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Feedback on Student Presentations

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1. Objectives and benefits

Presentations are central activities both in academia and in professional contexts outside the university. In order to develop and refine their presentation skills, students need practise and appropriate feedback on their performances.

In contrast to exams or written assignments, in which the communication usually occurs between two persons (teachers and students), presentations address **all individuals present in class**. A good design of presentations and of the corresponding feedback considers this special characteristic by choosing appropriate feedback methods and by creating a constructive atmosphere in the classroom.

Both presenters and audience members can benefit from feedback given **immediately after a presentation**. Students experience a wider range of feedback than they receive on their own work alone, which can deepen their understanding of professional standards and the culture of academic discussion.^[1]

There are various ways of providing feedback on student presentations. **Teachers** as well as students (**peer feedback**) may provide feedback. It can be delivered in **written** or **oral** form, **on site** or **electronically** at a later time (via e-mail or Moodle). The most common scenario is a discussion following a presentation. Finally, feedback may also be provided either on a final version of a presentation (**summative**) or on earlier, preliminary work phases (**formative**).

Research suggests that more feedback may not automatically result in better student learning.^[2] This makes it all the more important to carefully design and prepare feedback activities.

2. Quality features, requirements & challenges

The general quality features for good feedback (see Teacher Feedback (/en/start-page/teaching-advising/feedback/teacher-feedback/#c372918)) also apply to feedback on student presentations. Moreover, the **group discussion setting** holds a particular kind of **potential**. Feedback can take place directly after a presentation and may itself be subject of discussion, which constitutes the **dialogical character** of feedback that research has identified as especially beneficial to student learning.^[3] During the discussion, students are encouraged to ask for clarification or more details, clear up misunderstandings, or discuss the feedback itself.

Establishing a **respectful, constructive environment** for presentations and subsequent feedback sessions constitutes a particular **challenge**. Since many students are not (yet) routine presenters, they may feel insecure and uncomfortable being the centre of attention. At the same time, students should learn and practise expressing criticism reflectively and respectfully, as well as reacting to it, as these are central academic practices. Therefore, a culture of tolerance is essential for student learning and motivation.^[4]

The success of student presentations and the respective feedback activities hinges on the **engagement of students who do not present**. Teachers can assist students increase their engagement by clarifying the **audience's responsibilities** before a presentation, or by **providing tools** to help them understand and evaluate presentations (e.g. questions they should keep in mind as they listen, or feedback criteria). You can help your students formulate meaningful feedback and develop the skills necessary to participate in post-presentation discussions. Establishing accountability and helping students become aware of their duties as audience members contribute to a constructive working and learning environment. In doing so, you can also ensure that students engage with **more than just their own presentation topics**.

3. Implementation

The following steps should help you plan and implement feedback on student presentations in your course:

1. Plan: Consider presentations, as you **plan** your **course**:

- What content or skills should students acquire or prove through the presentation? What is the presentation's role in the course?
- What kind(s) of presentation(s) do you want to include (specialist presentations, simulations of conference presentations, presentations on readings, etc.)? Should students present individually or in groups?

Depending on the choice of presentation, select an appropriate feedback format, informed by the following considerations (among others):

- **Who** should provide feedback? Teachers? Fellow students? Teachers and fellow students?
- **What** is the **purpose** of the feedback? To help improve a presentation draft (formative)? To explain the grade a student received on the presentation? To suggest improvements for future presentations? To inform students about their level of knowledge or skills acquisition (summative)?
- **What learning activities** should receive feedback? The intended student learning outcomes for the course determine whether presentation techniques or materials in addition to the presentation content should receive feedback (for instance, you can establish as the minimum requirement that the presentation be intelligible).
- **When** will feedback be provided? During the early developing phase of a presentation or on a presentation draft? On the complete slides just before a presentation? Directly after a presentation or at a later date?
- **How** should feedback be provided? In oral or written form? Immediately on site or during the following session? Electronically via email or Moodle?

2. Prepare: Once you have selected the feedback format, communicate it to your students, e.g. as a detailed assignment and/or feedback criteria. In doing so, you make explicit expectations and responsibilities, clarify the purpose of presentations in your course, and offer orientation on the aspects that students should address in their feedback.

- Ideally, both teacher and student feedback **is based on specific criteria**. Discuss these criteria or develop them together with your students. The latter gives students the chance to actively engage standards and expectations by reflecting, discussing and formulating them as feedback criteria.
- Discussing **presentation topics and concepts** with the students early on is an effective way for teachers to provide formative feedback. If possible, also take a quick look at the **finished slides or handouts** before students give their presentations. This allows you to make sure that the students have understood and addressed properly the most important points and topics, and that all participants understand and benefit from the presentation.^[5]
- When **planning peer feedback** on lectures and presentations, consider that the audience only has a **limited amount of time** to **listen to, understand, take notes, and react to** the presentations using the provided guidelines. We recommend **limiting the number of categories (circa 3 to 5)** that the feedback should address, especially if students work on different topics and may therefore be less familiar with the content of the presentation. You may **distribute various tasks among audience members** (e.g. some pay attention to certain content-related aspects, others to the presentation materials, and others yet on presentation methods. You may form groups as you wish, e.g. according to seating arrangements or number schemes, etc.). **Distributing responsibilities** helps to cover the essentials while keeping the **workload manageable** for both the students and the teacher.^[6]

3. Realise:

- In order to make sure that non-presenting students are clear about their roles in the feedback process, we recommend you discuss their **responsibilities and the feedback process** with them. For instance, do you expect students to ask questions immediately after the presentation, provide oral or written feedback? Should they focus on certain aspects of the presentation and comment on them, or decide for themselves what to comment on? (Note: The latter works better for experienced students.)⁷
- **Engaging the audience** is crucial. Feedback forms or criteria are useful tools that help to orient students. If contributing feedback counts toward the grade, some students may be more motivated to participate. Moreover, you can employ methods that help students engage and structure feedback (see example method 3-2-1).
- In order to provide an open and constructive atmosphere in class, we recommend you **establish ground rules for behaviour** for (peer) feedback activities, and discuss them with your students beforehand.

4. Example method for peer feedback on lectures and presentations: 3-2-1

This simple method helps students in the audience follow presentations and actively prepare for a subsequent feedback session. As a result, the quality of the feedback improves, and students are more likely to participate in discussions because they are not required to formulate questions or comments spontaneously.

Method Instruct the audience members to take notes on a piece of paper or a note card on the following points while they listen to the presentation:

- *3 things I have learned from the presentation* (You can also be more specific and require students to address specific course topics)
- *2 things that could be improved in the presentation* (You can also narrow the focus: Should students address content-related aspects or can they also critique the presentation itself? Note that students tend to comment on the slides or presentation methods, and thus avoid engaging the more difficult contents)
- *1 question I still have* (Ask students to come up with one question about the content that still puzzles them)

After the presentation, teachers may use these notes in various ways. However, you should inform your students about the intended use as part of explaining the process. Here are some possibilities:

- Notes serve as the basis for feedback and discussions in class (oral feedback)
- Feedback providers hand over the notes to the presenters (written feedback)
- Feedback providers hand over the notes to the teacher (information for the teacher on student feedback practices, or on what students have learned from presentations; the teacher may discuss this information during the following class session).

References

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