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A Reflective Practice Process for Using Student Feedback to Enhance Teaching

Nichole Barta, Ed.D., Juliane Mora, Ph.D.

Author Note

Nichole Barta, <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-2558-1036>

Juliane Mora, <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-1017-1085>

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Abstract: Student feedback is a common component of teaching evaluation in higher education, yet many faculty members struggle to interpret and apply it in meaningful ways. Without a structured process for reflection, feedback can feel ambiguous, overwhelming, or even adversarial. This paper introduces a structured, research-informed Reflective Practice Process designed to help faculty engage with student feedback constructively and translate it into intentional teaching improvements. The six-step process guides faculty through instructional planning, formative feedback collection, self-assessment, student feedback interpretation, collaborative reflection, and instructional refinement. The accompanying Reflective Practice Workbook scaffolds each step with prompts, comparative reflection tools, and action planning templates. By shifting the focus from performance appraisal to professional development, this approach helps faculty move beyond defensiveness, make sense of student input, and engage in a continuous cycle of instructional inquiry that enhances both teaching effectiveness and student learning. The process is adaptable across institutional contexts and can support faculty development efforts at the individual, departmental, or programmatic level.

Keywords: *student feedback, reflective teaching, faculty development, scholarly teaching*

Purpose of the Reflective Practice Process

The Reflective Practice Process is an evidence-based, scholarly approach to teaching that supports instructors in examining their instructional choices through intentional planning, critical reflection, and the use of multiple sources of evidence. Scholarly teaching is defined as a deliberate, reflective practice informed by research on teaching and learning, well-reasoned theory, and the goal of maximizing student learning (Potter & Kustra, 2011).

At many institutions, student feedback is often misused or underutilized (Kreitzer & Sweet-Cushman, 2022). It is frequently treated as an evaluation of teaching effectiveness, despite longstanding concerns about its validity and potential biases (Stark & Freishtat, 2014). Faculty are rarely offered guidance on how to interpret or apply feedback constructively, and in the absence of a structured process for reflection, feedback is often treated as a performance metric rather than formative feedback for improvement (Gormally et al., 2014; Linse, 2017). Without such guidance, instructors may respond by ignoring unfavorable feedback, either by attributing it to instrument flaws or student bias, or by doing

nothing at all if the ratings seem “good enough.” In some cases, they may also make reactive changes intended to increase ratings, even when those changes are not supported by research on how students learn.

The Reflective Practice Process addresses these challenges by reframing student feedback as one form of evidence within a larger cycle of inquiry. In this model, instructional decisions are treated as testable hypotheses—purposeful strategies designed to support specific learning outcomes—and examined using multiple sources of evidence (e.g., peer review, assessment results, personal observation notes, and student input). Rather than serving as an evaluative measure, student feedback is considered part of a decision-making process that offers insight into whether instructional strategies supported student learning as intended.

This reflective approach includes six interconnected steps that guide faculty through a continuous cycle of inquiry and improvement, grounded in three guiding questions: *Where am I going? How am I going? Where to next?* (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). The process begins with instructional planning, in which faculty articulate their intended learning outcomes and the strategies they plan to use to support them. Next, faculty engage in gathering formative feedback by collecting input during the course to inform timely adjustments tailored to the needs of that cohort. After that, instructors reflect on their perceptions of how effective their strategies were before reviewing student feedback using the instructional self-assessment. Then, they interpret student feedback using a set of guiding principles. These interpretations inform the next step: collaborative reflection, in which instructors engage with peers to gain alternative perspectives and generate ideas for instructional improvement. Finally, the process concludes with an action plan for instructional refinement, helping faculty determine which practices to sustain, revise, or replace in future courses.

The descriptions that follow outline each of the six steps, illustrating how they function within a structured, inquiry-based approach to interpreting student feedback and enhancing teaching effectiveness. The appendix includes the Reflective Practice Process Workbook, which operationalizes this model through adaptable prompts and planning templates to support faculty implementation.

Step 1: Instructional Planning

Guiding Question: Where am I going?

Goal: Identify key instructional strategies and articulate the rationale behind them, treating teaching decisions as hypotheses that can be examined through multiple forms of evidence.

Key Concepts:

- **Intentional Instructional Decisions:** This step prompts you to define what strategies you plan to use, why you believe they will support student learning, and how they align with the goals and context of your course.
- **Planning as Scholarly Inquiry:** Teaching decisions are framed as testable hypotheses. By clarifying your instructional intent, you create the foundation for gathering and analyzing evidence—such as student feedback, peer input, and assessment data—to determine whether your strategies achieved their intended effects.

