Teacher feedback on student writing: students’ questionnaire-based views

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Justification for the study

• Feedback – widespread practice in HE
  • Response on writing is key activity for teachers
  • Students interact with the response as part of their learning process

• Swedish context: our own experience of spending a lot of time on feedback
  • Give feedback despite lack of formal training or time to reflect on the practice
Key results for university teachers of English

90% of respondents say their work consists largely of commenting on/evaluating student writing

Only 30% of respondents have an education in giving feedback on student writing (at university level)

90% say there is a need for professional development in giving feedback
Two types of empirical data

- **Corpus material**: Teacher written feedback on student writing
- **Questionnaire data**: Students’ views on feedback

- What does teacher feedback actually look like?
• **Student questionnaire**

• Online

• Undergraduate students first term students (N = 82) in the Eng Dept at DU

• Responses so far = 31
The student questionnaire
Key results on feedback experience

• Majority of students believe teacher feedback is helpful, important and improves their writing and that they always or often learn a lot from teacher feedback

• All 31 said they always read teacher feedback
Students’ beliefs about types of feedback

• Nobody wanted a grade or score alone - but in combination with positive and negative feedback

• Explanations (incl. grammatical) better than just and annotations only e.g. agr, WO

• Helpful with statistics on types of errors made
## Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Annotation</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Help link</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Points lost</th>
<th>Points gained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Agreement</td>
<td>Subject/verb agreement error. They should both be in the singular or in the plural. Noun/pronoun agreement e.g. the girls -&gt; she. Noun determiner agreement e.g. these news OR one of the many thing.</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td></td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Determiner</td>
<td>Wrong or missing determiner Incorrect use of the definite or indefinite article - The is normally used for specific reference - The should not be used with uncountables and plural countables in the general sense. - We also need the for things that are known or we have in common in our world e.g. the news, the Internet - For things we own we use the possessive pronoun not the definite article. A for words beginning with a consonant sound and an for words beginning with a vowel sound.</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>VForm</td>
<td>Wrong form of the verb</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>VTense</td>
<td>Wrong Verb tense (e.g. present instead of past or present perfect or present perfect instead of past perfect)</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Capitalization</td>
<td>Capitalization error</td>
<td>Punctuation</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Cut</td>
<td>Cut this text or word or letter</td>
<td>Sense</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>NounForm</td>
<td>Plural instead of singular or vice versa wrong prefix or suffix</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>SpI</td>
<td>This word is not spelled correctly</td>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>WChoice</td>
<td>Poor or inappropriate word choice</td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Second, it is very common to observe that every household with at least one vehicle, human usually drive the car instead of taking the bus or other transportation. This is another reason that global warming. Due to people drive, the car will emit pollutants and causes air pollution, in addition, while people inhale the terrible air that can harm the health of everyone in the world, in short, it is kind of vicious circulation. The global warming is worse than we thought. For the purpose of protecting our planet, from now on, everyone should avoid driving the car so often; taking transportation will be best for our planet. For instance, metro, bus or even bicycle is the best choice for people to go from one place to another place.

Third, global warming is the factor that causes sea level rise. Since the technological industry and manufacturing factory grow rapidly, in view of this situation, the industrial factories emit carbon dioxide while they are producing the chemicals or metal material. Now, we can obviously notice that, the sea level will continuously rise these decades and also the following century. If the rate of rise is accelerating, some small Island will disappear and the arctic ice melt. We can easily imagine those kinds of sceneries may gradually become serious. Some countries start to engage in building the house on the sea. However, if humans did not produce lots of poisonous material, our planet will not become ill.
Students’ beliefs about feedback

Do you think these help improve your writing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback Type</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very helpful</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite helpful</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps a little</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not helpful at all</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Positive**: Feedback on what was well done
- **Negative**: Feedback on what needs to be improved
The “but” sandwich

It is easy to detect your topic. I suggest a little more information in the first sentence. Expect a well-educated native speaker to write: perhaps you are a native speaker of English which is necessary in different countries. You don’t really say why? You need to develop you there is something connecting them. We can guess but we shouldn’t have to. 2. Who do you mean here? We ly? I have never heard it in spoken conversation but that doesn’t mean it has not happened. You could have a belief that technology is driving it but there is no scientific evidence for this. 1. Do we not know this for sure. It may be a factor but there is no support for it being a great factor. heck should have picked up your agreement errors but perhaps you did not use it. 1. As petit is borrow you use inappropriate linking expressions but it is good that you try to use them and this will h? You have a collection of facts about diamonds but they are not linked to each other by any overall

This is a description of Facebook but what about Facebook? What do you want to say? Why paragraph is a list of facts about a phenomenon but there is no red thread. he paragraph you talk about money side of things but also the security aspect. It would have been bett er essay you might have included the other ideas but they would need a paragraph each. 1. Can you see This paragraph is a description of a phenomenon but I really wanted you to take up an aspect of somet

This is a description of an experiment but your topic sentence is about established patterns monkey experiment might warrant its own paragraph but here the reader expects you to develop this first
There are some preposition and word choice problems but nothing too serious.
Your writing is a little difficult to follow **but on the whole** you seem to have understood the task.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My work is good</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My work is satisfactory</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I risk failing and need to work harder to pass</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't know what this means</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Good **but** the text is brought down by the language errors.
It’s highly proficient, **but** I don’t really know what it’s about.
OK attempt **but** I think you can improve in many ways.

- **2** My work is good
- **6** My work is satisfactory
- **23** I risk failing and need to work harder to pass
- **0** I don't know what this means
Good try, **but** it doesn’t hold all the way.
Understanding what the teacher means

*It is important to be clear *but* academic writing often has complex sentences.*

- I think that my teachers means that my task was easy to read
- It means that a student's work is not clear
- I don’t understand
- I don’t know what it means. Is having complex sentences opposed to being clear? Why the “but”?  
- I would argue that the teacher's comment does not necessarily facilitate comprehension.
Recurrent themes in open-ended responses on teacher feedback

• The most important element of the course

• The more feedback the better
  ➢ If I would get a full page of feedback back from an assignment I would be thrilled.

• Give as much and as specific as possible
  ➢ I would like the teacher to be more accurate in his/her feedback
Future directions

• Interviews complementing the questionnaire data
• Questionnaire for different level students
• Workshop/focus group with students