

Making feedback work

How to find, understand and use feedback



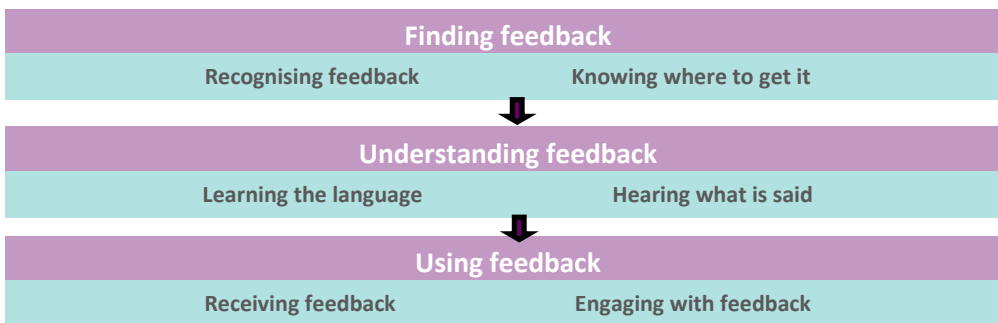
“Feedback is good for you – like exercise and broccoli. It makes you stronger and helps you grow” *Stone & Heen, 2014*



University of
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How to find, understand and use feedback

Feedback is good for us. But (like exercise and broccoli for many of us) we're not always so good at seeking it out and engaging with it. Feedback helps us develop our skills and abilities, and achieve our potential. Unsurprisingly we tend to want more, and better, feedback. Yet we often don't like hearing it when we get it; and can find that simply getting more doesn't help. How can we get the feedback we need and make good use of it? To be effective we have to *find it, understand it and use it*.



FINDING FEEDBACK

To find feedback we need to be able to recognise it. It can be tempting to think of feedback in your legal studies only in terms of the 'feedback form' you get back with your assessments.

This ignores myriad other sources of feedback and leads to a limiting view of feedback as a one-off event, delivered by a tutor, looking back at completed activity. In truth, feedback is not an event but a process in which the tutor is only one part.

Remember, feedback is not something that is done 'to' you, but something that you participate in. And, of course, feedback does not just look back to a particular activity but also feeds forward to the next.

WHERE IS FEEDBACK?

Easy to recognise feedback includes:

- Individual written feedback
- general feedback on activities
- personal tutor feedback on your exams.

Feedback opportunities also arise :

- through tutorials
- consultation hours
- discussion boards
- post-assignment discussions

And many more valuable opportunities without direct involvement of a tutor:

- self-evaluation through practice questions
- exploring past exam answers
- working in a study group

Are we speaking the same language?

What we think we say

What you might hear



UNDERSTANDING FEEDBACK

Finding feedback is of limited value if you are not sure what it means when you get it. Becoming familiar with the language of feedback means being able to make better use of it. Just as with any new language you have to practice translation and application. Feedback is not just about the language being used—you also need to make sure you are listening to what is being said—and not simply hearing confirmation of your own assumptions. Only when you fully understand where and how you can improve will you be able to effectively review your work. Learn how to listen properly. And don't be afraid to ask for clarification.

Feedback is a process, not an event

USING FEEDBACK

Feedback is only really of value if put it to use. But feedback can sometimes make us uncomfortable. Even though we tell ourselves (correctly) that the feedback relates to our work, it is still *our* work and so still feels personal. Our instinctive response may be negative or defensive. How we respond to feedback can be influenced by our mindset. Nurturing a 'growth' attitude means being able to view feedback as an opportunity for development. It also makes it easier to engage with feedback, being an active participant in the feedback process - joining the conversation, taking up opportunities, looking forwards as well as backwards, and using the resources available

It is hard to change a mindset. But we can try to cultivate more of a 'growth' attitude.

Whatever our mindset, we can be aware of our likely instinctive response to criticism (and praise).

Avoid putting up barriers to feedback (or knowing what we need to deal with before we can engage).

If you feel you don't have enough feedback on something – seek it out. If you feel you don't understand your feedback – don't ignore it. Take steps to learn the language and clarify points. And if you don't like what you are hearing – take a deep breath, seek advice, revisit your work with fresh eyes, and approach concerns constructively.

We will do our best to provide you with helpful, timely and appropriate feedback— so you can learn how to help yourself!