Workbook Tools: Step 1: Instructional Decisions & Course Design Planning Sheet and Step 1: Instructional Planning Evidence-Based Strategies

Step 2: Gathering Formative Feedback

Guiding Question: How am I going?

Goal: Collect feedback during the course to examine how students are responding to instructional strategies and to inform timely, responsive adjustments.

Key Concepts:

- **Responsiveness to Student Needs:** Gathering feedback during the course helps instructors determine what's working and where students may need additional support. Instructors consider: What aspects of the course—or my instruction—are facilitating learning? What changes could better support this group of students in achieving the intended outcomes?
- **Student Motivation and Perceived Value:** Students are more likely to provide feedback—and to do so at increased response rates—when they believe their input will be read and used to make instructional changes (Sozer et al., 2019). Instructors consider: Have I communicated how I plan to use this feedback? Have students seen changes made in response to their input?

Workbook Tools: Step 2: Gathering Formative Feedback Reflection Sheet and Step 2: Formative Feedback Planning Ideas

Step 3: Instructional Self-Assessment

Guiding Question: How am I going?

Goal: Reflect on how well instructional strategies supported student learning, using multiple sources of evidence before reviewing student feedback.

Key Concepts:

- **Triangulation:** Effective self-assessment involves comparing instructional decisions with multiple sources of evidence—including student work, assessment results, classroom observations, and peer review input. This triangulation can help mitigate overconfidence and bias (Yan & Carless, 2022). Consider: Which instructional strategies supported learning as intended?
- **Preparing for Comparison:** Reflecting on instructional strategies before reviewing student feedback helps reduce the influence of emotional reactions or student perceptions. This step focuses on identifying what was effective based on other forms of evidence so that differences between instructor and student perspectives can be more readily recognized in the next phase.

Workbook Tool: Step 3: Self-Assessment of Instructional Strategies

Step 4: Interpreting Student Feedback

Guiding Question: How am I going?

Goal: Use a scholarly, context-aware approach to interpret student feedback and identify what it reveals about the effectiveness of your instructional strategies.

Key Concepts

- **Contextual Interpretation:** Effective interpretation requires attention to response rates, distribution of responses, and alignment with other sources of evidence. Instructors consider what

patterns confirm or challenge their expectations and how those patterns intersect with other forms of feedback. Small numerical shifts are rarely a cause for concern on their own, but recurring themes across multiple sources provide a more reliable foundation for instructional decisions (Boysen et al., 2014; Drue & Bifulco, 2025).

- **Beyond the Numbers:** Student feedback reflects how learners perceived and experienced the course, rather than serving as a direct measure of teaching effectiveness. Instructors examine how students may have interpreted specific instructional choices and what their responses indicate about the impact on learning, moving beyond simply categorizing responses as “favorable” or “unfavorable”.

Workbook Tools: Step 4: Interpreting Student Feedback Reflection and Step 4: Interpreting Student Feedback Guide

Step 5: Collaborative Reflection

Guiding Question: How am I going?

Goal: Engage in peer dialogue to interpret feedback, explore instructional challenges, and generate ideas for enhancing teaching.

Key Concepts

- **Co-constructing Strategies:** Discussing student feedback with colleagues allows instructors to examine assumptions, explore alternative approaches, and clarify next steps. These conversations support informed decision-making and often yield more actionable strategies (van Lierop et al., 2018). Instructors might ask: What strategies have you used in similar situations?
- **Learning Questions:** Framing a targeted question about a specific instructional challenge—such as “What adjustments might help students better understand assignment expectations?”—can guide the discussion and elicit more relevant, helpful input. Peer reflection organized around such questions tends to result in more concrete plans for instructional improvement (Boerboom et al., 2011).

Workbook Tool: Step 5: Collaborative Reflection

Step 6: Action Plan for Instructional Refinement

Guiding Question: Where to next?

Goal: Identify what to continue, what to revise, and how you’ll monitor the impact of those changes—based on reflection, student feedback, and peer input.

Key Concepts

- **Closing the Reflective Loop:** Use what you’ve learned to inform your next round of instructional planning. Identify which strategies were most effective and should be sustained, what needs to be adjusted and why, and how you’ll evaluate whether those changes support student learning.
- **Monitoring Impact:** Establish how you’ll assess the effectiveness of instructional changes—such as gathering targeted feedback, requesting a peer observation, or tracking performance on a specific assessment.

