

Open Professionals Education Network (OPEN) Resource Document Writing Feedback for Selected-Response Questions: Overview

Background

One of the advantages of online assessment is the capability to give students timely, targeted feedback as they work through content and related assessment questions. Many studies have shown that feedback improves students' learning and deepens their understanding.^{1 2 3}

Feedback refers to corrections, suggestions, cues, and explanations that are tailored to the individual's responses. Errors are viewed not so much as mistakes but as a source of information about students' cognitive processes.⁴

Feedback is most effective when it

- Explicitly relates students' performance to the criteria by which they are being evaluated.
- Is timely, frequent, and constructive.
- Provides opportunities for students to incorporate that feedback into further practice.

Feedback helps learners determine performance expectations, judge their level of understanding, and become aware of misconceptions. It also provides clues about the best approaches for correcting mistakes and improving performance.

How to Write Targeted Feedback

1. Indicate whether or not the answer for which you are writing feedback is correct. Use the terms "Correct," "Incorrect," or "Not quite right." The latter is used in situations where the answer choice is partially correct or close to the correct answer to let students know that they are on the right track.
2. Provide students with a short (one- to two-sentence) explanation about *why* the answer they selected is either correct or incorrect.
3. In the correct answer feedback, the explanation should emphasize the concept being evaluated in the question. Given that all selected-response questions are susceptible to guessing, providing an explanation for the correct answer helps reinforce the concept for students who knew the answer as well as for those who may have guessed.
4. In the feedback for the incorrect answer choices, the explanation should state *why* the answer choice is not correct, focusing on the misconception being addressed. The feedback should *not* state or indicate the correct answer.

Examples

1. Multiple-choice: Which of the following is an example of a vegetable?

- A. apple
- B. pumpkin
- C. potato
- D. tomato

Feedback

- A. Incorrect. An apple is the fertilized ovary that comes from an apple tree and contains seeds classifying it as a fruit.
- B. Incorrect. A pumpkin is the fertilized ovary of a squash plant and contains seeds classifying it as a fruit.
- C. Correct. A potato is an edible part of a plant in tuber form and is classified as a vegetable
- D. Incorrect. Many people mistakenly think a tomato is a vegetable. However, because a tomato is the fertilized ovary of a tomato plant and contains seeds it is classified as a fruit.

2. Drop-down: Multiple-choice questions and drop-down questions primarily differ in how _____ (a distractor, feedback, the stem) is presented.

Feedback:

A distractor: Correct. Multiple-choice and drop-down questions primarily differ in how a distractor is presented. Multiple-choice questions display all the distractors as well as the key along with the question, whereas drop-down questions require the student to click on a drop-down menu to see all the possible answer choices.

Feedback: Incorrect. Feedback typically is shown after an answer choice is selected in either question type.

The stem: Not quite right. Although the stem in a multiple-choice question is typically written as a question and the stem in a drop-down is typically written as an incomplete statement, this is not the primary difference in the two question types.

Summary & Additional Resources

References:

1. Corbett, A. T., and Anderson, J. R. (2001). Locus of Feedback Control in Computer-Based Tutoring: Impact on Learning Rate, Achievement and Attitudes. In *Proceedings of ACM CHI 2001 Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, pp. 245–252. New York: ACM Press.
2. Wiggins, Grant. (1998). *Educative Assessment: Designing Assessments to Inform and Improve Student Performance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
3. Butler, D. L., and Winne, P. H. (1995). Feedback and Self-Regulated Learning: A Theoretical Synthesis. *Review of Educational Research*, 65(3): 245–281.
4. Bruning, R. H., Schraw, G. J., and Ronning, R. R. (1999). *Cognitive Psychology and Instruction*, 3rd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall.



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