

## Written Feedback

### *Tips for providing effective written feedback for continuous learning:*

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Learners value written comments far more than numerical representations of their work. Education research indicates that it is the specific guidance provided in the comments of evaluation forms that enables improvement.

Written feedback is performance information communicated in narrative. (e.g., comments on evaluation forms, in email messages, letters, reports, notes on documents). It is provided to enable improvement. Written feedback does not usually lend itself to interactions between the feedback-giver and learner.

#### *Written feedback is:*

- Usually private
- Explicit and tangible (enduring and traceable)
- Helpful when a considered response from the learner with follow-up is expected and processing time is necessary

*Note: Written feedback is not advisable when a complex task is being learned with a high cognitive load or urgency. Verbal feedback is usually more suitable for 'in the moment' situations.*

#### *Vehicles for written feedback in the clinical setting:*

- Direct observation forms: Mini-CEX's, procedural observation forms, presentations at
- conferences, in field notes, in web-based Apps, or other assessment form types End-of-rotation evaluation forms (e.g., end-of-rotation; semi-annual review; end of shift)
- Email-type messages to learners about their work.

## Suggestions for Providing Written Feedback

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- Be timely  
Consider the learning outcomes and/or expectations of the program and the learner
- Be aware of your perspectives. Are you:
  - **Coaching** for improved future performance?
  - **Appreciating** work, actions and/or effects?
  - **Evaluating** current performance?
  - **Applying** multiple perspectives?
- Begin with a brief **summary** of learner achievement.
- Focus on **two to three** areas of improvement and include reasonable detail for the learner to act on (coach).

### *Target Areas to Include in Written Feedback:*

- Level of effort
- Level of challenge
- Learner's self-awareness
- Strategies for work management
- Type or quality of preparation
- Physician-specific training areas
  - Patient care
  - Clinical reasoning and judgment
  - Medical knowledge
  - Professionalism: use of time; interactions with colleagues or staff; humanistic behaviors with patients; work habits: on-time, well-groomed; moral or ethical behaviors

For effective written feedback—to change future learner behavior and develop *informed self-assessment*—both the message and the tone are important. Choose words describing behaviors that are modifiable and observable.

*Note that effective written feedback has many of the same elements as effective verbal feedback.*

## References

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