Workbook Tool: Step 6: Action Plan for Instructional Refinement

Participant Reflections and Insights

During the AALHE session, participants were introduced to the history, context, and development of the Reflective Practice Process. They then engaged directly with the six-step framework, using selected workbook prompts and discussing how the process could apply to their own teaching contexts.

In a small group discussion, several themes emerged. Participants described the process as “a lot to take in and digest,” reflecting the number of considerations involved in implementing a six-step framework with multiple prompts and reflective activities. Many noted that having a structured process—particularly one that begins with instructional planning and includes self-assessment—would require more front-end work to establish goals and intentions, but would also help them consider how feedback might be interpreted differently when viewed through the lens of those intentional instructional decisions. However, their feedback was largely positive, reflecting interest in reframing student feedback as perception data rather than as evaluations of quality.

Additional comments focused on the value of alignment: between feedback and instructional intent, between self-assessment and student responses, and between data and action steps. Participants expressed frustration with current approaches to end-of-course feedback and were curious about other methods, such as midterm surveys, for gathering more actionable insights. The collaborative reflection step was also viewed as particularly valuable, offering a supportive space to test interpretations and generate ideas with colleagues. One participant noted that the process “gave me a way to talk about feedback that isn’t defensive,” while another emphasized that the planning and interpretation steps made it “easier to identify patterns instead of reacting to isolated comments.” Questions posed during the session focused on adapting the process to their own institutional context and improving response rates.

The session also prompted broader conversations about institutional practices, including how teaching effectiveness is documented and how processes like this one could contribute to faculty evaluation. Some participants shared that while their institutions require student feedback, they provide little guidance on how to interpret or use it constructively. The Reflective Practice Process was seen not only as a faculty development tool, but also as a potential framework for department- or institution-level conversations about teaching and instructional improvement.

Overall, participants described the Reflective Practice Process as adaptable across disciplines, teaching modalities, and institutional settings. These discussions reinforced the importance of structured reflection, intentional instructional planning, and peer dialogue in making student feedback a more useful resource for improving teaching.

Future Considerations

Students are stakeholders in their institutions, and their feedback about instruction should be heard and valued (Drue & Bifulco, 2025). The development and use of the Reflective Practice Process has produced tangible results in the context of our medium-sized liberal arts institution and has been

incorporated into the regular offerings of our teaching and learning center. The structure and format of the process is adaptable and transferable to other institutions and contexts.

When the goal of teaching is to support student learning, feedback from multiple sources—including students—can provide important insights into how instruction is working and where it may need refinement. While student evaluations of teaching are widely used across higher education, they are often underutilized as tools for reflection and improvement. If institutions are interested in making better use of this data, we might consider:

- How does student input fit into a holistic understanding of teaching effectiveness?
- What steps could our institution take to adapt or incorporate the Reflective Practice Process into existing faculty development or evaluation efforts?
- What challenges might arise in adopting this approach on our campus?
- In what ways could the Reflective Practice Process support improvements to teaching effectiveness initiatives in our context?

The Reflective Practice Process was developed in response to long-standing concerns about how student feedback is collected, interpreted, and used in conversations about teaching. Rather than viewing feedback as a performance rating, this process treats it as one source of information—considered alongside self-assessment, student learning evidence, and peer review input—to support informed decision-making. While the process can be used with existing course evaluation instruments, institutions are encouraged to review whether their instruments are designed to prompt the kind of reflection the process encourages. Feedback that is aligned with instructional goals and tied to teaching strategies can offer more useful insights for both faculty reflection and institutional conversations about teaching effectiveness. By incorporating structured opportunities to plan, assess, and revise, the Reflective Practice Process offers a practical and transferable framework to support the ongoing development of teaching in ways that are intentional, informed, and responsive to student learning.

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Appendix: Reflective Practice Process Workbook

Step 1: Instructional Decisions and Course Design Planning Sheet

Directions: For each teaching dimension (1-9 below), describe the strategies you intend to use and explain why they are appropriate for your course context and goals. A companion resource in the supplemental section provides example strategies to support your thinking; however, you are encouraged to adapt or add your approaches.

