



Tip: Give "Wise" Feedback

Tell students: "I have high standards" + "You can meet them" + "I will support you"



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I was introduced to the term "wise feedback" during a recent webinar sponsored by the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching. *Wise feedback* is a 3-part strategy that helps instructors frame feedback in a way that communicates that students can meet high expectations and gives concrete direction for how to meet the expectations. It's an alternative to the [frequently-maligned compliment sandwich](#).

The research...

The most-cited article, *Breaking the Cycle of Mistrust: Wise Interventions to Provide Critical Feedback Across the Racial Divide* (Yaeger et al., 2014) describes a set of three studies conducted with middle and high school students; the first was an experimental design where the intervention group (the "wise feedback" group) got feedback on their essay drafts with a note attached stating "I'm giving you these comments because I have very high expectations and I know that you can reach them" and the control group got a note saying, "I'm giving you these comments so that you'll have feedback on your paper." The group receiving wise feedback did better - they were both more likely to attend to the feedback and ended up submitting higher-quality work. The intervention was even more effective for traditionally underserved populations of students:

Wise feedback increased students' likelihood of submitting a revision of an essay (Study 1) and improved the quality of their final drafts (Study 2). Effects were generally stronger among African American students than among White students...Study 3, undertaken in a low-income public high school, used attributional retraining to teach students to attribute critical feedback in school to their teachers' high standards and belief in their potential. It raised African Americans' grades, reducing the achievement gap.

The steps...

I always think it's helpful when strategies can be articulated in ways that are simple to share and to implement. Here, the process is broken down into concrete actions: the steps to giving wise feedback, with some examples of what it might look like.

STEP 1: Communicate high expectations.

- *"I know it feels like this is a very challenging task I'm asking you to do - and it is."*
- *"Learning how to write a lab report is a new skill that you haven't been asked to do before, but it will help you to think about your skill set as a scientist for when you write your research proposal."*
- *"Giving a presentation in front of the whole class can feel scary, but it's really good practice for job interviews."*

STEP 2: Explain that you believe the student can meet the expectations.

- *"Your work to this point demonstrates that you already can do _____ and ___ well."*
- *"You earned a score of _____ on the last quiz, which shows me that you understand the foundational concepts for the project."*
- *"Your first draft had some really excellent points, so I know that you are capable of meeting the expectations for the final essay."*

STEP 3: Provide actionable feedback that demonstrates support.

- *"The feedback I gave you on your draft is where you should start as you write the next version - I look forward to reading your final paper!"*
- *"Looking at your quiz responses, you should start with a review of _____ and _____ concepts so that you feel as comfortable with them as you do with _____, which you did really well on."*

That's really all there is to it - a reframing of the feedback you would already be providing to a student on their work. I've shared before about [asking students to write personal essays](#) and [getting students to read and write about belonging in college](#) as two strategies that are relatively easy to implement but have potentially strong impacts on student success (in your course) and persistence (staying in school beyond your course). *Wise feedback* is a third strategy that has both immediate and longer-term benefits.



Baby Yoda Wise Feedback created by me with <https://buns.life/>

Breana

For more reading about wise feedback:

- The genesis for my dive into wise feedback literature - Derek Bruff's blog post, [Wise Feedback and Compliment Sandwiches](#)
- [Wise Feedback: Using Constructive Feedback to Motivate Learners](#) from Temple Univ.
- [Wise feedback: How to Provide Critical Feedback Across the Racial Divide](#)
- [Giving Wise Feedback: A method for teachers to give feedback to students that builds students' academic mindset, trust, and positive identity](#) from Greater Good in Education, U.C. Berkeley

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Mark Perew Feb 2, 2021

This is very great advice. Thank you for posting it for us to read and use. May we also have permission to use your Baby Yoda graphic? The timely pop-culture reference will certainly resonate with many of my undergrad students.

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