

Ep. 024: Prompt Feedback

Podcast: <https://prodev.illinoisstate.edu/podcast/2017/ep024.shtml>

It's the episode we've put off doing for far, far too long! Claire and Jim explore the need to provide prompt feedback in our teaching... and why that's a challenge for many of us. These two confessed procrastinators highlight ways to encourage students to provide meaningful feedback to their peers and themselves. Find out how study groups, rubrics, and self-evaluations all play a role in supporting this important teaching practice.

Transcript

JIM: Hi there. I'm Jim.

CLAIRE: And I'm Claire.

JIM: Let's Talk Teaching Welcome to Let's Talk Teaching a podcast from the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology here at Illinois State University. I'm Jim Gee. Returning to our podcast today, Dr. Claire Lamonica. Our director, Hi, Claire.

CLAIRE: Hi, Jim.

JIM: How are you?

CLAIRE: I'm so happy to be here doing this again.

JIM: It's been about a month. It's been a very busy month around here at CTLT. We've, we've had spring break, we've had our Spring Institute. What else has been going on? We've had a great...

CLAIRE: Getting ready for summer.

JIM: We're getting ready. Well, we are getting ready for summer...

CLAIRE: Upgrade to ReggieNet.

JIM: Yeah.

CLAIRE: All kinds of stuff. We've been a hoppin place.

JIM: We have been, and you know, when we as faculty members, or as instructors get busy segue coming up here segue warning, when we get busy, it is sometimes hard for us to keep up with kind of our commitment to students to give them prompt feedback. So, we want to talk today about prompt feedback, one of the Seven Principles for Good practice and undergraduate education.

CLAIRE: It is indeed, and I think that the subtitle of today's episode should be do as I say, not as I do. I have to say, I work very, very hard and giving students prompt feedback. Um, but it does not come naturally to me, I am not a sit down and get this done kind of

person. And I have mentors and many, many colleagues who just cannot rest until those student papers have been addressed. And that is so not me. So, I, you know, I, the good news is I get it, and I understand why it's important. And that, that provides me with some impetus to you know, to get after it and get it done in a timely fashion, if not totally prompt, at least timely.

JIM: And I I'm right there with you. And it's something I like to think I've improved on upon a little bit. And it really wasn't until I started to get to really pay attention to the, the feedback I got either from in the middle of the semester or from students at the end of the semester. And I realized, oh, yeah, that is that's an achievable goal, when we've been talking about doing the seven principles, and will of course link to some of our past episodes. We've talked about some of the other principles. But we kept we would always go oh, prompt feedback. Yeah, we should do that episode.

CLAIRE: We should do that one someday. It's like the procrastinators club in here.

JIM: So, we were not very prompt about doing the episode on prompt feedback, which I think is kind of delicious in its own way. And in part of the problem is we were talking before we started recording, not really the problem. But part of the challenge in in discussing this is there's the prompt part, but there's also what exactly constitutes feedback and the one kind of relates to the other. So, I'm not sure where we should begin with this other than let's, let's review a little bit about summative and formative feedback.

CLAIRE: Well, we can, you know, share it, we can talk about the feedback part first. And we can remind ourselves and anybody who's listening to this, that there are two kinds of feedback, there's formative feedback, and there's summative feedback. And formative feedback is feedback that you provide to students while they are in the midst of learning. And it helps them gain a new understanding. You know, when we're, because I teach writing, I always think of it in terms of, you know, that's the feedback I give them while they're working on their papers. So, me of the feedback is as the grade, that's what you get, at the end, it's evaluative. It tells you how you did as a student. And I think that we, we in higher education have seen for a while is one of our challenges, getting students not to be so focused on that summative feedback, but to pay more attention to the formative feedback that we're providing along the way. So, that's just kind of a refresher for right, a pod episode of something else.

JIM: So, does one need to be more prompt than the other?

CLAIRE: Well, you know, my sense is yes, my sense is that formative feedback really, really has to be prompt because the, the whole purpose of feedback is to let students know how they're doing. And formative feedback. It's not going to do students a good to know how they did on their first draft after they've written their fourth draft. Right. You know, they really need to know that before they write their second draft, so and, you know, analogous situations in any discipline. So, I think I actually am pretty good about prompt formative feedback. When, when my students are in the middle of a project. I am really dedicated to making sure that by the next time I see them, they have heard from me, and they have some feedback. It's those, it's that summative feedback that I

tend to procrastinate and put off, and that's where I have to really be hard on myself and say, okay, I, I have to have this back within a week or whatever. So, because they are going to start the next project, and yes, in fact, the next project will go better if they have already had even summative feedback on this first project.