Course Information

Course Title:

Course Learning Goals:

1. Environment Created by the Instructor

- Planned Strategies:
- Rationale:

2. Support from the Instructor

- Planned Strategies:
- Rationale:

3. Organization of the Course

- Planned Strategies:
- Rationale:

4. Pacing of Coursework

- Planned Strategies:
- Rationale:

5. Clarity of Learning Expectations

- Planned Strategies:
- Rationale:

6. Way Course Content Is Delivered

- Planned Strategies:
- Rationale:

7. Assignments, Projects, and Learning Activities

- Planned Strategies:
- Rationale:

8. Clarity of Grading Expectations

- Planned Strategies:
- Rationale:

9. Feedback on Student Work

- Planned Strategies:
- Rationale:

Step 2: Gathering Formative Feedback Reflection Sheet

1. When and how did you gather formative feedback?
2. What did you learn from the student feedback?
3. What changes did you make during the course based on that feedback?
4. What changes are you considering for a future iteration of the course?
5. How did you communicate your response to students?

Step 3: Self-Assessment of Instructional Strategies

Directions: Complete this reflection **before** reviewing student feedback. For each instructional area, evaluate how your planned strategies for supporting student learning worked. Use evidence such as student work, assessment results, and observation notes to inform your responses.

- ☐ VE (Very Effective): This aspect strongly supported student learning
- ☐ E (Effective): This aspect supported student learning
- ☐ NI (Needs Improvement): Changes to this aspect could better support student learning
- ☐ NE (Not Effective): This aspect did not support student learning

1. Learning Environment Created by the Instructor

How effective was your approach? ☐ VE ☐ E ☐ NI ☐ NE

- What specific strategies or practices most effectively supported student learning in this area?
- What would you revise or approach differently next time?

2. Support from the Instructor

How effective was your approach? ☐ VE ☐ E ☐ NI ☐ NE

- What specific strategies or practices most effectively supported student learning in this area?
- What would you revise or approach differently next time?

3. Organization of the Course

How effective was your approach? ☐ VE ☐ E ☐ NI ☐ NE

- What specific strategies or practices most effectively supported student learning in this area?

- What would you revise or approach differently next time?

4. Pacing of Coursework

How effective was your approach? ☐ VE ☐ E ☐ NI ☐ NE

- What specific strategies or practices most effectively supported student learning in this area?
- What would you revise or approach differently next time?

5. Clarity of Learning Expectations

How effective was your approach? ☐ VE ☐ E ☐ NI ☐ NE

- What specific strategies or practices most effectively supported student learning in this area?
- What would you revise or approach differently next time?

6. Way Course Content Is Delivered

How effective was your approach? ☐ VE ☐ E ☐ NI ☐ NE

- What specific strategies or practices most effectively supported student learning in this area?
- What would you revise or approach differently next time?

7. Assignments, Projects, and Learning Activities

How effective was your approach? ☐ VE ☐ E ☐ NI ☐ NE

- What specific strategies or practices most effectively supported student learning in this area?
- What would you revise or approach differently next time?

8. Clarity of Grading Expectations

How effective was your approach? ☐ VE ☐ E ☐ NI ☐ NE

- What specific strategies or practices most effectively supported student learning in this area?
- What would you revise or approach differently next time?

9. Feedback on Student Work

How effective was your approach? ☐ VE ☐ E ☐ NI ☐ NE

- What specific strategies or practices most effectively supported student learning in this area?
- What would you revise or approach differently next time?

Step 4: Interpreting Student Feedback Reflection

Directions: Use this section to examine student feedback as perception data and consider how it aligns with your instructional intentions and self-assessment.

1. Is the response rate sufficient to interpret the data reliably based on class size guidance?
2. In reviewing quantitative and qualitative data: What patterns stand out?
3. What do students say most supported their learning?
4. What do students say most needs improvement to better support their learning?
5. Are there any student perceptions that do not align with your instructional self-assessment? If so, what are the differences?
6. What feedback prompts questions that you want to investigate further?

Step 5: Collaborative Reflection

Preparation Directions for Peer Reflection

Reflect on one specific area you're considering revising based on your self-assessment and interpretation of student feedback. Use this reflection to prepare a *Personal Learning Question* that you can bring to a peer or group discussion.

Examples to Help You Prepare:

In the course, I implemented *[strategy]*, which led to *[observed outcome]*.

Students provided feedback about *[specific aspect]*: "*[summary or quote]*."

This feedback prompted me to reconsider my approach to *[area of instruction or design]*.

