

Oral Communication Feedback Strategies

General Advice

1. Start early – set the expectation that you will talk about student performances together regularly – be sure to tell them why (it enhances learning!). Also decide early if students have a choice about getting oral feedback on their presentations.
2. Give instruction on the kinds of comments you hope to get. General tips for asking for and sharing feedback include:
 - Ask for specific responses about specific issues. For speeches, ask about patterns of organization, use of visual aids, attention-getting techniques, use of voice, etc. For feedback about discussion exercises, ask about roles people played, listening skills, or development of ideas.
 - Give students time to think. The typical advice is to count to at least 12 after asking a question. Silence is okay.
 - Encourage the use of “I” language in offering feedback. Students, and teachers, can own their responses by saying “I was able to follow along because....” or “I was confused when...”
 - Describe rather than accuse: “I didn’t see much eye contact after the introduction,” is better than “You weren’t prepared well enough to maintain eye contact.”
 - Ask for responses to the content of the presentation/discussion. Encouraging students to respond to a question such as “what did you learn?” can go a long way toward reminding students that oral communication isn’t about “performing” for others – it’s about communicating with others!

Strategies for Facilitating Oral Feedback Sessions

1. There are several traditional methods of handling oral feedback on student in class oral performance.

Use peer critics to generate initial responses

- They have written responses at their fingertips so it is fairly easy for them to make a positive comment and a “could work on” comment.
- Discussion can spin out from these comments – the presenter(s) or other class members can respond to the comments.
- Can be done immediately after an individual presentation or at the end of a group of presentations.

Assign oral comment roles before presentations begin

- In addition to having peer critics creating written responses to the performances you can assign some listeners to the role of offering oral comments.
- These comments can be shared after an individual presentation or at the end of a group of presentations.
- Roles can be general or specific. Possibilities include:
 - facilitator of the oral feedback session
 - people assigned to offer suggestions for next time
 - people assigned to offer positive feedback
 - people assigned to ask a content question
 - people assigned to ask a presentation preparation question

2. There are several innovative methods for providing oral feedback.

The tag team feedback session

At the end of the round for the day one of my TAs gets one “volunteer” to offer a comment about one or more of the speeches. Once their comment is out (and improved or clarified through questions from the TA or other class members) the volunteer then gets to call on the next person to speak. This strategy spreads the discussion around the room, reinforces names (when they say “that guy” the person has to introduce himself before commenting), and gives a little reward of power to the person who shared something. To overcome the “eye contact avoidance” problem that can occur when people are called on, another TA uses a small soft ball that the students toss to the next commentator. Everyone pays careful attention to make sure they don’t get hit in the head by the ball.

The quick oral go-round

I’ve visited classes where the instructor, due to time constraints, waits for oral feedback until the end of the session, and then in the last 3 minutes of class has everyone make one comment about the speeches they have heard that day. Comments can be some specific idea or attitude they will take home from one of the speeches/discussions, or something they learned about public speaking/discussion from that day.

The roaming written feedback form

This is a take off of the oral go-round. I have seen instructors with reticent students pass out a sheet of paper for each speaker for the day; each page has a speaker’s name at the top. The page circulates through the room sometimes during and sometimes after each presentation and everyone (except the peer critics) writes a brief comment directly to the speaker. While it is not ideal to have students passing around a sheet of paper during a presentation (I prefer that the sheet circulate at the end), it is wonderful for the speaker have a page of quick comments to take out of the room immediately after the presentation.

The chalkboard go-round

An instructor with a particularly reticent class began using this strategy as a way to make written feedback public. At the end of the presentations for the day, every student is asked to go to the chalkboard to write two comments about the presentations. As in the quick oral go-round, comments could be about some specific idea or attitude they would take home from the content of one of the speeches/discussions, or something they learned about public speaking/discussion from that day. The latter may be phrased as a general observation – “good eye contact makes me pay attention” – or as a specific tip that they plan to apply to their own presentations. Once the comments are on the board, as time permits, the instructor can facilitate some discussion out of the comments.

The small group feedback conversation

Some instructors have 3-5 students assigned as peer critics for each day’s speakers. In the last ten minutes of class, the critics meet with the speaker and the speaker facilitates his or her own feedback session. Once students are used to this process, they sometimes ask their small group members to look for particular things in their presentations.

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*Based in part, on classroom strategies developed by many Teaching Assistants at ISU including
Kristen Nanaziashvili, Nancy Anderson, Mark Callison, Sari Fordham, and Kathy Norris*