# The considerations for effective verbal feedback in physical education.

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## What is feedback?

One essential feature of successful teaching and learning is the feedback the teacher gives a student. Feedback has been defined as an action taken by an agent (e.g., teacher and student) to deliver information about one or more aspects of student performance (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Winnie and Butler (1994) claim that “feedback is information in which a learner can confirm, add to, overwrite, tune, or restructure information in memory, whether that information is domain knowledge, meta-cognitive knowledge, beliefs about self or tasks, or cognitive tactics and strategies” (p.5740). Feedback can take many forms in physical education such as oral, written, informal, formal, peer, self-assessed and video feedback. This article will focus on oral feedback although many of the principles for effective practice transfer.

The Educational Endowment Foundation report that effective verbal feedback delivered by the teacher can improve outcomes by five plus months in secondary age pupils. The recipe for effective feedback is complex. Feedback should give the learner clear goals (“Where am I going?”) and identify the gap between actual and desired levels of performance (“How am I going”) (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Feedback can reinforce successful performance or provide reasons for failure, such as effort or strategy choice (Dweck, 2000). Finally, feedback can give the learner next steps (“Where to next”, Hattie and Timperley, 2007). To do this effectively the teacher must consider what the learner already knows, what they need to know and their readiness for the next steps. Good teachers have enough knowledge and experience of similar situations to develop sound intuition about what is likely to work best (Hogarth, 2001).

## What types of feedback should I use?

The motivation for giving feedback is twofold: providing information to improve or sustain performance, and increasing student motivation, engagement and autonomy (McLeskey et al., 2017). While there are many varying classifications of feedback this article will adopt those outlined in Cushion et al. (2011). It includes five methods of verbal and/or gesture feedback: specific positive feedback, specific negative feedback, general positive feedback, general negative feedback and corrective feedback. Figure 1 below includes a definition of each with working examples.

Table 1. **Practitioner feedback definitions (adapted from Cushion *et al.,* 2011).**

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| Specific positive  Feedback | Specific verbal statements (either positive or supportive OR negative or unsupportive) that specifically aim to  provide information about the quality of performance (can be delivered concurrently or post). e.g. Positive:  ‘Good you followed through well’, ‘Good drag’, ‘that was good defending’, ‘I liked the way that you got nice and low in the tackle’, ‘good serve’, ‘excellent counter attack/fast break’. |
| Specific negative feedback | Negative: ‘Don’t lose sight of the ball and your man’, ‘Don’t force the pass’, ‘the attack is too slow’, ‘you’re swinging too early’, ‘you’ve got to talk, guys’, ‘you maybe got caught a bit too wide’. |
| General positive feedback | General verbal statements OR non-verbal gestures (either positive or supportive OR negative or unsupportive (can be delivered concurrently or post). e.g. Positive: ‘Well tried’, ‘well done’, ‘good job’, ‘much better’, ‘that’s lovely’, ‘I like that’, clapping. |
| General negative feedback | Negative: ‘don’t do that again’, ‘oh, guys, please’, ‘that was rubbish’, ‘you got that wrong’, ‘not from there’, holding head in hands. |
| Corrective feedback | Corrective statements that contain information that specifically aim to improve the player(s) performance at the next skill attempt (can be delivered concurrently or post). e.g. ‘it would help if your stance was not a metre wide’, ‘you probably do not want to be on the same side as your team-mate initially’, ‘move your feet and not your stick’, ‘pass it earlier next time’, ‘force them away from the goal when they are attacking’, ‘we need to increase the ball pace’. |

The most commonly used feedback in education settings is general positive feedback, such as phrases like "well done" and "good job". This type of feedback is widely employed as it creates a more positive experience for students and contributes to the development of strong student-teacher relationships (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). However, relying solely on general positive feedback without providing specific information about why a performance was successful can hinder the student's ability to replicate that success.

In general, studies of negative feedback suggest it can be related negatively to intrinsic motivation (Koka & Hein, 2003) and may have a detrimental effect on student self-esteem. When feedback is related to faulty interpretations rather than a lack of understanding, it is perceived as less threatening by students. This means that if students receive feedback that helps them correct their misconceptions or faulty interpretations, it is more likely to be seen as constructive rather than harmful. In such cases, the feedback can still be effective in helping students improve their understanding and practical performance.

Corrective feedback is an essential aspect of the teaching and learning process. Students who are clear about their learning goals and expectations can produce better outputs and are more self-regulated (Brookhart & McMillan, 2020). It is a method used by teachers to help students understand and rectify their mistakes, while also providing guidance for future practical performances (Whitney & Ackerman, 2020). For instance, in a physical education, a teacher may correct a student's technique by instructing them to land softly on the balls of their feet. This correction aims to enhance their ability to change direction quickly while participating in a game. Although corrective feedback is crucial for students' growth and development, it may sometimes be perceived as negative. However, it is essential for teachers to create a positive and supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable receiving feedback.

## How much feedback should I give?

Effective teachers use quality feedback rather than increasing the amount of feedback delivered. General praise such as “well done Nushi” is not quality, it is merely non- specific feedback which weakens its effects. Praise may be helpful to create a positive, supportive learning environment for students and enhance motivation but may not consistently improve students’ skill learning compared with information feedback (Hattie & Gan, 2011).

The amount of feedback required will be influenced by the student’s stage of learning. Beginners in the cognitive stage of learning will potentially need more feedback on how to execute a skill however too much information could be overloading and unhelpful (Ofsted, 2022). Students with higher levels of prior knowledge in the autonomous stage can more successfully play an active role in developing their strategies for error correction (Zhou et al., 2021). It is therefore important that as student’s competency develops the teacher reduces the amount of immediate instructional feedback. For example, learners might benefit from delayed verbal feedback or opportunities to reflect on their own performance using video and self or peer assessment. Too detailed feedback at this stage in learning can distract them from processing their own sources of feedback and developing their own broad and rich error-detection systems (Otte et al., 2020).

## When is it best to give feedback?

Feedback will become less powerful as the time between the behaviour and the acknowledgement increases (Whitney & Ackerman, 2020). Therefore, specific positive, specific negative and corrective feedback should be delivered immediately following the student’s practical performance. This will avoid errors being repeated.

For some students, receiving feedback in front of the whole class can be a positive experience. This method allows for collective learning and encourages peer-to-peer interactions, as classmates can benefit from each other's feedback. On the other hand, some students may find it more beneficial to receive private individual feedback. This method provides a safe and confidential space for students to address their specific learning needs. The teacher must therefore tailor feedback to the individual needs of the students.

According to Silverman et al. (1992), practice and feedback combined are the key variables in achieving success. In the context of learning, both post-instructional and concurrent feedback play a crucial role in helping learners understand what they need to improve and what they should continue practicing. It is important for teachers to provide timely and specific feedback to students, but also allow time to act on the feedback. Feedback given at the end of a lesson may have limited value compared to feedback provided in the early stages.

## Top tips for effective feedback

In conclusion, feedback is a powerful tool for learning that may not be fully utilised by teachers. It should not be a one-time event but rather an ongoing conversation between teachers and students. Effective verbal feedback should have the following features:

* The feedback should be clear, concise and compatible with the student’s prior knowledge, adjusting the amount and type of feedback to the stage of the learner.
* The feedback should relate to specific and clear goals giving students next steps.
* The teacher should focus on feedback quality rather than quantity prioritising specific positive and corrective feedback.
* The teacher should ensure opportunities to act on feedback through practice.
* The teacher should create a climate where self and peer assessment are integral and foster a culture where learning from mistakes is positive.

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