Develop Your Personal Learning Question:

Use one of the following prompts to guide your question:

- *How can I...?*
- *What adjustments could improve...?*
- *What strategies support...?*

Summary of What You Took Away from the Discussion

What did you learn from the conversation that will inform your next steps?

Step 6: Action Plan for Instructional Refinement

Where to next?

Use this form to close the loop in the Reflective Practice Process by identifying what you plan to adjust, sustain, and monitor based on your self-assessment, student feedback, and peer reflection.

What's Working Well: *What will you continue or reinforce, and why?*

Planned Adjustment: *What specific change(s) will you make, and why?*

How to Monitor Improvement: *What will help you evaluate the impact of this change? What evidence will indicate whether the adjustment is achieving its intended effect?*

Reflective Practice Process Workbook Supplemental Section

Step 1: Instructional Planning Evidence-Based Strategies

Directions: This sheet provides example strategies aligned with each teaching dimension to support your planning. Use it as a companion to the *Instructional Decisions and Course Design Planning Sheet* to spark ideas or adapt approaches for your course context. The strategies listed are illustrative, not exhaustive—select or modify those that best align with your course learning goals, student needs, and teaching philosophy.

1. Learning Environment Created by the Instructor

- ☐ Use an interest survey or online questionnaire to ask students about their preferred name/pronouns, interests, plans for the future, and what they are most looking forward to about the class (ACUE.org)
- ☐ Learn students' preferred names and use them regularly during class sessions and when referring to previous contributions (Lang, 2016)
- ☐ Use inclusive language including current terminology for addressing various identity groups; share your gender pronouns (ACUE.org)
- ☐ Include a structured peer-to-peer introduction activity in the first week to build connection among students (Tanner, 2013)
- ☐ Include a syllabus statement that explains why diversity and inclusion are important to education and helps students understand the importance and relevance of diversity and inclusion (ACUE.org)
- ☐ Set expectations for valuing diverse viewpoints from the beginning of class is essential to fostering community and creating a productive learning environment (ACUE.org)
- ☐ Co-create community agreements with students in the first week (Lang, 2016)
- ☐ Use structured protocols (e.g., think-pair-share, round-robin) to ensure equitable participation in discussions (Tanner, 2013)
- ☐ Require group projects to include team contracts or shared accountability plans (Oakley et al., 2004)
- ☐ Offer inclusive office hours at a variety of times and in different formats (one-on-one, in groups, over Zoom, etc.) (ACUE.org)

2. Support from the Instructor

- ☐ Set communication expectations in the syllabus (response time, feedback policies) and revisit during Week 1
- ☐ Offer at least one office hour outside standard business hours (evening/virtual) based on student availability survey
- ☐ Schedule automated check-in emails (e.g., Week 3, Week 7) with referral resources embedded (e.g., learning support)
- ☐ Send personalized feedback or check-in messages to students who miss class
- ☐ Create opportunities for students to ask clarifying questions before, during, and after instruction using consistent routines (e.g., muddiest points, turn and talk, Mentimeter)

3. Organization of the Course

- ☐ Organize LMS content into weekly modules or thematic units with consistent structure (e.g., objectives, readings, lectures, assignments) to reduce cognitive load and enhance navigation.
- ☐ Include a detailed course overview on the LMS homepage—syllabus, schedule, instructor contact, communication expectations—to support student planning.
- ☐ Use consistent and descriptive naming conventions for files, folders, and module elements (e.g., “Week 2: Motivation Theories”) to improve usability and reduce confusion.
- ☐ Ensure all uploaded materials are accessible: provide transcripts for videos, alt text for images, and adhere to ADA compliance standards.
- ☐ Post regular weekly announcements summarizing key themes, upcoming deadlines, and tips for success to support student engagement and time management.
- ☐ Create lessons with a structure that students can easily follow—have a recognizable pattern or framework for each class (Bolkan, 2017)
- ☐ Make the lesson structure visible to students, consider using agendas, outlines, or visual organizers so students can track where they are (Bolkan, 2017)

