

# GIVING STUDENTS EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

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## WHAT IS FEEDBACK?

**Feedback is information about a student's learning that helps the student take the next steps in the learning process.**

This guide covers teacher feedback to students as part of the formative learning cycle in the classroom. Elaborated feedback means feedback that connects evidence in students' work with students' current thinking and understanding and uses those inferences to suggest next steps in learning.

## 3 QUESTIONS

The most effective learning happens when students are aiming for some understanding or skill, usually called a learning target, and are participating in a formative learning process based on three questions:

- 1 Where am I going?
- 2 Where am I now?
- 3 Where to next?

You might think that feedback just covers that second question – helping students understand the quality of their work and their learning at a point in time. In reality, effective feedback helps students with all three questions by helping students

- ★ see exactly what it is they are trying to learn
- ★ understand where they are currently
- ★ see what their next step in learning should be and get the information they need to take that step.



## WHY IS FEEDBACK IMPORTANT?

Feedback provides information that is necessary to the learning process. *Even if the teacher doesn't provide any feedback,* students use some sort of information to take next steps in learning. Those steps can be anything from negative and counter-productive (“I failed, as usual. I’ll throw this work in the bin on my way home”) to positive and very productive (“I wrote a great poem. Maybe I should try writing more poems”) and everything in between. At this point, hundreds of studies of feedback have been published, and reviews of these studies routinely conclude that **feedback is the most important or nearly the most important variable affecting the amount and quality of student learning.**

In addition, teacher feedback is under a teacher's control. Harnessing the power of effective feedback does not need to take additional time

or resources beyond what teachers already have. Teachers can make it a routine part of their teaching repertoire. In short, teaching without using the principles of effective feedback is like putting 87-octane petrol into an engine designed to run on 91-octane fuel. The car may get you to your destination, but it won't be a very smooth ride.

Research has shown that when students receive elaborated feedback that is positive and forward-looking, their learning improves. Research also shows that this is the kind of feedback most students prefer.

