

Written, Verbal and Digital Feedback

Category: Assessment, Feedback and Learning

Written, verbal and digital feedback are modes through which information and dialogue about performance may occur. Written feedback offers a persistent record and precise connection to text. Verbal feedback can convey tone, permit immediate questioning and support relationship. Digital feedback is an environment that may contain text, audio, video, annotation, screencast or automated responses.

No mode is inherently effective. Value depends on purpose, clarity, credibility, timing, accessibility and the learner's opportunity to act. Written comments can become one-way transmission, while spoken or recorded feedback can be difficult to scan, revisit or match to particular evidence ([Nicol, 2010](#)).

Selecting and Combining Modes

1. **Begin with purpose:** Identify the learning decision, evidence and action the feedback should support.
2. **Use written precision:** Anchor important points to passages, criteria or features and preserve a usable record.
3. **Use verbal dialogue:** Explore reasoning, uncertainty and emotion through questions, explanation and response.
4. **Use digital affordances:** Provide replay, multimodality, remote access or on-screen demonstration where these add value.
5. **Ensure access and action:** Offer accessible alternatives, protect privacy and provide time to apply priorities.

Examples in Practice

For a dissertation chapter, a supervisor adds focused written annotations, discusses two conceptual issues in a short meeting and records an agreed action summary. A student unable to access audio receives an equivalent transcript rather than losing information.

Why It Matters

Combining modes can improve clarity and connection, but duplication may overwhelm learners. Educators should select the lightest combination that makes priorities understandable, retrievable and actionable, while accounting for language, disability, bandwidth, privacy, emotional impact and learners' differing preferences ([Paterson et al., 2020](#)).

Further Reading

6. Nicol, D. (2010). [From monologue to dialogue: Improving written feedback processes in mass higher education](#). Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 35(5), 501–517.
7. Lunt, T., & Curran, J. (2010). [‘Are you listening please?’ The advantages of electronic audio feedback compared to written feedback](#). Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 35(7), 759–769.
8. Paterson, C., Paterson, N., Jackson, W., & Work, F. (2020). [What are students' needs and preferences for academic feedback in higher education? A systematic review](#). Nurse Education Today, 85, 104236.

Related Terms: Dialogic Feedback | Audio Feedback | Digital Assessment | Feedback Accessibility