4. Pacing of Coursework

- ☐ Distribute major assessments to avoid clustering in final weeks; use backward design calendar (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005)
- ☐ Include scaffolded components (e.g., proposal → draft → final) for major assignments
- ☐ Use a mid-semester survey to gauge student pacing and adjust flexibly (Cohen et al., 2004)
- ☐ Build in at least one flex week or catch-up day following intensive instructional periods
- ☐ Do not try to do too much - prioritize which concepts are most difficult to learn, rooted in common misconceptions, and/or represent fundamental principles rather than superficially covering multiple topics (Tanner, 2013)
- ☐ Collect assessment evidence from every student, every class - use daily minute papers, polling platforms, or small group discussions to continuously monitor student understanding and adjust pacing accordingly (Tanner, 2013)

5. Clarity of Learning Expectations

- ☐ Provide end-of-class summaries that connect content to learning outcomes (Bolkan, 2017)
- ☐ Provide step-by-step worked examples for complex processes or problem-solving (Bolkan, 2017)
- Post learning outcomes in each LMS module and reference them during class transitions
- ☐ Use assignment briefings—short in-class explanations with Q&A—for each major task
- ☐ Provide annotated exemplars of past student work (with permission)
- ☐ Require a short reflection prompt in assignments asking students to self-assess against learning outcomes

6. Way Course Content Is Delivered

- ☐ Use visual aids such as graphic organizers, concept maps, and pictures to enhance understanding (Fuller, 2013)

- ☐ Allow adequate processing time after presenting new information before moving to the next concept (Fuller, 2013)
- ☐ Use small group discussions that mix linguistically diverse students with native speakers to reinforce content through peer explanation (Fuller, 2013)
- ☐ Implement planned discussion circles where students can process content through structured dialogue in intentionally designed groups (Fuller, 2013)
- ☐ Pre-teach vocabulary by introducing key terms with definitions before presenting content that uses those terms (Fuller, 2013)
- ☐ Provide terminology support through glossaries or vocabulary lists for each content module (Fuller, 2013)
- ☐ Help students identify what they do and do not know through targeted questions and reflection (Dunn et al., 2013)
- ☐ Circulate among student pairs during discussions to answer questions and guide conversations (Dunn et al., 2013)
- ☐ Use varied active-learning strategies to consistently provide multiple entry points into the conceptual material for students, ensuring no single population of students is always outside their comfort zone (Tanner, 2013) (e.g., incorporating reflective writing, think-pair-share activities, visual representations like concept mapping, and hands-on laboratory activities).

7. Assignments, Projects, and Learning Activities

- ☐ Design tasks that require students to apply course concepts in real-world or professional contexts (Mueller, 2005).
- ☐ Allow students some choice in how they demonstrate their learning (e.g., video, presentation, written report) (Mueller, 2005).
- ☐ Break larger assignments into smaller, sequenced tasks with checkpoints (e.g., outline, draft, reflection).
- ☐ Dedicate class time at key points in the assignment timeline to address questions, clarify expectations, and prompt student reflection.
- ☐ Provide estimated time commitments for each assignment or weekly task to help students plan and prioritize.

8. Clarity of Grading Expectations

- ☐ Use criterion-referenced grading scales (e.g., Meets Expectations, Approaching, Does Not Meet Expectations) that clearly communicate student understanding levels of specific learning objectives rather than percentage-based grades (Harsy et al., 2021)
- ☐ Establish clear learning targets and success criteria using well-written rubrics that define what proficiency looks like, eliminating the need for students to "read the instructor's mind" (Buckmiller et al., 2017)
- ☐ Provide exemplars of high-quality work to illustrate grading criteria.
- ☐ Include a grading FAQ in the syllabus clarifying late work, revision opportunities, and feedback turnaround times

☐ Use a grade calculator or visual tracker in LMS so students can monitor progress—they know what they have to do to get the grade they want.

9. Feedback on Student Work

- ☐ Use a feedback template that prompts you to identify one strength, one area for improvement, and a specific next step (Brookhart, 2008)
- ☐ Design intentional feedback loops by calendaring specific times for formative feedback, peer review activities, and instructor consultations, then clearly communicating this schedule to students in advance
- ☐ Focus feedback on specific learning targets rather than global comments like “good job” (Brookhart, 2017)
- ☐ Integrate pre- and post-revision reflections that prompt students to articulate specific changes they made and evaluate how well they met their self-identified goals (Chung et al., 2021).
- ☐ Help students build their ability to recognize and apply standards of quality by discussing grading criteria and practicing with sample work (Little et al., 2025)
- ☐ Design feedback systems that allow students multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency, with revision and resubmission processes built into the course structure (Buckmiller et al., 2017)
- ☐ Require students to complete and attach structured self-assessment checklists before submitting assignments (Chung et al., 2021)
- ☐ Provide frequent low-stakes assessments that allow students to demonstrate understanding without complex language barriers (Fuller, 2013)
- ☐ Train students before peer feedback activities using feedback forms, training courses, or rubrics to maximize benefits for both provider and receiver (Little et al., 2025)

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Step 2: Formative Feedback Planning Ideas

The ideas below can help instructors determine what types of feedback may be most useful during the course and how to gather it in a way that informs future instructional decisions.

