



RADLEY

Feedback Policy

November 2025

Aims - Provoking action or change

1. **Action and change.** The primary purpose of the feedback policy is to provoke the change that boys need in order to make academic progress.
2. **Consistency.** It should help dons to be reasonably consistent in how they provide feedback across the College, although it recognises differences between subjects.
3. **Efficiency.** It is also intended to help dons provide feedback efficiently, so that they can spend more time on codification of resources, intellectual preparation, and the practical skill of excellent teaching.

Preamble

Dylan Wiliam highlights one of the challenges of feedback in his book, *Embedded Formative Assessment*.

“I remember talking to a middle school student who was looking at the feedback his teacher had given him on a science assignment. The teacher had written, “You need to be more systematic in planning your scientific inquiries.” I asked the student what that meant to him, and he said, “I don’t know. If I knew how to be more systematic, I would have been more systematic the first time.” This kind of feedback is accurate—is describing what needs to happen—but it is not helpful because the learner does not know how to use the feedback to improve. It is rather like telling an unsuccessful comedian to be funnier—accurate, but not particularly helpful, advice.”

Wiliam goes on to say that what students actually need to improve is a “recipe for future action”, and a “series of activities that will move students from their current state to the goal state.”

As Daisy Christodoulou notes, ‘Written comments are not good at doing this. They are much more like a thermometer than a thermostat. They might provide an accurate summation of the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of work, or of the strengths and weaknesses of a student’s mental model. But they are not very effective at provoking action or change.’

Challenge

The challenge for any school’s feedback policy is to go beyond the ‘true but useless’ Written comments, even the most specific, are rarely useful to the pupil. The equivalent would be learning to rugby tackle and being handed a lengthy and specific written comment from the coach after the session:

‘Well done, your skills at tackling are improving and you showed good independent awareness of the steps required to tackle effectively. You adopted the correct body position in order to make the tackle and you were successful at making contact with the opposition below the sternum. You were mostly in control of the tackle but to improve you could make sure that you slow down prior to committing your body and remember to squeeze the opponent’s legs to use his own weight to pull him down. Well done, you are making good progress.’

Even this detailed and specific written comment, while true, is not useful. What the learner needs – and what rugby coach would actually do – is to take you through the steps of the tackle

again but, this time, with the focus on going slower, breaking down the movement into its constituent parts, with a specific emphasis on pausing to balance, and squeezing the legs.

Radley College is committed to effective feedback which leads to action and change.

What, then, is 'effective' feedback?

Effective feedback leads to progress

Educational research has provided evidence supporting the impact of effective feedback on student learning and has also provided a useful guide to key features which make feedback impactful. Feedback should be:

1. **Actionable:** offering clear, concrete steps that students can take to improve their performance. (Black and Wiliam in *Inside the Black Box* [1998]).
2. **Timely:** the closer feedback is delivered to the learning task, the more effectively students can use it to correct and improve their work (Hattie and Timperley (2007) in *The Power of Feedback* [2007]).
3. **Specific:** effective feedback targets precise aspects of a student's work rather than offering vague generalities (Hattie and Timperley [2007], Kluger and DeNisi's meta-analysis [1996]).
4. **Clear and Understandable:** feedback must be presented in a way that is easily comprehended by pupils, so they know exactly what is required for improvement (Shute, "Focus on Formative Feedback" published in the *Review of Educational Research*, Volume 78, Issue 1, pages 153–189 [2008]; Hattie and Timperley [2007]).
5. **Encouraging (but challenging):** feedback should motivate students to improve by being supportive while also challenging them to reach higher levels of performance (Hattie and Timperley [2007]; Carol Dweck's research on growth mindset [2006]).
6. **Focused on the Task/Process, Not the Person:** feedback should concentrate on the work or process rather than making judgments about the individual, thereby fostering a growth mindset (Dweck [2006]; Hattie and Timperley [2007]).
7. **Requires Student Engagement:** for feedback to be effective, students must actively engage with it—analysing, reflecting, and applying the suggestions provided (Black and Wiliam [1998]; Hattie and Timperley [2007]).
8. **Sustainable for Teachers:** feedback practices must be practical and sustainable within the constraints of teachers' workloads (this concern is discussed in various Education Endowment Foundation reports and toolkit guidance, which consider teacher workload alongside impact).
9. **Varied and Flexible:** different contexts and pupil needs require the use of multiple feedback methods—such as verbal, written, peer, and whole-class feedback—to be most effective (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick [2006]; Wiliam [2011]).

