The FEEDBACK Handbook

or

Will my feedback tell me how to get an ‘A’?
This handbook has been developed for The University of Sheffield School of Architecture [SSoA]. The resource has been created by Leo Care, Sarah Foxwell and Ian Hicklin. Thanks to Susi Clark and Satwinder Samra for setting up the original student focus group.

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www.sheffield.ac.uk/architecture
www.feedbackhandbook.wordpress.com

The University of Sheffield
School of Architecture
Arts Tower
Western Bank
Sheffield
S10 2TN
Introduction

This document has been developed to help anyone involved in receiving and giving feedback: students, tutors and guest reviewers. The aim of this handbook is to give people a better understanding of feedback; what it’s for and how to use it.
What is FEEDBACK?

Feedback is information and advice, provided either to help inform current work or help you reflect on work you have already done.

But what use is feedback and in what formats does it come?

In education, two kinds of feedback are recognised:

FORMATIVE: Feedback to help you improve or develop your work while there is still time to make improvements or changes.

SUMMATIVE: Information that usually comes at the end of a module or assignment that tells you how you have performed - this could be a grade or could include written feedback, either personal or generic.
Feedback can help to improve the standard of your current work and can inform future work. It can help you understand whether your work meets assessment criteria.

"At my final review, I received clear actions that I could take to improve my work; whether it was changing, re-organizing, or adding a completely new piece of work."

3rd Year Student

### 2.1 What are the benefits of FEEDBACK?

**FEEDBACK CAN INFORM THE DEVELOPMENT OF CURRENT WORK:**

- Highlights areas to develop or change
- Provides new ideas
- Provides different perspectives

**FEEDBACK CAN HELP YOU IMPROVE WORK:**

- For a future assessment, review or portfolio

**FEEDBACK CAN PROVIDE IDEAS:**

- Potential references
- Inspiration
- A different approach
- Technical information

**FEEDBACK CAN ENCOURAGE YOU**

- It can help you see unrecognised merit or potential in your own work

**FEEDBACK STIMULATES INDEPENDENCE**

- By encouraging you to reflect on your work

**FEEDBACK CAN HELP YOU DEVELOP VERSATILITY**

- It can inform HOW you work
In what formats might **FEEDBACK** appear?

Feedback comes in many forms. Each one will help you in a different way. It is important to understand the types of feedback you might encounter for the work you are undertaking.

- **FEEDBACK AS ADVICE**
  - “If I were you, I would take this approach because...”

- **FEEDBACK AS GUIDANCE**
  - “Have you thought about trying this...?”

- **FEEDBACK AS COACHING**
  - “What you did worked well in this way. Next time try doing it this way...”

- **FEEDBACK AS DIRECTION**
  - “Do this...”

- **FEEDBACK AS A GRADE**
  - “This is how well your work addressed the assessment criteria...”

“I really appreciate feedback that gives me different things to try and experiment with, rather than being told what to do!”

Student

“We aim to give feedback that opens up different avenues of exploration for students rather than being prescriptive about which direction to go in.”

Tutor
2.3 How might FEEDBACK be presented?

The presentation of feedback varies from drawn and written to verbal and gestural feedback. In a design project you are likely to be offered all forms of feedback.

"It was particularly helpful when tutors used drawings on feedback sheets to clarify their meaning."

3rd Year Student

DRAWN FEEDBACK:
- Sketches reflecting what a student has presented
- Construction detail
- Drawings on top of existing work to show suggestions for exploration

WRITTEN FEEDBACK:
- Ideas and observations
- Corrections
- Students often value this above other forms

VERBAL FEEDBACK:
- During or after presentation
- From tutors/peers

GESTURES:
- Highlighting points
- Nodding
- Encouraging

GRADED FEEDBACK:
- Always read the grade descriptors in the Programme Handbook when you receive a grade - this is feedback

2.3
Tutor - After report
"Good understanding of the concept. I would like to see the ideas developed further in the project but this report is a good basis for that."

Tutor - Dissertation draft
"Your research question seems very clear and the content is looking interesting. However you might want to rearrange the structure as it doesn’t flow. Perhaps try swapping chapters 4 and 8. Keep adding to your bibliography, it is looking a little sparse."

Tutor - After review
"A project responding sensitively to context with some lovely moments. Needs more attention to distinctions between public and private and get more sense of how the building functions/is inhabited. Axonometric is good - work up the other drawings to the same level."

A diagram suggesting how a project could be organised to simplify and improve the legibility of the building design.

A diagram reflecting how a reviewer understands a student design presented to them.

A drawing exploring how the construction of a design could be improved.
Feedback is part of a process, not an object or commodity. Engaging with feedback is an integral part of your learning, development and understanding.

But how is feedback provided and who supplies it? Should you treat all feedback in the same way?
Feedback comes from a variety of sources, both formal and informal. Different sources might be more informed in aspects of technology, theory and process, but all can expose you to different agendas.

"It's good to get fresh eyes on your project and to see other people's work."

