

Top Ten Strategies for Oral Feedback

In the latest OFSTED guidance, they have clearly stated that lesson planning should not be inflexible, and that teachers should react to the progress, or the lack thereof, of their students. This is heartening recognition of what we have known all along – and that is that teaching and learning are *contingent* activities. Learning is often problematic, changeable, non-linear, beset by a host of unique factors that cannot be exactly replicated (but with experience we can determine common patterns). We must therefore be constantly tracking the evidence of learning with as much precision and skill as we can. That is why effective teaching *hinges* absolutely on **oral formative feedback**.

1. ‘Making the Learning Visible’ – Oral Feedback on Worked Examples: This heading captures a variety of methods and tools to essentially do the same thing – showing student work in the midst of the process. Whether it be through an iPad; a Visualiser; a video camera or still camera; or more simply pinning ongoing work up onto the wall or a display; making the work ‘visual’ is a powerful tool for assessment for learning. For one, it raises levels of pride, giving students a keener sense of purpose, and it often instills a healthy competitive edge to the learning. It is also evident that most successful students have an innate sense of what ‘good work’ looks like, but many students simply don’t have this degree of self-efficacy. Making visible exemplar work, and breaking down its component parts, is a simple and powerful way to modify the learning of each student – helping to enhance what Ron Berger described as the crucial assessment going on “inside students”.

2. Guided Writing: Ostensibly, the strategy is a writing task – but it is the ongoing oral feedback at the heart of this strategy that is essential in establishing where the learners are and where they are going with their learning. This is one of those activities that teachers often shy away from, perhaps through a sense of fear of making a mistake in their writing, or not having absolute control of behaviour whilst undertaking the writing (a neat trick is to select a student to scribe the guided writing to allow you to freely roam the room; or going one step further and having an object passed around, for which students need to hold to contribute). Working effectively, it can harmonise a symphony of understanding. Given any topic the teacher can begin with a prompt to the writing to oil the wheels, before students are asked to contribute subsequent ideas and sentences. Once more, it has the attendant benefit of modelling excellence in a very collaborative and fulfilling fashion.

3. Peer Response Partners (or ‘think-pair-share’): This style of peer feedback is well trodden and nothing new, but it is worth reflecting that it is the aggregation of understanding provided by learning in groups which provides the positive impact inherent in collaborative learning. See here for a great, fulsome explanation: <http://headguruteacher.com/2012/07/17/the-washing-hands-of-learning-think-pair-share/>.

4. Gallery Critique: This stems from the work of Ron Berger and his brilliant book ‘The Ethic of Excellence’. It can be used during the draft/main process or as a summative task. This strategy does have some specific protocols students should follow. The work of the whole group should be displayed in a gallery style for a short time. Students are expected to first undertake a short silent viewing (making notes to reflect is also useful here). The students make comments on the work – post it notes being ideal for this stage. Then the next step is a group discussion of ‘*what they noticed*’ in particular, with debate and discussion encouraged – of course, the feedback should be both kind and constructive. The next step for discussion is talking about ‘*what they liked*’ and evaluating the work. The final stage has the teacher synthesise viewpoints and express their own; before ensuring students make notes and reflect upon useful observations for making improvements. Feedback should always be ‘kind, specific and constructive’.

5. One to-one Teacher Feedback: This strategy is as obvious as they come, but in the hurly burly of thirty GCSE students rumbling along in unison, the prospect of one-to-one feedback appears slim to non-existent far too often. Yet, we all know the power of the swiftest of one-to-one oral interventions. Too often our elegant written commentaries are ignored or simply misunderstood. We need to talk it through. With our KS3 groupings in our English and Media Faculty we have allocated *one-to-one weeks* for each class each term. We are going to ensure students work with peers collaboratively 'marking' prep books for SPaG in their preparatory writing, before undertaking independent reading and writing challenges. Every student will spend five minutes with their teacher reflecting upon their progress, targets and their finished, or ongoing, work. At GCSE, you may find that mock feedback would be doubly useful given an oral one-to-one to supplement a written commentary. How about setting up a small group task where students devise their own exam questions and answers whilst undertaking that crucial one-to-one feedback.

6. Opinion Lines: A lively debate can ensue from this strategy. Select topic sentences that convey a clear opinion and then use both sides of the room as an opinion continuum, from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'. This is an ideal task at the beginning of a topic, to determine their understanding, or at the end – perhaps it is a good way to book end learning to identify changing opinions after a topic has been studied. Students must orally feedback their opinions, justifying their ideas with evidence, building upon or challenging feedback from other students. The feedback can be made visible by a student scribing the continuum on the board in note form (photograph it and save it for later, or use it for ideas for a subsequent written activity).

7. Post it note feedback: Students are asked to note any questions on a post it and place it on the 'questions wall', as they worked away. This small step was helpful in eliminating those helpless and distracting questions, like 'How do I spell such and such...', when a dictionary is in a box in front of them! The freedom from answering these questions means you can go around quickly giving constructive oral feedback with limited interference.

8. TSSSTSSS: This simply strategy relates to the method of questioning to elicit oral feedback. The 'Teacher-student-student...' approach explicitly rejects the 'tennis style' teacher led questioning, to instead encourage students to feedback upon the ideas of one another – bouncing ideas around the room like a basketball team (without the heavy ball obviously!). It is a timely reminder to ensure students still own their learning, building upon the ideas of one another.

9. ABC feedback: Closely related to the previous point is the very simple model for students to respond to one another – A = Agree with... B = Build upon... C = Challenge. When students know this structure it is a finely tuned short-hand for effective collaborative learning that enriches the quality of feedback. The teacher is the ultimate guide, but students can develop their thinking more independently. This style does work better with a meaty topic where students are grappling with an argument, or questions, that requires higher order thinking. It also helps if students are given notice that they will respond, as it ensures they listen ever more keenly.

10. 'Learning Spies' feedback: Borrowed from David Didau, this strategy works great for group work where you want students to remain on task purposefully throughout the lesson. It is a great way to celebrate and feedback upon positive learning, making explicit what good learning looks like, sounds like and feels like. By making explicit before the task what behaviours you expect of good group work, the two 'spies' (I found a gender and ability mix for the pairing worked well), would note each group at work; making notes about skilful contributions, good leadership, levels of engagement and active listening. At the end of the lesson, they would feedback with real skill about the learning habits displayed by the group, identifying the best insights and behaviours on show. Try it with one of your most 'challenging' students – we all know the type – it works!