

# Feedback During the Revising Stage

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the role of feedback in the writing process, and the different types of feedback you may receive. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. [Feedback in the Writing Process](#)
2. [Constructive vs. Nonconstructive Feedback](#)
3. [Incorporating Feedback](#)

## 1. Feedback in the Writing Process

**Feedback** is advice given in response to reading an essay or other writing project and is typically intended to lead to revision and a second or third draft that shows improvements over the first draft. This means that feedback can be part of the writing process when a reader offers a writer reactions and suggestions to the piece of writing in question.

In college, often a piece of writing will receive feedback from instructors, peers, and even tutors or graders. But even when you're not being offered feedback as part of a course's requirements, you may still seek it out from your trusted friends and family, using their intelligence and expertise to improve your own work. Moreover, if you're in a professional space, you may end up getting feedback from coworkers, supervisors, and other interested parties.

Regardless of where and when you're getting feedback on your writing, it's probably best to have really good feedback from just a few people instead of lots of feedback from many people. That way, you can be sure that you're seeing a diverse set of perspectives on your writing but aren't getting overwhelmed by an avalanche of other people's opinions.

Feedback may arrive in a few ways. Perhaps you'll have a conversation about a writing project with a boss, teacher, or friend. Or you may receive physical notes on your writing, either digitally or on paper from a peer or an instructor. Or you may just get a note at the end of the paper summarizing the reader's feedback and thoughts about what you've written.



## TERM TO KNOW

## Feedback

Advice given in response to reading an essay or other writing project; typically intended to lead to revision and a second or third draft that shows improvements over the first draft.

# 2. Constructive vs. Nonconstructive Feedback

Feedback is either constructive or nonconstructive. Feedback is usually nonconstructive when it is so extensive that the writer finds it difficult to make any of the suggested changes. Feedback that is completely noncritical—that provides no helpful insights into what the writer should work on—is also nonconstructive. Constructive feedback straddles a line between these two: It provides useful insights and ideas that can be implemented by the writer.

In other words, the best, most constructive feedback will:

- Offer insights into your ideas, organization, and style that can be implemented.
- Ask probing questions that help you reconsider and enrich your own ideas.
- Stick with personally focused, I-based comments such as “I don’t understand what you mean in this paragraph.”

On the other hand, nonconstructive feedback may:

- Be so critical that making the suggested changes would be very difficult.
- Contain personal attacks against the author.
- Place a judgment on the values of the piece instead of on the way the piece was written.
- Be so noncritical that it doesn’t demonstrate any meaningful changes that the author can make, such as if someone just writes, “I like it,” “It’s fine,” or even “I don’t get it.”

However you receive feedback, it’s important to learn how to assess if that feedback is constructive or not and determine how to incorporate it into your writing.

# 3. Incorporating Feedback

Read the following excerpt from an early draft of an essay. Try to identify problems—not only mistakes in grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc., but also structural and thematic problems, and “big picture” concerns.

*John Stuart Mill believed that scientific knowledge was esential for a “modern” educated human. It was his belief that scientific reasoning teaches people to question the world around them, and to never take anything for granted. I think the idea was to train students to properly use their instruments. I generally agree with John Stuart Mill, at last on the general ideas he hit on. I don't think that we should all have to*

*learn Latin and Greek, but I do agree with his statements about learning second languages and the cultures involved.*

This paragraph will benefit from constructive criticism. The following bolded areas display the kind of comments a reviewer might make. The comments identify possible typos, as well as questions about how ideas work together. The imaginary reviewer even asks the writer how the conclusion of the paragraph connects to its main idea:

*John Stuart Mill believed that scientific knowledge was essential (**essential**) for a “modern” (**When was he writing this?**) educated human. It was his belief that scientific reasoning teaches people to question the world around them, and to never take anything for granted. I think the idea was to train students to properly use their instruments. (**Odd tone—better to be more formal here?**) I generally agree with John Stuart Mill, at last (**least**) on the general ideas he hit on. I don't think that we should all have to learn Latin and Greek, (**When does he say this?**) but I do agree with his statements about learning second languages and the cultures involved. (**What statements? Wasn't he talking about science—that should be your focus, I think.**)*

Because the entire essay is not available in this example, it's impossible to evaluate how this paragraph relates to the thesis, or to the “big picture.” However, there are obvious problems with the paragraph, as the reviewer constructively points out. Read the following revision, which has incorporated the feedback:

*John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) believed that scientific knowledge was essential for a “modern” educated person. It was his belief that scientific reasoning teaches people to question the world around them, and to avoid taking anything for granted. He wrote that “Facts are the materials of our knowledge, but the mind itself is the instrument...” (pg. 396). The idea that education should be about developing a person's method of thinking—in this case, the scientific method—came from Mill and other thinkers of his time. This focus is even more important in the current era of computers and space shuttles, microwaves and nuclear missiles, than it was in his day. As Mill said, the benefits of the scientific method are present in everyday life, no matter what you do for a living.*

The writer has taken the feedback into account to improve the development of ideas in the paragraph. As a result of the feedback, the point about scientific learning is made more effectively. Also, the tone of the revised paragraph is much more academic.



BIG IDEA

Feedback helps writers by providing a different perspective on their work and the impact it has on the intended audience. Used effectively, it's a resource that promotes successful writing.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **feedback in the writing process** occurs when advice is given in response to reading an essay or other writing project, typically during the revising stage. There is a big difference between **constructive feedback** and **nonconstructive feedback**: While constructive feedback offers insights into your ideas, organization, and style that can be implemented, nonconstructive feedback places a judgment on the values of the piece instead of on the way the piece was written, or is so noncritical that it doesn't demonstrate any meaningful changes that the author can make. Finally, you looked at a sample paragraph to see how a writer might **incorporate feedback** into a revision.

Best of luck in your learning!

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