

Are you sometimes unsure about how to correct your students' written work? Should you just write in the correct version or maybe just underline errors? This lesson looks at the areas you can give feedback on and looks at some different ways of providing feedback on students' written work.

Task 1 – A complaint about Andy

Andy's Director of Studies pulled him aside and informed him that a lot of the students in his academic writing class had made a complaint. They said that Andy never gave feedback on their written work. Andy protested and said that he did. He indicated that he responded to the ideas and in doing so reformulated many of the language errors in a correct version. He thought the students and the Director of Studies were being unfair.



Is Andy's opinion justified? What do you think and why? Jot down your answers on a note pad, then check the answer key below. 🗝️



Task 1 Feedback

Andy has some justification in his opinion. However, this kind of feedback might have been too subtle for some of his learners. He may not have pointed out to them that this is his way of providing feedback on writing and he could have indicated that his reformulations contained useful suggestions on correct language. If the students don't know to look for this, they are unlikely to see it.

Key Skill

There are many different ways of providing feedback on students' written work. The key issue is that students need feedback not only on their language but also on the ideas they include in their written work.

Task 2 – A procedure



Letters a to e outline steps in a typical procedure for the correction and rewriting of students’ written work. Put these steps in a logical order.

Steps	Order? [1- 5]
a. In pairs or small groups students help each other to make sense of the corrections that the teacher has pointed out in their written work.	
b. Students write the next draft of their text incorporating the feedback.	
c. Students finish a draft of their text and exchange them to get feedback from their peers.	
d. The teacher collects in the students’ texts and indicates where there are problems.	
e. The teacher monitors and helps the pairs and groups, clarifying anything that is unclear in the marking.	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

The procedure above is not the only approach. For example, students could take the marked texts home to work on and the teacher could set up one-to-one tutorials with students. Another variation is the extent of the teacher’s marking. How explicit are you about errors? The next task looks at different approaches.

Task 3 – Different approaches



Numbers 1 to 6 in the grid are different approaches to providing feedback on students' written work. Letters a to f are strengths, while numbers i to vi are weaknesses that can be associated with the different approaches. Match the strengths and weaknesses to each approach.

Approaches to feedback on written work	Strengths	Weaknesses
1. The teacher corrects all mistakes and provides the correct version.		
2. The teacher underlines mistakes and uses a code to indicate the nature of the error.		
3. The teacher underlines errors, but gives no indication of the nature of the error.		
4. The teacher writes suggestions for improvement in the margin.		
5. The teacher takes 2 example texts and reformulates the language in these texts. The reformulations are distributed to the class as a whole to consider.		
6. Students give peer correction without any feedback from the teacher.		

Strengths

- a. This approach can combine feedback on language and content.
- b. This approach presents students with some challenge, but offers them some degree of support.
- c. This approach can provide students with useful models of language.
- d. This approach is very comprehensive in its feedback on language.
- e. This approach is very good at encouraging students to use each other as a resource.
- f. This approach provides students with a good sense of challenge.

Weaknesses

- i. This approach can be confusing for students as they are not sure what the problem is.
- ii. Students can feel that this approach lacks any real certainty for them.
- iii. This approach can result in too much feedback and can become demotivating for students.
- iv. In this approach the feedback on language can be too vague for many learners.
- v. Strict adherence to this approach won't provide learners with feedback on the content of their texts.
- vi. Learners may find this approach too general and not relate the feedback to their own work.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

It is a good idea to vary your approach to giving feedback. In doing so, you may be able to develop student independence and encourage them to think about accuracy and self-correct as much as possible.

Task 4 – Language Errors



Letters a to j are example errors. Numbers 1 to 10 below show typical symbols used to point out language errors (commonly used in the second approach described in task 3). Match the symbols to the errors.

Errors	Symbols
a. Say goodbye, he left for the airport.	
b. I am losing always my glasses.	
c. They went the library after lunch.	
d. I was very surprising to see him there.	
e. He got lost in a Amazon jungle.	
f. However it cannot be considered a perfect example.	
g. He is the highest person in his family.	
h. We have received your last message.	
i. I have been to Fiji last year.	
j. Sam has just finished recently.	

ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook

Correcting written language: Unit 2 h)

Symbols

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. WF = wrong form | 6. WO = wrong word order |
| 2. WW = wrong word | 7. P = wrong punctuation |
| 3. T = wrong tense | 8. V = wrong verb form |
| 4. ^ = something is missing | 9. A = wrong article |
| 5. Sp = wrong spelling | 10. ø = extra word, not necessary |

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

It would be interesting to trial two different approaches to giving feedback on students' written language that you have never used before. For example, where you typically give feedback by means of symbols, you could spend a month experimenting with reformulation and peer correction. (It is probably not a good idea to do this with a group that has to sit an exam.) At the end of the trial period, you could see whether there is any significant improvement in your students' written language. You can also ask them to give you feedback on the two approaches.

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Often students will make similar errors. You can build up a collection of common errors by having an "Error Box" in the class room. When learners make an error, it can be written on a card and placed in the "Error Box". The error cards can be used as the basis of a revision activity when doing writing activities.

Want to find out more ... ?

Pages 313 to 316 of *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom* by Tricia Hedge (Oxford University Press 2000), and pages 147 to 152 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), contain extra reading on giving feedback on students' written work.

Related TaskBook lessons...

You may be interested in the following lessons in the ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook series, relating to this topic:

- Unit 2 g) **Correcting spoken errors:** recommended as a precursor to this lesson, dealing with error correction of students' spoken errors in the classroom.

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

- 1) c
- 2) d
- 3) a
- 4) e
- 5) b

Task 3 – Feedback

- 1) d, iii
- 2) b, v
- 3) f, i
- 4) a, iv
- 5) c, vi
- 6) e, ii

Task 4 – Feedback

1. WF = wrong form
*d. I was very **surprising** to see him there.*
2. WW = wrong word
*g. He is the **highest** person in his family.*
3. T = wrong tense
*i. I **have been** to Fiji last year.*
4. ^ = something is missing
c. They went ^ the library after lunch.
5. Sp = wrong spelling
*h. We have **received** your last message.*
6. WO = a problem with the word order
*b. I am losing **always** my glasses.*
7. P = wrong punctuation
f. However, it cannot be considered a perfect example.
8. V = wrong verb form
*a. **Say** goodbye, he left for the airport.*
9. A = wrong article
*e. He got lost in **a** Amazon jungle.*
10. ø = extra word, not necessary
*j. Sam has just finished **recently**.*