10. **Leads to Progress:** the ultimate goal of any feedback system is to demonstrably improve student learning outcomes. (John Hattie's *Visible Learning* [2009]; Black and Wiliam [1998]).

Existing research suggests that the effectiveness of feedback depends more on its quality—being clear, specific, and actionable—than on its delivery method.

How, then, should Radley dons give feedback?

At Radley, the specific mechanism for feedback is delegated to Heads of Departments who may choose the method that works best for their subject and the ages of the students they teach.

Regardless of the mechanism that Heads of Department choose, the aim must be consistent with the principles and aims above. The feedback must provoke action and change on the part of the student, while being maximally efficient with teachers' time.

Methods of feedback fall into two broad categories:

1. Individualised written comments (IWC)
2. Whole-class feedback (WCF)

Individualised written comments

The traditional form of feedback in academic teaching (as opposed to teaching in sport and music) is to provide written comments on a student's work.

Where Heads of Department wish to employ written comments as part of the feedback given in their departments, they must create clear departmental expectations that conform to the 10 features of effective feedback detailed above. Effective written feedback needs to be designed to be actionable, timely, and specific. It needs to provide clear, concrete guidance that targets precise aspects of the work, outlining exactly what steps a student can take to improve.

Such feedback must be presented in an understandable manner—using accessible language and avoiding vague generalities—while striking a balance between encouragement and challenge. By focusing on the task rather than on personal attributes, written comments should foster a growth mindset and prompt self-reflection.

Whole-class feedback and re-teaching tasks

Whole-class feedback (WCF) attempts to re-teach an error that has been highlighted by an assessment.

How does this work?

1. The don marks all of the submitted essays, tests or exam scripts.
2. They make a note of common errors and misconceptions.
3. They then devote some or all of the following lesson(s) to reteaching the error(s).
4. They check to see if their feedback has provoked action or change.

An example from theology:

- While reading his 6.1 exam scripts, JHCP notices that his class are poor at setting out a clear thesis in the introduction. He also sees that attempts to answer the question are too descriptive and not sufficiently evaluative: while boys can *describe* a thinker's argument, they are much weaker at explaining why they are/are not persuaded by it.
- The re-teaching task (RTT) when the boys enter the following lesson is to identify the best thesis statement of a choice of five and discuss with their partner why they have made their selection. JHCP uses the ensuing discussion to talk about why X thesis statement was poor but Y thesis statement was good. Boys then have five minutes to rewrite their introduction and a random boy's goes under the visualiser for class comment.
- The second RTT requires the pupils to look at two different paragraphs. One example and one non-example. Boys have to work in pairs to consider what is good/could be better about each paragraph before feeding back to the class. JHCP uses this time to highlight sentences that address AO2 (evaluation).
- The final RTT requires pupils to rewrite their first main paragraph before a random pupil's is presented to the rest of the class under the visualiser for comment. As pupils are rewriting their paragraphs, JHCP circulates to give some individual oral feedback.

An example from maths:

- While reading his Remove scripts, RDS notices that a number of students have got the logic the wrong way round in a fractions question.
The question was to prove that $2\frac{2}{3} + 1\frac{4}{5} = 4\frac{7}{15}$, however the last line of working on many of the scripts was $\therefore 4\frac{7}{15} = 4\frac{7}{15}$. The re-teaching task (RTT) when the boys enter the following lesson is to discuss what is wrong with this approach. RDS then provides a correct model answer.
- In another question a number of pupils were unable to get started on a 3D trigonometry task. RDS asks pupils to identify which angle is required and which triangles need to be drawn to break the problem down into simpler 2D questions.
- An important principle is that if a pupil scores 80% in a paper then in many ways 80% of their time has been wasted as they can already do that. However, the 20% that they did not get right is gold dust and tells them exactly what they need to work on. Therefore reworking questions that they have got wrong is a vital part of learning.
- Completing the details of corrections can be set as prep to avoid wasting lesson time.