1. Clarify Your Focus

Rather than asking broad or general questions, consider narrowing your focus to one or two instructional areas relevant to your goals or concerns. Examples include:

- Course structure and organization
- Effectiveness of content delivery methods
- Clarity and value of assignments
- Learning environment and class climate
- Student progress toward specific outcomes

2. Time Feedback Strategically

Feedback doesn't need to occur only at midterm. Consider gathering input:

- After the first assignment or exam
- Following the introduction of a new instructional method or tool
- After a difficult topic or module
- At a point when students have enough experience to reflect meaningfully

3. Ask Targeted Questions

Use prompts that help students reflect on their learning experience and suggest improvements. For example:

- What concept, topic, or assignment has been the most confusing so far? What would help clarify it?
- What feedback or communication from me has been most helpful? What could be improved?
- What has helped you feel most engaged in this course so far, and why?

4. Choose a Format That Fits Your Context

Gathering feedback can be simple and flexible. Consider:

- Canvas surveys (graded or ungraded)
- Google Forms (for anonymity and convenience)
- In-class written reflections
- Small-group discussions
- Feedback facilitated by a colleague or teaching assistant in focus groups

5. Close the Loop

When students see that their input is heard and valued, their motivation to provide thoughtful feedback increases. After reviewing the responses:

- Identify patterns and consider how they align with your instructional goals
- Share key takeaways with students
- Explain what changes you plan to make—or not make—and why

Step 4: Interpreting Student Feedback Guide

Step 4 invites instructors to examine student feedback as one form of evidence about how instructional strategies supported student learning. Rather than classifying responses as simply “favorable” or “unfavorable,” the goal is to consider whether the strategies used supported the learning they were intended to facilitate.

Guiding questions include:

- How did students interpret this instructional choice?
- What insights do their responses offer about its impact on learning?
- What adjustments might improve its effectiveness in future iterations?

Foundational Concepts

1. Interpreting Student Feedback as Perception Data

Student feedback reflects students’ perceptions of their experience and is **not** a direct measure of teaching effectiveness or learning performance (Linse, 2017). These perceptions may be influenced by multiple factors such as course difficulty, grading expectations, instructor identity, or modality (Cook et al., 2024). When interpreted as perception data, feedback can offer insight into how students understood instructional strategies and which aspects supported or hindered their learning.

2. Response Rate and Representativeness

No universal threshold defines an ‘adequate’ response rate. Rather, the response rate needed to draw reliable conclusions depends on class size: smaller classes require higher response rates to avoid sampling error and ensure generalizability.

Class Size	Minimum Rate (Formative)	Minimum Rate (Evaluative)
< 20 students	≥58%	≥95%
20–50 students	≥40–50%	≥90%
50–100 students	≥35–50%	≥85–93%
100+ students	≥20–30%	≥80–85%

Adapted from Nulty (2008) and Luo (2020)

Low response rates may still offer useful formative insights, but higher rates are recommended for evaluative purposes to mitigate sampling error and bias. Luo (2020) found that response rates below 40% were associated with lower average scores and small-sample bias—even when controlling for class size, modality, and instructor rank.

3. Making Sense of the Data

Understand the Scale: Student rating instruments typically use ordinal scales, where intervals between points are not equal. Reporting only the mean score assumes equal spacing between options (e.g., “Effective” and “Very Effective”), which can misrepresent results. This is especially true in skewed distributions, where a few low ratings may pull the mean downward. Medians and modes are often more reliable measures in these cases.

Examine the Distribution: A mean of 4.2 could reflect consistently high ratings or a mix of high and low scores. Without viewing the full distribution, it’s impossible to distinguish between those patterns.

Small changes in the mean (e.g., 0.2–0.3 points) may appear meaningful but often fall within expected variation and should not be overinterpreted (Boysen et al., 2014).

Consider Representativeness: Student evaluations are not random samples. A 40% response rate provides no information about the remaining 60% (Cook et al., 2024).

