# Engaging students in feedback

Feedback is effective when students use it to improve their future performance. This resource gives ideas for ways to prompt students to engage more actively with the feedback they receive.

For guidance on structuring comments, both written and face-to-face, see [Giving effective feedback](https://ctl.ox.ac.uk/giving-effective-feedback).

## Different types of questions to engage students

By asking students questions about their work we can start a discussion, thereby making feedback a collaborative process in which students have opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of the feedback received. It’s important to consider the purpose of these questions and to vary them to avoid making them too routine. Here are some types of questions you could use:

### Asking students what they would most value feedback on

Having students request feedback on specific aspects of their work ensures you address queries which may otherwise remain unvoiced. However, students early on in their studies may not know what they’d like you to comment on, so you may want to start with reflective questions (discussed next) before leading up to this.

### Prompting students to reflect on their work

Asking reflective (‘**metacognitive**’) questions – such as: ‘What do you think are the strengths of this piece of work?’, ‘What did you find most challenging?’ or ‘Did you try anything new in this work and how did it go?’ – will enhance students’ awareness of how they’re learning and improve their ability to judge the quality of their work. Students might be overly self-critical (or less often, overly-positive) about their work; reflective questions provide opportunities to discuss this and support students’ in recalibrating their academic judgements. This approach can offer insights into how students are learning, making it easier to give feedback on learning processes, for example, planning, handling literature, writing etc.

### Asking students to self-assess against criteria

We can help students to understand better the notion of academic quality of their work by introducing them to the criteria by which they will be assessed. Consider asking students to reflect on how their work relates to a specific criterion or, with more advanced students, introducing all the criteria at once and asking questions such as: ‘Which criteria do you think you have you achieved/not addressed/understand the best or least?’. Alternatively, you can ask students to make a judgement against a criterion, for example, excellent/good/ OK/not yet met, which can help develop students’ self-assessment skills.

## Practical ways to begin the feedback conversation

### **Use cover sheets**

This option involves giving students a feedback cover sheet (examples at the end of this document) with questions to fill in when they submit their work. This allows you to use students’ responses to inform your feedback.

Using cover sheets can be useful for students to look back on the responses they’ve made as the term has progressed – and equally, whether anything raised in the feedback sheets has been forgotten, missed and/or requires further clarification. Some students may feel more confident responding to reflective questions in a written cover sheet format, rather than verbally.

Dedicated cover sheets for collections (formative examinations) and other assessments are called ‘exam wrappers’. See the resource on [collections and revision classes](https://ctl.ox.ac.uk/collections-revision-classes) for further details.

### Ask students to share their responses with peers

Instead of asking students to submit a cover sheet with their work, you can ask students to come to the teaching session prepared to share their responses to one or more of your feedback questions with you and their peers.

Students can benefit from this approach by sharing their experiences, challenges and possible solutions. However, students may not feel confident sharing their thoughts in front of a large group of their peers, so it’s best to give students some choice on which response they share and to allow them to discuss their responses with a partner first, before sharing one point arising from their discussion with the rest of the class.

### Pose questions verbally

Rather than having students prepare in advance, questions about students’ reflections on their work can be raised during the class itself, and indeed, this is a common feature of tutorial teaching. However, not all students are used to thinking about their learning in this way, so self-assessing their work on the spot may not give rise to rich answers. It is also harder to keep track of students’ responses when they are not written down.

## Sample feedback cover sheet: essays

Please complete the cover sheet and submit it with your essay. The questions are designed to help you reflect on your learning. Your answers will help me understand your approach to learning so I can tailor my feedback for you to discuss when we meet.

Name:

Date:

Essay title:

1. Please choose **at least three** of the questions below and respond to them:

* Why did you choose your particular essay question?
* What is the question asking you to do?
* As you wrote, were there any changes or shifts in the way you thought about the question?
* Summarise your argument in under 20 words.
* Which was the most interesting piece of reading this week? Why?
* Which was the most difficult piece of reading this week? What made it tricky? How did you tackle it?
* Give me a brief summary of your essay writing process (everything you did between choosing the title and writing this cover sheet).
* What was the most challenging aspect of writing this essay? And the most rewarding?
* Did you try anything new in this essay? How did it work out?
* What’s the strongest paragraph in this piece of work? Why?
* Is there anything else you’d like to share about this essay or the process of writing it?

2. Having thought about your chosen questions, what would you most value my feedback on?

## Sample feedback cover sheet: problem sheets

To help me tailor my feedback to your work, and to set priorities for the tutorial/class, please complete the cover sheet and submit it with your problem sheet. The questions are designed to help you reflect on your learning this week.

Name:

Date:

Problem sheet:

Please provide brief responses to the five questions below:

1. What was the most important thing you learned from doing this piece of work?

2. What was the most challenging concept you addressed in this work? What made it tricky and how did you tackle it?

3. Which is your strongest solution in this problem sheet? Please explain why.

4. Were there any alternative solutions or approaches you could have used? If you didn’t use them, could you explain why not?

5. Having now thought about all of the above, what would you particularly like to receive feedback on for this week’s problem sheet?