JIM: And that's where I, I'm so glad you said that, because that's where I kind of had that revelation of Oh, yeah, this is this is part of the issue. I mean, yes, I'm busy. Yes, they're busy. But we really do need to kind of put a period on that last assignment before we really get them engaged in the next assignment. And when you're doing project-based learning, that can, that can be a challenge. I mean, the daily stuff is a challenge to you, let's face it. So, I have students who are creating performances, they really need to have kind of that. I give them feedback along the way, because formative feedback is about knowing about learning what you don't know as much as what you do know. Right. But you have to give them that that kind of let that put that exclamation mark on the end of it. Right. So, they can cognitively move on.

CLAIRE: Yes, yeah. Yeah, I think that I think there's something to be said for that.

JIM: And I'm I, you know, I'm a procrastinator, as you will know, being, being also my supervisor here at CTLT. We will, and we will. And we are doing our employee self-evaluations here this week do, aren't we? But if feedback is formative you're well, you're right. And one of my habits is that, you know, I have this desire to get things done completely, before moving on to the next thing. And that's not always possible in our own work lives. We have to juggle a couple of things at a time. But when it comes to learning, I think it's it's not necessarily that model doesn't necessarily translate as well.

CLAIRE: We have a club. Yeah.

JIM: I think I think, which is that a student shouldn't be doing multiple things, you know

CLAIRE: That they aren't that.

JIM: Although it could be. Are they? Yeah, but even within the same class, you know, I talked about three different ongoing assignments last night that they haven't in the course of teaching this semester. So, okay, we're dancing around the prompt part. I feel though, so that's an important this kind of important foundation on what we're going to explore for the rest of today's episode. But when we're talking about prompt feedback, let's talk about what are some ways to give students that prompt, if not immediate feedback on what they're doing? Yeah.

CLAIRE: It could be immediate, um, you know, you well, it is a matter of fact, we pretty consistently are giving immediate feedback. So, when we're in class, and students are doing any sort of, quote, performance, unquote. So, during a class discussion, we give prompt feedback when we respond to what they said as part of the discussion, or better yet, when someone else in the class responds to what they said, as part of the discussion. So, that, you know, we're all having feedback all the time on, on everything we say. So, that's, that's kind of a feedback really broadly,

JIM: It's a communication. It's a communication definition of feedback that is part of the transaction model defined communication.

CLAIRE: Yeah. But, um, but also, I think we need to realize, and I think this might be a place that we as instructors can give ourselves a little break, we don't have to be the only source of feedback for our students.

JIM: Yes.

CLAIRE: So, it's possible, for example, for a student to complete a self-evaluation in the midst of a project or a paper or whatever, to sort of tell you how they think it's going and where they need help, and what they're struggling with, and what they're really proud of, you know, all of that is good information that you can then pretty quickly react to and let them know, you know, yeah, you're right, you're doing that really well. Or, oh, I can tell you're struggling with that. Let me let me give you a boost. Let me show you an approach that you might take. So, you know, self-evaluation can be a form of feedback, peer evaluation, which is something I think a lot of people shy away from, because it's a little bit because student default is to say, you know, to their friend, who's also in the class, good job, smiley face. And that's not feedback. That's not helpful. So, I think the thing about the trick to peer response and peer feedback is to always structure that. And I think we've talked about that before, you know, providing some structure for that feedback. What kinds of Things do you want them to respond to, and model feedback. So, they should be seeing in your feedback to them, the kind of feedback that you want them to give each other. Maybe providing a template, providing examples, having conversations in class about times that they've been helped by feedback, maybe from a coach from a music teacher

JIM: That's interesting.

CLAIRE: You know, and so that they understand what it is that they're trying to do. And that yes, it actually is, it's not helpful to my classmates, if I just say, good job, smiley face, it might save their feelings, but it won't save their grade. Right? So right now, you know. So, it's, it's more helpful if in fact, you give them some sort of actionable feedback, something that they can, that they can move forward with.

JIM: And helping students to learn how to give feedback is actually a very valuable set of skills.

CLAIRE: Oh, my goodness, absolutely.

JIM: You know, and again, I always, I'm only teaching one course this semester. So, I have a limited set of examples to draw from, in the course, that I teach again, I do have a couple exercises where students have done a performance and then they part of the of the overall grade is for them to critique other students' performances. Yeah, now that had to be very much structured, and the feedback is anonymous. So, in order to encourage students to be honest, so I'm not that, you know, that achieves the goals I have for the class. I don't know, overall, necessarily.

