

## Effective Instructional Feedback

Source: Scarcella, R. C. (2003). *Accelerating academic English: A focus on the English Learner*. Oakland, CA: Regents of the University of California, (p. 132).

### *Defining Instructional Feedback*

In writing, instructional feedback consists of comments, words, or even symbols. This feedback is instructional in the sense that it helps students to improve their ability to write in English. Feedback might include checks in the margins of papers to indicate inaccurate phrases, the explanation of key grammar rules on the side of students' papers, the use of encouraging remarks (*Good job! Use more expressions like these!*), [or] negative comments (*Your subject-verb agreement problems are marring your otherwise impressive work*)....

Strong instructional feedback has the following characteristics:

1. **Instructional feedback is clear.** Students understand it. If their instructors' feedback makes no sense to learners, if they cannot understand exactly what they are supposed to correct and how they are to correct it, or if their teachers' handwriting is illegible, the students will probably not use the feedback....
2. **Instructional feedback is consistent.** Feedback might fall short if teachers do not give it reliably. ...If only their...English instructors correct their grammar mistakes, and their science and social studies instructors ignore their mistakes, students might think that their English instructors are just being picky and that there is really nothing wrong with their work.
3. **Instructional feedback helps students to convey their messages accurately.** If students cannot see the usefulness of feedback in improving their ability to communicate their meaning precisely, they will probably not bother to use it.
4. **Students attend to instructional feedback.** It makes them cognizant of the "gap" or the difference between their inaccurate use of a linguistic feature and their accurate use of a linguistic feature.
5. **Instructional feedback is useful and timely; Students use it to improve their speech and writing.** Studies indicate that students reject or ignore feedback...that they consider of "no use." They do not follow teachers' suggestions written on completed drafts with letter grades.
6. **Instructional feedback is supplemented with instruction.** Teachers follow up on the feedback they give students by providing them with mini-lessons, assignments, and exercises. Effective instructors review [student writing

samples]...with students to make sure that the students know how to edit their writing competently.

7. **Instructional feedback is instructional; Learners learn something from it that improves their future work.** Feedback can teach learners helpful rules, new words and phrases, strategies, organizational techniques, and ways to add cohesion.
8. **Instructional feedback provides students with information on both their strengths and their weaknesses as writers.** Errors are just one indication of the students' writing proficiency, but they are not the best. To provide instructional feedback, teachers need to examine what the students *can* do with English and not just focus on what they can *not* do.
9. **Instructional feedback encourages, not discourages.** It helps students to improve their English; it does not destroy their motivation.... I agree with Jago (2000) who argues:

While a critical approach to teaching...is meant to encourage good work, it can sometimes damage students...forever. Forgetting to use encouragement in our responses can also turn what should be an intellectually stimulating task into a hateful task.
10. **Instructional feedback is given thoughtfully, in ways that do not prevent students from developing their creative abilities and skills.** It is not given on all student work. Sometimes teachers ask their students to concentrate on developing the content of their writing or their organization: for instance, when students are producing quickwrites, journal entries, or first drafts of assignments. Other times, teachers ask their students to focus on content, organization and accuracy simultaneously; for instance, when students are taking exams with written sections, writing [final drafts of lab reports or other papers], producing specific types of in-class assignments, or completing homework assignments.

The goal of providing instructional feedback is to expand the students' linguistic repertoires, helping them to acquire advanced proficiency in academic English so that they can excel on their assignments and tests. Acquiring strong proficiency in academic English helps students to achieve success in this society.