Step-by-Step Interpretation Process

First, revisit your instructional intentions

Before reviewing student feedback, reflect on your self-assessment. Consider:

- What strategies do you believe effectively supported student learning?
- What adjustments are you already considering?

Second, read and react

- Read through the entire feedback report to understand the big picture. Acknowledge any emotional reactions—whether pride, frustration, or surprise. Take a break if needed, then return to the data with an inquiry-focused approach.

Third, analyze quantitative data patterns

- **Check response rates and class size:** Review the number of responses relative to the class size. Are rates sufficient to inform decisions? Lower response rates—especially in small classes—limit generalizability and may reflect nonresponse bias.
- **Match the statistical summary to the scale:** If the scale is ordinal (e.g., 1 = Not at all effective to 5 = Very effective), avoid relying solely on the mean. The **median** and **mode** often better reflect central tendency, especially when the distribution is skewed or includes outliers. For example, if most students selected the highest rating but one or two gave very low scores, the mean may underrepresent the typical experience.
- **Examine the distribution of responses:** Go beyond averages to understand the spread. Do most responses fall into a single category? Are there polarized ratings? A mean of 4.2 might reflect consistent agreement—or a split between very high and very low ratings. Reviewing the full distribution helps clarify which interpretation fits.

Fourth, analyze qualitative feedback

A scholarly approach to interpreting student comments involves identifying patterns rather than reacting to isolated remarks. One recommended method is to group similar comments, label each group with a theme, and focus on the patterns that appear most frequently (Linse, 2017).

Suggested strategies:

1. **Sort by Strengths and Areas for Improvement:** Distinguish comments that highlight what supported learning from those suggesting areas for change.
2. **Apply Instructional Dimensions:** Group comments into themes (e.g., feedback, pacing, organization, clarity) that reflect scholarly teaching dimensions or align with your feedback instrument.
3. **Identify Recurring Themes:** Count how often themes appear. For example, five comments on helpful feedback or six about pacing signal a clearer pattern than one comment about unclear slides.
4. **Compare to Your Self-Assessment:** Ask: “Does this pattern confirm what I anticipated?” or “Does this challenge my assumptions?”

Step 5: Reflect and Identify Next Steps

This final step brings together your self-assessment, student feedback data, and the patterns you've identified to support evidence-informed instructional decisions. Reflection is not about defending or justifying—it's about inquiry: understanding what worked, what didn't, and what to explore further.

5A. Synthesize Patterns

Reflect on the full picture:

- What feedback patterns affirm your instructional approach?
- Which areas were perceived differently than you expected?
- Where do patterns in the data align—or diverge—from your self-assessment?
- Are themes consistent across sections or semesters, or do they seem cohort-specific?

5B. When Feedback Warrants Further Exploration

Some patterns may prompt further consideration—not because they indicate a problem on their own, but because they suggest a possible gap between instructional intent and student experience. Linse (2017) and Drue & Bifulco (2025) emphasize that such data points should not be interpreted as evidence of instructional shortcomings, but as signals that additional context or inquiry could be helpful.

Feedback may warrant further exploration when:

- Multiple quantitative items fall below the midpoint (Linse, 2017).
- A specific area of instruction (e.g., organization, pacing, responsiveness) consistently receives lower ratings across different course sections or terms (Boysen et al., 2014).
- Qualitative comments reinforce concerns suggested by the quantitative data, especially when comments appear frequently in multiple courses (Drue & Bifulco, 2025).
- Ratings or comments diverge substantially from patterns observed in previous semesters and cannot be explained by changes in course design, delivery mode, or student composition (Linse, 2017).

According to Linse (2017), no single rating item or mean score—particularly in a skewed distribution—should serve as the basis for summative conclusions. Instead, these patterns can guide thoughtful inquiry into whether instructional intentions and student experiences aligned as expected.

When such conditions arise, you might revisit how learning goals and expectations are communicated, review course materials or instructional strategies with a colleague, gather targeted feedback in a future offering, or consult with your teaching and learning center for additional perspectives.

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About the Authors

Nichole Barta, Acting Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs and Associate Professor, Kinesiology & Sport Management, Gonzaga University, bartan@gonzaga.edu

Juliane Mora, Associate Professor, Communication Studies, College of Arts and Sciences; CTA Faculty Fellow for Inclusive Pedagogy; and Affiliate Faculty, Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, Gonzaga University, mora@gonzaga.edu