CLAIRE: I think a lot of people do that. Yeah, that's okay. But yeah, but I think, yeah, that the idea of teaching students to provide good feedback.

JIM: Right.

CLAIRE: And part of that may be including that good feedback as as part of the assessment for the project. So, yeah, I'm going to grade your final product. But I'm also going to grade a part and part of that grade is going to include the feedback that you gave other people and whether or not that was helpful, so. And, you know, I think it's also important, I was talking about modeling earlier, to help students learn to give feedback respectfully, and to make them understand or to help them understand that that's the expectation, that feedback is always respectful, and given in respectful ways, and with the ultimate aim of helping somebody else learned. So, you know, the feedback because feedback can be as we both know, it can be destructive, if it's delivered in the wrong way, or at the wrong time or in the wrong fashion, you know, that can, that can be hurtful. So, we want to make sure that students understand all the all the things that go into providing feedback.

JIM: You know, it's interesting, because I just realized this, both you and I come from a background where at various points in our lives, we've served the role of editor. Yeah. Which, which is, which is a feedback since

CLAIRE: Well. exactly

JIM: Well, my case talk about the Peter Principle, but that's a whole other, that's a whole other episode. No, but seriously, talking about, you know, I the best experience I had working with an editor in a journalistic sense, in my case, our editors who make suggestions instead of the Perry White, sort of hard-nosed cigar chomping at.

CLAIRE: Just making corrections and shouting down.

JIM: Yeah, why don't you got it? Don't you know how to spell? You know, that sort of thing? Yeah. Which is an open question for me. But that's a whole other

CLAIRE: Well, then we you know, so here's another way to think about it. Many of us have experienced providing feedback to journal author, editors, or I'm sorry, authors of journal articles. Right. So, we are reviewers for various journals. And I don't think everyone does this, but I always tried to sort of have a positive demeanor in my reviews, even if what I'm saying is, yeah, this isn't ready. Yeah. Or it's not appropriate for this journal or whatever, to offer some feedback that allows people to move forward. So, you know, I try to respond to colleagues in the same way I would respond to students but also to respond to students in the same way I would respond to colleagues which is respectfully and with, with the full knowledge that they're, they're going to use this or with the with the full hope I guess I should say that they're going to use this and move forward. So, because you can, you can really damage a relationship with a student, and I've done this, so I know. You know that you can damage a relationship with a student with sort of ill-conceived feedback even though you may mean it in a really positive way.

JIM: Yeah.

CLAIRE: I don't want that to happen,

JIM: Or, or my experience

CLAIRE: We're going to scare people. Nobody's going to want to give feedback.

JIM: Want to give feedback after this, or in my experience trying to be humor. humorous.

CLAIRE: Yeah.

JIM: And that didn't that didn't work either. That doesn't land.

CLAIRE: Well. Yeah.

JIM: Yeah. And this is, you know, I think that though, to be totally honest, is another reason why it took us a while to get to this. Because the all the things we've been talking about are things that I have said to myself, and I want to do that right now. Because getting students to give each other feedback can be, can seem like an onerous task, especially if you've never done it before. Or you're it's not very well structured. Going back to that idea of students giving themselves feedback, where do you see, and we haven't talked about this? Where do you see the relationship between student prompt student feedback? And the idea of a study group, because we've talked about study groups?

CLAIRE: I had never thought about that. But of course, that's feedback. I mean, when they're working in groups to learn, you know, another thing that's feedback is, I was taking one of those buzzfeed quizzes right on Facebook the other day, you know, and interestingly, it was like, how much do you know about teaching and learning? And one of the questions had to do with feedback, and one of the questions in the quiz had to do with what's a good way to study? And one of the answers the answer, the correct answer was quiz yourself. And that, in fact, yes, that's much a much better way to study then rereading the chapter or using a highlighter or even you know, creating comments in the margins. quizzing yourself is a great way to learn. Because guess what, it's prompt feedback, you know, right away, you can look it up and find out, ah, I got that answer wrong. So, even though it's students doing it for themselves, it's, it's fast. And it's, and it's helpful. So, because they know they've taken they've, they've misunderstood or not learned something. So, that's good,

JIM: That is good. Yeah, I like that. I like that a lot. That's a good way of looking at it. So, when we're talking about prompt feedback, there are still going to be times we've talked, we have some ideas now about how you can get students to give feedback to each other, or having feedback to themselves having feedback as part of a discussion in class. But there are still times when we as instructors just have to,

CLAIRE: We can't, we can't i can't pass it off to anybody else anymore.

