

Ohio University Dept of Physics and Astronomy : General Guide for Offering Comments About others Work

Here are some suggestions on offering comments for the work of others¹ aimed at promoting positive, constructive criticism rather than devaluing or disrespecting those whose work you are commenting on or those you are offering the comments to.

1. Use a respectful tone. Even in the face of fatigue and frustration, it's important to always address people respectfully.
2. Think about the sorts of comments that you find helpful and unhelpful. For example, avoid one-word comments such as “good”, “unclear”, or “awkward.” Rather, Explain your concerns or evaluations in concrete terms. Example: “You develop the implications very effectively here”, or propose an alternative: “Do you mean x?”
3. Think about the extent to which you want to comment on each aspect of the project. For example, how important are punctuation and spelling? Is it enough to have one or two comments on grammar and syntax, or would more extensive comments be appropriate?
4. Don't overwhelm the individual with a lot of different comments. Approximately one to three comments per page will be enough. Focus on a couple of major points rather than comment on everything.
5. Write specific comments in the margin and more general comments at the end of the assignment. General comments give the individual an overall understanding of what went right or wrong and how they can improve their work in the future. Specific comments identify specific parts of the assignment that are right or wrong and explain why.
6. What has been omitted from the research paper (or exam) responses is as important as what has been included. A question to point out something that is missing or suggest improvements. Try to give a good overall sense of how the work can be improved.
7. Do not comment exclusively on weakness. Identify and explain strengths. This helps the individual know their progress and helps them build their skills. Write as many comments on good work as on bad work. In addition to commenting on things the individual does well, think about how the person might work to improve their writing or research skills.
8. Write legibly or type comments.

¹ <https://gsi.berkeley.edu/gsi-guide-contents/grading-intro/communicating-about-grades/comments/>

9. Do not be sarcastic or make jokes. What seems funny to you may be hurtful to another person.
This is detrimental to improvement.
10. Discuss difficult cases for other instructors, if necessary, anonymize the case.
11. Keep a record of common problems and interesting ideas to discuss in class.
12. Make sure to adequately explain the reason for a given comment, criticism, or grade.

Providing Feedback

Providing feedback is a way for us to improve on what we have done. Also, the way we present feedback to others is equally important. Here is a list of suggestions for effective feedback²:

1. Use comments to teach rather than justify the grade (or discussion), focusing on what you'd most like the person to address in future work. Link your comments and feedback to the goals for a given assignment.
2. Plan early opportunities for individuals to get feedback on ways of thinking, writing, or problem solving that they will need later. This will avoid repetition of common errors. In-class (for a class project,) or otherwise collaborative learning exercises can be good moments to provide formative feedback – when the individual is practicing new skills or learning new concepts.
3. Avoid over-commenting or “picking apart” the individuals’ work.
4. In your final comments, ask questions that will guide further inquiry by the individual.
5. Provide feedback to whole group or class orally and/or in a shared written document.
6. Have the group read sample works together to look for common themes or apply evaluation criteria.

²https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/cte/teaching_resources/grading_assessment_toolbox/providing_meaningful_student_feedback/index.php