3rd Year Student

3.1 Who provides FEEDBACK?

TUTORS:
- From within the School of Architecture

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS:
- Guests
- Specialists
- Practitioners
- Clients/users
  [Live Projects]

PEERS:
- Year group
- Within School

FRIENDS AND FAMILY:
- Non-architects
- Lay-person's view

YOU: SELF-REFLECTION:
- Formally prompted and day-to-day
Feedback is not only provided in formal review or assignment situations, it may be provided on a day-to-day basis in tutorials and through casual discussion. Feedback presented in this way can be just as valuable as a written feedback sheet or notated coursework.

"Having the feedback almost straight away meant that any queries could be taken up and work could move forward quicker."

3rd Year Student

FOR STUDIO DESIGN PROJECTS:
- During tutorials
- At reviews [interim, final]
- During casual discussion
- In workshops
- At portfolio reviews

FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:
- Tutorials/seminars
- Interim submissions
- Final submission/assessment

FOR WRITTEN EXAMINATIONS:
- Grade
- Generic feedback
- Individual written notes

FOR VERBAL PRESENTATIONS:
- Tutorials
- Review/assessment
Feedback Timeline for a Sample Studio Project

- **Week 1**
  - Project
  - Self-reflection

- **Week 2**
  - Peer Review

- **Week 3**
  - Tutorial

- **Week 4**
  - Self-reflection and peer to peer input throughout

- **Week 5**
  - Final Review

- **Week 6**
  - Interim Review
  - Final Review
  - Portfolio: Written feedback/grade
Feedback Timeline for a Sample Written Assignment or Dissertation

Self reflection and peer to peer input throughout

Review

Draft Submission if applicable
Submission
Final written feedback/grade
3.3 Should all FEEDBACK be treated the same?

You may get conflicting feedback or opinion that leads in different directions. It is your responsibility to decide what to do with feedback: this process should deepen your understanding.

“It was helpful to have the opinion of another tutor to contrast with my studio tutor. They gave me lots of different ideas that I think will help my project.”

3rd Year Student

INFORMED VS UNINFORMED OPINION:
- Feedback from within architecture might differ from an outside source

FEEDBACK FROM A RANGE OF DIFFERENT PEOPLE:
- Different views
- Users/clients
- Different priorities

IS SELF-ASSESSMENT USEFUL?
- Yes, self-assessment is a vital part of your work process
3.4 Why is peer review useful?

Peer review provides an opportunity for you to receive feedback from others working on similar projects or assignments. Giving feedback to others can also help you understand the feedback process and reveal new ideas or elements you have ignored in your own work.

“Working in the studio is great because you can help each other develop your projects”

Tutor

VICARIOUS EXPERIENCE: LEARNING FROM WHAT OTHERS HAVE DONE

- This is how people work in architectural practice - and in other sectors

IT DEVELOPS CRITICAL ANALYSIS SKILLS

- Prompting you to form an opinion supported by reflection and evidence

IT CAN INFORM YOUR OWN AGENDA

- Thinking about your peers’ work helps you clarify your own priorities

IT PROVIDES NEW IDEAS/VIEWPOINTS

- Widening your experience - learning from 20 or 100 projects not just one!

IT HELPS DEVELOP YOUR CAPACITY TO COMMUNICATE

- Ideas need to be articulated to be appreciated
4.0 How should I use FEEDBACK?

You will usually need to actively reflect upon, and interpret, your feedback for it to be effective.

So how should you interpret, make the most of and use feedback?
How should I interpret FEEDBACK?

It is important to interpret, understand and apply feedback as quickly as possible for it to be useful. The interpretation will depend on how the feedback was given and the context in which it was given.

3rd Year Student: “I think with the project, we perhaps were not completely aware that our work looked a bit disorganised/messy and needed tying together, so it was good to be able to understand this and make changes.”

Tutor: “The responsibility to use feedback is yours.”
If feedback isn’t legible, ask for clarification.

Before starting a new piece of work, review previous feedback and incorporate the advice into your new workflow.

Record comments if you wish to analyse them later.

Keep a record of feedback and use it to inform future work.

If feedback isn’t legible, ask for clarification.

Analyse feedback and apply it to your work.

In reviews, listen carefully - ask a friend to take notes for you.

Record comments if you wish to analyse them later.

Keep a record of feedback and use it to inform future work.

Remember you can ask your reviewer questions too.

Make the most of the time available.

In reviews, listen carefully - ask a friend to take notes for you.

Before starting a new piece of work, review previous feedback and incorporate the advice into your new workflow.

If you are required to respond, take a moment to compose your answer.

Ask for clarification if there is a question or answer you don’t understand.
Feedback can be an exceptionally useful tool, so it is vital that you take as much from it as possible.

“IT’S WORTH KEEPING A NOTE OF FEEDBACK SO THAT YOU DON’T REPEAT THE SAME MISTAKES. IF YOU KEEP GETTING THE SAME COMMENTS OVER AND OVER AGAIN YOU NEED TO CHANGE YOUR PRACTICE.”

