

7 Essentials of Effective Feedback

Be Frequent



Frequent feedback will allow for fewer issues and improve student learning. Do appraise the student often as a response to a need. Don't try to squeeze all thoughts into one moment, such as a monthly evaluation. Tailor these responses to day-to-day workplace moments (e.g., observation of H&P, participation in a supervised procedure, etc.).

Be Specific and Clear

While it may seem uncomfortable to be direct and offer constructive criticism, unclear feedback can actually impede learning and frustrate the learner. Do try to link feedback specifically to academic goals and performance in a clear and concise way. Don't deliver a speech or vague statements such as “you need to push yourself” without any specific details to explain *how*.

Be Evidence-Based



Evidence-based feedback should include specific details of what was good and what was not, what type of procedure or event took place where you observed (e.g., service name, rotation, procedure name, note about the student's role in the procedure, etc.). Do distill your message to the student clearly. Don't presume that everyone understands your thoughts.

Be Kind and Accurate

Everyone has limitations to their learning. Do give unbiased and objective feedback that is within the power of the student to alter. Don't include moral or religious edicts to “treat others as yourself,” and avoid emotional and personal opinions that start with “I feel like...”.

Be Dialogue Oriented



Feedback can be as simple as a quick conversation, not necessarily a monologue or speech. Do listen critically to the student's response to verbal feedback including verbal and non-verbal cues. Depending on your writing style, written feedback can be expressed in first person (“I observed”) or in third (“He completed”, “She demonstrated”).

Be Beneficial

Beneficial feedback should provide ways for the student to improve or change/modify a poor behavior. Don't be quick to fill a comment box simply to move the process and avoid confrontation as this can potentially lead to issues with patient care. Instead, strive to accomplish one goal through the feedback, and state it clearly on a written evaluation.

Be Early



Do give immediate feedback (positive and/or negative) soon after the behavior takes place to lay a foundation for expectations and retention of procedural or conceptual knowledge. Don't presume the student will “figure it out” eventually.

Examples of Effective Feedback

1. ____ is very enthusiastic in the clinic. He is very curious and asked intelligent questions about our patient histories that morning.
2. Ms. ____ involved herself on rounds and in the OR. She was able to ask pertinent questions that linked directly to Grand Rounds.
3. ____ was a good student on my rotation. He performed well on the surgery clerkship, specifically Plastics rotation, and was very interactive with staff and patients. He incorporates well into a team.
4. ____ worked well as part of the wards team. She is enthusiastic and willing to take on all assigned tasks, including 12 H&Ps. She is punctual, appropriately dressed at all times, and speaks in turn.
5. ____ was always on time for his requirements during his week of wards. He was also very knowledgeable about therapeutics and plan of care. A suggestion for improvement: be cautious in your reactions and comments at times. Some people may find them offensive without you meaning for them to be. Regardless of your interest in the rotation, you should also show initiative. Continue to read and improve your knowledge base, which will come with time and experience.
6. ____'s notes and H&Ps were well organized - she was responsive to feedback and was quickly able to improve areas that needed attention. She is smart, personable, and very clear when speaking with patients.
7. ____ did a great job on the surgical oncology service. She was always prepared and punctual. She has a great personality and communicates well with patients. She has good hands in the OR and was a willing participant in clinic, as well.
8. ____ was a very good student and a pleasure to have on rotation. She was very eager to learn as much as she could both operatively and in the clinics. I spent a significant amount of time with her in the clinic setting and she functions at least at the level of a PGY1, if not a PGY2 for most basic surgical diagnoses. Her knowledge is above most of her peers, as are her suturing skills. ____ has expressed interest in dermatology, and I think she will be outstanding in this capacity.
9. I had a limited time with ____, he spent some time with me during my clinic. I am impressed by his level of knowledge. We discussed a colon cancer case and his level of knowledge is excellent, ahead of his class.
10. Excellent job taking history and performing physical exam, as well her skills at the robotic simulation session were above expectation.
11. ____ performed very well during the week we worked together on the inpatient medicine service. She carried a personal census of 2-3 patients during the time. She always had a solid understanding of her patients' histories and active issues, and she was able to identify new problems when they arose.