JIM: So, we can we so we can't end this episode, without at least talking a little bit about maybe some techniques or some, some things to avoid, at least when we are, you know, we always go back to planning the semester. But even if it's the middle of the semester now or a little bit thereafter, and we are in everything's piled up, what do you do?

CLAIRE: Yeah, well, I think I think the first thing is you prioritize, so you prioritize what, what is the most important thing I need students to learn from this feedback. And you really focus on that and don't spend, you know, focus your time focus your attention on that. Don't spend hours and hours giving the kind of feedback, that's this not going to be helpful. So, I, you know, once again, because I always default to writing, right, so on an early draft, they hear nothing from me about their grammar and punctuation. I'm an English teacher, I had to, I had to train myself to do that I had to actually, there were there were a few months where I sat on my hands while I was reading early drafts, in order to keep from going in and editing the student work. That's that wasn't the most important thing for them to hear, right to hear from me was, how's the paper going? Where do they need more evidence? You know, do they have a clear thesis? Are they on the right track? So, you know, there were just really more important things to address. So, I think that's, you know, that's one of the things that we need to remind ourselves, I think, find a way of providing feedback that's comfortable for you. I tend to you know, you Well, I used to write it all out in longhand on their papers. I moved to writing it, you know, composing at the computer, so that now I can, you know, take a document that they've submitted and I can you know, I, well, I'm going to use the word type. I type in my comments I, you know, I write my comments on the text. But there are other ways. So, for example, you can record your feedback. And I've never done this, but I do have colleagues who've done it successfully for years. And I understand that in ReggieNet. I can do it in ReggieNet. So, you know, if you're listening to this and you're thinking what, what I can, you should like call Charles.

JIM: Or go to our website CTLT.IllinoisState.edu click on the big old Reggie net logo that will get you to the instructional support side of ReggieNet, and then you can, you can, you can contact us from there. Yeah, I've I have not actually used it this semester in teaching, but I know that we we've played around with the function a little bit, it works. It you are limited to like 180 seconds. So, that's like, what, three minutes.

CLAIRE: That's three minutes that should be that should be plenty.

JIM: So, it forces you to be succinct. Oddly enough in a for a broadcast performance class, I don't record audio feedback back to the student. I have before in one reason why part of it's just, I would rather type out my thoughts because I'm working off a rubric typically. And, and but even with their papers, I don't mark their papers, I don't return their papers anymore. And of course, I'm accepting all this electronically. I'm not doing markup in the in the paper because it's not about it's about the ideas that they're presenting, not necessarily how they formatted them and stuff for this course. But I do always put comments in in the in ReggieNet when the assignment is returned, and their bullet points about what was going on. And I always say with papers, if you want to get a little bit more detail, come in and see me very rarely do they do that. I'll be honest, but you know, sometimes, but, but I used to just, just correct their grammar,

because I think that when we get overwhelmed as instructors, sometimes we kind of go back to basics, because it's the easiest thing.

CLAIRE: We go to where we're comfortable.

JIM: Yeah.

CLAIRE: You know, it's that's what we do when we're stressed, we go back to where we're comfortable. And, and, you know, that's an easy thing. Oh, yeah, look, there should be a comma here.

JIM: Yeah.

CLAIRE: But, but you know, you mentioned rubrics, and that's another form of feedback, right. And it's it can, it can be a time saving form of feedback, particularly when you get to that sort of summative point.

JIM: Right.

CLAIRE: You know, where what I need to do now is evaluate and give a grade and a rubric is a great time saving tool. And, but it's not just about saving time, it's about providing useful feedback. And so, a rubric really helps students see exactly where they went wrong in terms of the expectations for the assignment.

JIM: Right.

CLAIRE: So, it's quite communicative. I always, I always with a rubric, try to keep in mind that anything that's in the rubric is basically a rubber stamp response. And so all of my rubrics have room for individual comments. And comment is, that's what I was talking Yeah. And so, and I, so I do try to make sure that nobody just gets back a rubric where I checked off boxes or on our highlighted things or whatever. But that I, I write, but it saves me time, I can give a more personal response. Because I've taken care of all those rubber stamp things in the in the rubric.

JIM: Right.

CLAIRE: So, I feel like then I can use that extra piece to make a connection with a student.

