can also take the opportunity to ask Dr. Smith for any additional resources or advice she can provide to help Samantha improve her research skills.

By responding to Dr. Smith's constructive criticism in a positive and constructive manner, Samantha can improve her research project and learn from her mistakes.

Case Study #2

Even though Jared is initially disappointed by Dr. Lee's negative feedback he can take some time to reflect on the criticisms and decides how to address the issues. He can also ask Dr. Lee for any additional guidance or resources she can provide to help him improve his methodology and analysis skills.

By responding to Dr. Lee's negative feedback in a positive and constructive manner, Jared can improve his research project and learn from his mistakes.

Case Study #3

Even though Julia is initially frustrated by Dr. Kim's unclear feedback she knows that it is important to seek clarification in order to improve her project. She can ask to schedule a meeting with Dr. Kim to discuss the feedback in more detail and asks for specific guidance on what she needs to do to improve.

Julia may also want to ask for additional resources or guidance on how to improve her research skills.

By seeking clarification and taking the initiative to address Dr. Kim's feedback, Julia can improve her project and learn from her mistakes.

Case Study #4

Even though Fatima does not agree with all her committee member's feedback, she should be open to the idea that any feedback can be valuable and can help her to see her work from different perspectives.

Regarding the feedback, Fatima will need to determine which feedback she will incorporate and which she will not. It is important for Fatima to realize that she doesn't need to incorporate everyone's feedback she just needs to be able to critically assess why she has or has not used it as it will likely come up in future committee meetings.

For example, she might not adjust the color palette of the portrait if she believes that the bright colors add energy and emotion to the piece.

Fatima should thank her roommate for her feedback and explains how she plans to incorporate some of the suggestions into her work. She can also use the feedback as an opportunity to explain her creative process and to share her artistic vision with her committee to help her communicate the intention behind the portrait.

By being open to feedback, while also recognizing the value of her own artistic vision, Fatima can refine her work and to grow as an artist.

Case Study #5

Dion could acknowledge their supervisor's feedback and appreciates the different perspective. To respond to the feedback, Dion could take the following steps:

- Evaluate the weight and cost of the bridge and consider alternative materials or design options that could reduce the weight and cost, while still maintaining the structural integrity of the bridge.
- Explore ways to improve the aesthetics of the bridge, while ensuring that it remains structurally sound.
- Reach out to their faculty advisor for additional feedback and guidance, given the contradictory feedback they received.

Dion could approach the feedback with an open mind and a willingness to consider different options. They could focus on maintaining the structural integrity of the bridge, while also exploring ways to make it more cost-effective and visually appealing.

Dion could communicate with their supervisor to clarify any concerns or confusion about the contradictory feedback and seek further guidance on how to address the feedback in their design. Additionally, they could keep their faculty advisor updated on their progress and seek additional feedback and guidance to ensure that their design meets all the necessary criteria.



By being open to feedback and seeking additional guidance, Dion can use the feedback to improve their design and to grow as an engineer. They will be able to address the contradictory feedback in a constructive manner and produce a better final product.