Tutor

4.2 Making the most of FEEDBACK

Feedback can be an exceptionally useful tool, so it is vital that you take as much from it as possible.

**PREPARE**
- Check the criteria; make sure your work addresses it

**CHECK FOR CLARITY**
- Make sure work is clear and clearly presented

**QUESTION YOURSELF**
- What questions might you be asked? What would you like advice on?

**CHECK PAST FEEDBACK**
- Don’t repeat the same mistakes

**LISTEN**
- Take in as much as possible; and get a friend to write down any feedback (if verbal)

**APPLICATION**
- Apply any comments given to you or others to current and future work
Feedback is often given in the context of a single piece/body of work, but it should also be used in the future to inform new work. Use feedback to help you reflect on your practice.

• Feedback can be used to inform and adapt current work

• Contextualise previous feedback; think about how it might inform new work

• Use feedback to build on your current skills and experience

"If you get feedback from one project to the next...you know whether to try harder and if you need to do more or change the way you have been working."

1st Year Student

IMMEDIATELY:

RETROSPECTIVELY:

TO INFORM FUTURE WORK/PROCESSES:
"After the feedback I had more confidence and progressed further knowing what I was doing well/badly."

3rd Year Student
Preparing for Feedback

Whether giving or receiving feedback, it is important to be prepared.

So how can you prepare for giving and receiving feedback effectively?
ALIGN YOUR EXPECTATIONS:
- What type of feedback are you likely to receive?
- How much feedback can you expect?
- Tutors and students should have similar expectations

IDENTIFY FEEDBACK CHANNELS
- How is the feedback being provided?

UNDERSTAND ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
- Understand what is expected and analyse previously marked examples to see the effect of feedback

PREPARE WELL AND REHEARSE
- Practice presentations
- Check equipment
- Project your voice

BE OPEN TO FEEDBACK:
- Listen
- Constructive criticism is helpful

GIVE AND TAKE FEEDBACK:
- Share your ideas/skills with others
- Interpret feedback given to others for your own work

It is important to go into a situation in which you will be receiving feedback with an open mind and realistic expectations of the type and amount of feedback you will receive.

"For the recent portfolio marks, I got what I was expecting considering the feedback at final project review, and the work I’d put in since.”

Student
5.2 Preparing to give FEEDBACK?

As a reviewer you will be required to give feedback on a number of different criteria and in a number of different ways.

"The best tutors are really clear about criteria ... which results in student's work meeting standards and students being pushed enough and in the right direction."

6th Year Student

"Feedback from studio reviews, reports and responses to final presentations should be promptly returned to the students so as not to slow progress."

3rd Year Student

- What is the brief?
- What are the expected learning outcomes?
- What stage should students be at?
- What should they be presenting?
- Different levels of completion require different types of advice/instruction
- What is required to attain each grade? (see course handbook)
- Be as concise and thorough as possible
- Try to give students equal amounts of feedback and time
5.3 How can you give effective FEEDBACK?

Whether you are a student or a tutor, it is important to make sure that any feedback you provide is useful.

“I sometimes find it really difficult to decipher handwriting”
3rd Year Student

“Sometimes review feedback sheets are too much based on describing the project rather than constructive points about what worked and what didn’t.”
3rd Year Student

- **Weaknesses AND strengths**
- **Be positive, offer advice and suggest ways to progress**
- **Feedback is of no use if it can’t be read!**
- **Not just a list of what was presented/written**
- **Either do it yourself or assign someone else (if verbal)**
- **It can then be used to implement changes before the student has moved on**
- **Answer queries and follow-up points**
What is ineffective FEEDBACK?

Feedback that is not constructive or supportive does not help students develop their work.

- FEEDBACK THAT DEMORALISES
  - Feedback should be realistic but make sure that feedback doesn’t just focus on weaknesses

- FEEDBACK THAT IS NARROW MINDDED
  - Do not allow personal prejudice to influence the advice you give
  - Keep an open mind

- FEEDBACK THAT DOES NOT ARTICULATE OUTCOMES
  - Offer advice and direction
  - Set clear goals

- FEEDBACK THAT IS VAGUE
  - Vague feedback can be confusing

- FEEDBACK THAT IS RETURNED LATE CAN BECOME USELESS
  - Return feedback as quickly as possible

“If I receive feedback straight after a review I can start to work the points into my design straight away. If I get vague remarks two weeks later I’ve already moved on and can’t even remember what they refer to!”

5th Year Student
Feedback and assessment are two different things. Students all have differing skills and learning needs, so where possible, feedback is tailored to the individual. Assessment is made against set criteria.

"Good constructive feedback builds confidence and helps create a platform to allow you to go forward with your design. It is important that at the end of each review that each student feels they are walking out feeling they can move forward."

2nd Year Student
6.0 Finding out more about FEEDBACK

References

We found the following references useful in developing this handbook:

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The Feedback Handbook

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