JIM: And I think in any assignment, especially maybe in the assignments that you or I would be looking at, given our disciplines, there's an awful lot of subjectivity. And a rubric is a way not to not to eliminate that. But to at least communicate it like you said a little bit more, maybe to objectify it a little bit, in an agreed upon language, because I always go the students always, of course, have the rubric before the assignment is given right, or before they do the assignment. So, they kind of know what the expectations are and stuff like that. We've talked a little bit about this before. But I want to as to kind of summarize our discussion of prompt feedback today to talk a little bit about the dialogue with students about setting expectations and when they should, when should they expect to get feedback? And especially that summative feedback that we're talking about, because I've had some consultations with faculty members, and I, I've

done this myself, and I and I still catch myself doing it saying, Yeah, I should have that back to you next week. No, I didn't have that back. And that really creates, I think, some angst, especially because students are kind of used to that they want. Like you said.

CLAIRE: Yeah. They gear themselves up for getting it back. And they don't get it. Yeah, it's like letdown. Yeah.

JIM: Even with the best of feedback. And you know, and if they are really focused just on that grade not. And we haven't yet reached the point where they're thinking more about the learning behind the grade than that exacerbates the situation even more. So, any advice on?

CLAIRE: Well, I I think it's important to let students know the timeframe in which they can expect so I once made myself wildly unpopular.

JIM: I think we talked about this, but it's worth telling again

CLAIRE: in the writing program by putting, putting a note in the standard syllabus for English 101 that instructors would always return graded work within 10, 10 days or something like that. And boy, did I get a lot of graduate students really angry at me.

JIM: Got a lot of feedback. Didn't you?

CLAIRE: I got a lot of prompt and promptly. Yes. But oh, I think setting a reasonable expectation I in part, because students expectation seems to be that it that all feedback will be immediate, right? You know, I think, in this in this digital age, they're so used to getting immediate. And I mean, by immediate I mean, within, you know, you, you put something on Facebook, and you, you know, if you don't start getting likes, within a couple of minutes, you start to wonder, did that really post? Well? Are my friends you know, liking this?

JIM: Or if you text someone on your phone, you're expecting an immediate response, right? I had a student say to me a couple of days ago. Well, I texted him, but, but I didn't even get a delivered receipt. And I'm like, are you getting those? Like you're making sure it's even delivered? So, so you have no excuse not to see it? Because? Yeah. And I think that's also true, by the way, which is, which is a whole other episode, talking about communication between instructors and students. You know, they expect those emails answered right away.

CLAIRE: Yes. Yeah. Yeah. So, so students are expecting truly immediate feedback. And that's just not, you know, that's not possible when you're giving a test, or you're grading a paper, or you're reading a lab report, or you're watching a performance or whatever. So, I think it's important to sort of define prompt in your syllabus, and to say, and, you know, and to say, you know, unless you hear otherwise, for me, you can anticipate that I will return your work within X amount of time. And, and then yeah, if that's not going to be possible, you know, because you're, you know, your kid breaks his leg or, you know, something happened.

JIM: Whatever.

CLAIRE: Yeah, um, you know, then you tell the students, you say, you know, I was as fast as you can, yeah, I was anticipating that I would have these back for your next class period, you know, so that an email, whatever, yeah, that's not going to happen, I should be able to get them done by X. So, I think, you know, an ongoing conversation about when they're going to get their work back.

JIM: But you can't do that too many times, I think is the is the other aspect of it, you can't constantly you can't make it the norm that everyone know, even, even though I like having a little housekeeping time in a class, so but you can't set up that the that the expectation is that you're going to come and make the excuse to your...

CLAIRE: Right, right. No, you have to You know, you have to be respectful of their need for feedback and responsible in your role as their instructor and the person who's responsible for their learning. And, and you have to give them you have to give them feedback in a timely fashion.

JIM: Yeah. Yeah, I know. And it sounds so simple to say that, but it is so hard. The last thing I would probably want to leave folks with who are listening, if because prompt feedback is so important. Then if you're semester after semester, if you have some, some assignments, some assessments, you're doing whatever, whatever you want to call them. If there are parts of lessons that you are constantly struggling with to give proper feedback, then maybe it's time to reevaluate how you're doing those lessons. Because if the payoff isn't there in the end, then they're you know, are you sure they're actually learning from them. And that's something that we can, we can consult with, with instructors here. We're happy to do that here at CTLT. And take a look at what you're doing and maybe give you some advice on maybe different ways of assessing or of doing the same exercise.

CLAIRE: That's a great idea.

JIM: All right, Claire. Well, thank you so much.

CLAIRE: Thank you, Jim.

JIM: And that's all the time we have for this week's episode of Let's Talk Teaching, you can go to our website at CTLT.IllinoisState.edu. Click on the podcast link in the upper right of the page. You can find today's show notes will link to the original study that the seven principles are all based on in some of our past episodes, and some other useful material. You can also find out how to subscribe to the show, so you don't miss an episode. Until we talk again. Happy Teaching!