ACADEMIC SKILLS

Factsheet
💬 Give feedback (1)

C21
ENGLISH FOR THE 21st CENTURY
Levels 3 and 4

Basics
In academic settings, you will frequently give and receive feedback about academic activities. Feedback tells us about what we are doing well and what we are not doing so well. It is important that feedback is given in a positive and polite way so the listener can use the ideas to improve what they do and enhance their learning.

The academic context
In the academic world, there are numerous situations where you need to give and receive feedback.
Examples include: presentations, study groups, tutorials, exams and discussions.

Key features
- Realize that comments about what we do are not personal.
- Remember that the purpose of feedback is to help someone do better.
- Try to be as kind and polite as possible.
- Always include positive comments:

> I really liked …

- Use modal verbs or questions to make suggestions:

> You could display your findings in a graph.
> Why don't you …?

- Involve the other person by asking their opinion:

> What do you think?
> How do you think you did?

- Avoid using very negative words:

> **Too negative**   Your presentation was terrible!
> **More positive**   The content was good, but I think you could improve your delivery.

- Show you understand:

> I know this topic is very difficult to summarize.

- Be supportive and positive by using polite intonation.
- Remember to think about the overall context. What is the overall aim of the activity? What are the key skills or outcomes? Never give negative feedback about something that doesn't really matter.
- Remember to always give the other person time to respond, and listen to what they say.
- Good feedback is honest and imaginative. If something was bad, you can say so – but think about the other person's point of view first. How will your words make them feel? What will you do if they respond negatively?

Challenges/difficulties

It takes discipline to focus on remaining positive and using polite keywords when you are giving feedback with critical comments.

Try to practise providing feedback to your peers in a way that will help them improve their learning.

How can I develop this skill?

Work with a partner. Show pieces of work you have done to your partner for them to read and think about. Take turns giving polite and positive feedback about each other's work.

Learning outcome

When you have mastered this skill, you will be able to use positive comments in feedback, understand how to make feedback softer and more effective, and be more aware of how your voice and body language impact the effectiveness of your feedback.

Theory to practice

▷ **01 Read and listen to the conversation between two students. Answer the questions.**

> **A** I thought your talk was boring. You need to make it more exciting.
> **B** Really? I didn't realize.
> **A** Yeah. The slides were poor, to be honest.
> **B** I thought they were OK.
> **A** Yeah, and make better handouts. I hated them.
> **B** My tutor liked them. You're wrong.
> **A** Sure. Try putting in more pictures. People don't like just reading.

1 Is Student A polite or rude?
2 What language makes you think this?
3 How can Student A be more positive?
4 How can Student B respond more positively?
5 Practise having the conversation:
   a in a less polite and more negative way
   b in a more polite and positive way

Ways to get more practice

Practise giving more general positive feedback to people you know about activities they do well (sport, arts, etc.) and listen to how positive their responses are.