

- For teachers marking work and giving verbal feedback

FEEDBACK AND ASSESSMENT

The Power of Feedback

A landmark international synthesis of feedback research, spanning dozens of meta-analyses, translated for UK classrooms.

How much of the feedback you give actually tells a learner what to do next, rather than just how they did?

Across 12 meta-analyses covering 196 studies, feedback averaged close to double the typical effect of a year's teaching. But the average hides the spread: feedback about the task and how to improve it sat among the strongest, while praise, rewards and punishment sat among the weakest.



● ● ● Evidence: Promising

A pre-registered systematic review with documented searches, quality appraisal, full precision estimates, and testing of the model as a whole.

WHAT HAPPENED

Feedback can be one of the biggest levers you have

Hattie and Timperley pulled together 12 meta-analyses covering 196 studies and almost 7,000 effect sizes on feedback in classrooms. The average effect was 0.79, close to double the typical effect of a year's teaching (0.40), placing feedback among the top 5 to 10 highest-scoring influences on achievement out of more than 100 studied, alongside direct instruction and reciprocal teaching. But that average hides huge variation: a wider synthesis of 74 meta-analyses found feedback on the task and how to do it scoring near the top, while praise and rewards scored near the bottom.

A typical year of teaching (all influences studied)

Effect  **0.40**

Feedback, on average (12 meta-analyses, 196 studies)

Effect  **0.79**

Effect sizes (Cohen's d) on learner achievement. The 0.40 benchmark comes from Hattie's 1999 synthesis of over 500 meta-analyses; the 0.79 feedback figure comes from Hattie and Timperley's own Table 1 (12 meta-analyses, 196 studies, 6,972 effect sizes). Both numbers hide wide variation: the 12 studies behind the feedback average range from 0.12 (teacher praise) to 1.24 (feedback for special-education learners).

What the strongest feedback has in common

1

Feed Up

Answers "Where am I going?" A clear, specific goal, not a vague one, for the learner to aim at.

2

Feed Back

Answers "How am I going?" Written comments on progress toward the goal beat grades or marks alone.

3

Feed Forward

Answers "Where to next?" Points to the next strategy or challenge, not just "more of the same."

4

Right level

Aimed at the task or the process, not the person; praise about the self carries little useful information.

Across your subjects and classes

This is a synthesis of what dozens of studies found about feedback in general, not a test of any single classroom routine. What follows are sensible ways to check your own feedback against that pattern: worth trying, not separately proven for your context.

Subject	How the pattern could apply
English / Literacy	Comment on structure or argument (process) before spelling and punctuation (task); one written "next step" on an essay outweighs a page of margin ticks.
Maths	A cross next to a wrong answer is task feedback with little process information; showing where the method broke down and asking "what would you do differently?" targets the level that seems to matter more.
Science	Correct/incorrect feedback on a result is common; feedback on the reasoning or method behind it sits at the process level, which the data associates with deeper understanding.
Practical / PE	For simple, well-drilled skills, feedback in the moment suits fast correction. For a complex or unfamiliar skill, a short delay before feeding back may give more room to process what happened.

A note on timing

Easy, familiar task

Immediate feedback tends to suit simple or well-practised tasks; delay adds little and can feel disconnected.

High-attaining class

Push feedback toward the process and self-regulation levels: ask learners to name their own next strategy rather than confirming they got it right.

Hard, unfamiliar task

A short delay before feedback on a difficult task may allow more processing time; one study found delayed feedback scored far higher on the hardest items.

Learners needing more support

Keep goals concrete and specific rather than open-ended, and favour immediate, simple, corrective feedback on straightforward tasks.

Start with one: the cheapest change in the data is swapping one grade-only comment for one written next step, "try X on the next one", since written comments alone were shown to lift performance more than grades alone or grades plus praise. It costs a different sentence at the end of the page, not new training.

A widely convergent synthesis, with a lot of noise inside the averages

Developing

This rates the evidence's firmness, not our endorsement of feedback itself. A dozen independent meta-analyses pointing the same way is about as convergent as education research gets, but it is a synthesis of existing reviews, not one new, pre-registered study.

- This article synthesises 12 (and, more broadly, 74) pre-existing meta-analyses rather than running a single new systematic review with its own documented search method, so we can't independently check how thoroughly the field was covered.
- The headline averages hide huge variation: the 12 feedback meta-analyses range from 0.12 (teacher praise) to 1.24 (special-education learners), and most individual figures are reported with no confidence interval attached.
- The underlying studies are international, drawn from a New Zealand-based research team citing mostly US and international literature, not verified as a UK-representative sample.

What that means for you: treat the direction (feedback on the task and next steps tends to help; praise alone rarely does) as well-established across many independent studies. Treat any single number, like "close to double the average effect", as an illustration of scale, not a promise for your class.

TRY IT THIS WEEK

Your first small step

THIS WEEK

Pick one piece of feedback you're about to give, marking a book or speaking to a learner, and check it answers one of the three questions: does it make the goal clear (feed up), show progress against it (feed back), or point to the very next step (feed forward)? If it's just a mark or "well done", add one sentence that does one of the three.

Try it and watch: notice whether learners can tell you what they'll do differently next time, not just what mark they got. That's your own evidence, not ours.

Go deeper

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