Some features of whole-class feedback

1. Examples and non-examples

One way we might give feedback is by showing a good example. This has the benefit of highlighting what the expected standard *looks* like rather than us attempting to describe it. It can be even better when one of the good examples is a pupil's work. By also creating exaggerated non-examples, we can highlight the contrast between the standard we want and the standard we don't want.

2. Specificity

WCF tries to avoid 'true but useless' comments such as 'You need to be more evaluative' or 'This needed more detail'. The focus of the feedback is on which *specific* sentences/steps are needed next time to improve. The feedback focusses on specific detail to break down the overall *performance* goal (writing a good essay) into a specific *learning* goal (writing a thesis statement that addresses the question set).

3. Common errors/misconceptions

WCF does not try to give feedback on every individual mistake made by each pupil. Dons are encouraged to make a note of frequent errors in understanding and then creating RTTs which address these misconceptions through explanations, model answers and pair/class discussions.

4. Oral feedback

RTTs or classroom tasks can be designed to give space for the don to give individualised oral feedback where required. Oral feedback has the benefit of being personal while also allowing dons to communicate the next steps for the pupil in the most efficient manner: we can say much more in 30 seconds than we can write.

5. Checks for understanding

WCF and RTTs need to finish with some form of low-stakes assessment so that the don can check whether their re-teaching has 'stuck'. Without it, like written comments, there is a danger that the feedback has been given but there is no evidence that it has provoked action and change.

6. Jeopardy

While individual written comments are less important in the context of WCF, *summative* feedback remains important. This is because the boys need to know that the don has read their scripts and that, if their effort has been poor, it has been noticed and that there are consequences.

WCF must always be combined with attentive reading all of the pupils' assessments.

FAQs

With WCF how will boys know that dons have read their work?

Boys will know that their work has been read because it will be awarded some form of summative assessment. I.e. a grade or mark. Ideally, this is given *after* the RTT because there is evidence that, when summative and formative assessment is combined, pupils only focus on their grade or mark and take little notice on the specific steps they need to improve.

Can dons still give individualised written comments if they want to?

Yes, but we would like to move to a culture which prioritises WCF and RTTs. The disadvantage of dons continuing with individualised written comments is that dons who are moving to WCF and RTTs might be thought of by the boys/parents as less diligent because they don't use as much

red pen. We want to move the culture to one where there is less red-penning and more time on the intellectual preparation of excellent feedback and more lesson time on the assessment of change.

Ticking, crossing and awarding grades or marks remains fine.

Could I drop voice notes on my pupils' work instead of writing comments?

Yes, and this may be preferable in some subjects because a) it is faster b) it accompanied with the tone of one's voice and c) you can create a task asking the pupils to summarise your feedback to check that they have internalised it. However, as with written comments, it doesn't provide the RTT which allows you to assess whether progress has been made after the feedback.

Doesn't WCF feel a bit sterile, not giving individualised comments?

Good whole-class feedback provides space for individual comments but shifts the emphasis to oral comments rather than written comments. The benefits of the former are: a) that the comments can be accompanied with facial and vocal expression and b) that dons can say more than they can write in the same time.

How do we evidence our feedback?

Feedback may be in the form of individual comments written on the student's work. If a don has opted for IWCs then these comments should be visible on the pupil's work (in either analogue or digital format). The comments should always conform to the 10 principles of effective feedback listed above.

Whole-class feedback and re-teaching tasks are evidenced through drop-ins and observations made by the DHA and Heads of Department. WCF and RTTs may also be visible in written tasks completed in pupils' exercise books, workbooks or digital notes.