Giving Feedback to Students

Regular, constructive feedback is an important part of the clerkship process. The objective of feedback is to help a learner improve. Feedback is information on what a learner did. This is different than an evaluation, where a learner is ranked or graded.

Quick Tips

- Help the learner to recognize the feedback. Tell them when you’re about to provide feedback.
- Conduct feedback sessions in a private, relaxed, and supportive atmosphere.
- Engage the learner in self-assessment. Ask, “How do you think you did?” Be a good listener. Compare your assessment with the student’s and discuss.
- Ensure that comments are information-specific, issue-focused, and based on observations.
- Focus on a specific behavior (what the learner did, vs. who he or she is).
- Direct feedback toward behavior the learner controls.
- Provide feedback as soon after the behavior as possible.
- Limit the amount of information to what the student can use.
- Remember the difference between feedback and evaluation.
- Make sure you are being understood.
- Link feedback to the learner’s goals.
- Summarize the essential points of the discussion and establish a follow-up plan to address the learner’s needs.

The Difference Between Feedback and Evaluation

The nature and timing of assessment varies based on the circumstances and needs of the learner.

Formative feedback occurs at teachable moments and typically takes place in brief, timely, focused, one-on-one interactions between you and your student. High-quality feedback provides information about a particular behavior and how that behavior is helping or impeding a learner’s progress toward goals. Meaningful feedback is specific, detailed, and includes both positive and negative comments. Keep in mind that feedback describes the learner’s behavior without judgment or evaluation against a standard.

Summative evaluation occurs at the conclusion of a defined clinical experience. It involves evaluation of competence based on standardized benchmarks. Summative feedback looks considers trends or patterns of behavior and provides an assessment of performance over time.