

Giving and Receiving Effective Developmental Feedback

What to do when giving feedback

When possible, ask what the author would like feedback on, and what stage of development the manuscript is in.

Start by identifying what you think is working well and why and acknowledging what you think the writer is intending to do.

Give specific and substantiated praise and criticism and be precise regarding how you think the text might be enhanced.

Distinguish between macro-level issues (e.g., the clarity and consistency of the argument, and structure of the piece) and micro-level concerns (e.g., grammar and punctuation).

Suggest areas that might be cut or condensed as well as what to add; this is important when the piece is close to, or exceeding, the word limit.

Always respect the author, adopt a developmental approach, and make recommendations rather than judgments; consider how you would feel if you received this feedback.

What to avoid when giving feedback

Avoid concentrating on what is not in the piece; although it might be necessary to point out critical omissions, focus on improving what is in the piece.

Avoid making general or vague judgments to which it is difficult to respond; rather, be specific and action-oriented.

Avoid being obsessive about the author's bibliographic sources; although it is helpful to point out missing voices and perspectives, no one can cite everything on a topic, nor should you expect them to cite lots of your references!

What to do when you are requesting and receiving feedback

Tell the reviewer what kind of feedback you need and what stage you are at in the writing process.

When appropriate, offer to provide feedback on their writing.

Separate the delivery from the message; stay calm and avoid taking any comments personally.

Listen, don't talk; avoid defending your work instead of listening.

Reflect carefully on the advice received; take advantage of the opportunity to clarify your ideas.

Take ownership of your own writing; only make changes that make sense to you.

Source: Drawn in part on material in Belcher (2009, 223-8); Grant (2016, 87); Moore (2018, 123-4); Murray (2009, 163); Murray and Moore (2006, 49); and Thomson and Kamler (2013, 173-5); from where further guidance may be sought.