



## GIVING WISE FEEDBACK

*"In the middle of every difficulty lies opportunity."*

—Albert Einstein

### OVERVIEW

A method for teachers to give feedback to students that builds students' academic mindset, trust, and positive identity

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Any time throughout the school year; however, using it at the beginning of the school year will help to build a trusting classroom climate and to cultivate positive relationships between the teacher and students right from the start.
- When giving corrective feedback in written or verbal form—for example, during a writing conference
- When offering counseling on academic or behavioral issues

#### TIME REQUIRED

- 3-5 minutes

#### LEVEL

- Middle School
- High School
- College

#### MATERIALS

- None

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Revise an assignment to meet the high expectations of which the teacher knows they are capable

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Think of a teacher or mentor who believed in you, but also held you to high expectations. How did this person make you feel? Did your beliefs about yourself and/or your ability to succeed change in any way? Did you put more effort into your work as a result of this person's influence on you?
- Reflect on whether you might hold any [unconscious biases](#) around race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, gender, or other forms of diversity, toward a student's capacity as a learner.
  - For example, Asian students are good in math, but Latino students aren't.
  - This [article](#) by John A. Powell provides strategies for removing these biases.
- How is this type of feedback relevant or useful in a student's life, both in and out of school? Would they agree with you?

## INSTRUCTIONS

### THE PRACTICE

- When giving feedback on a student's piece of writing or other form of school work, write a note that includes the following:
  - Start with specific actionable feedback.
    - *"Your writing assignment will require revisions. Please see my comments that make specific suggestions on how to improve your essay."*

- *"While your powerpoint presentation followed the basic requirements, the comments I made suggest how to make it better."*
- State high expectations.
  - *"This writing assignment is to prepare you to write your college admission essays."*
  - *"Creating a powerpoint presentation to persuade city commissioners to address gun safety laws is challenging."*
- Express your confidence in the student's ability to accomplish the task at hand.
  - *"I know from past assignments you have the ability to make the necessary improvements to your writing."*
  - *"Your past presentations have shown me that you have the skills and motivation to improve your work."*

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## NOTES

- Use "wise feedback" with learning opportunities that merit students' best efforts.
- This practice should not be considered a "silver bullet", and, instead, be part of a larger effort to create a positive school climate in which all students are valued and supported.
- Researchers have found that overpraising mediocre work or not offering critical feedback in general can actually reinforce students' belief that they are being viewed as a stereotype, hence lessening their trust in teachers and schools.
- While this practice is good for all students, researchers found that it was most effective when used with students who don't have a high level of trust in their own abilities or who feel that their teachers may harbor racial bias towards their intellectual capacity.

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- What went well for you in leading this practice? How did students respond to the practice? Would you change anything for next time? What is your plan to sustain this practice?
- Are students more likely to turn in revised and/or improved work after receiving "wise feedback"?
- Do you notice whether your relationship with students changed for the better or worse after this practice? Have you created the space for students to ask you questions about your feedback? Are students striving to meet high expectations?
  - Did your beliefs or expectations of students' ability to meet high expectations increase or decrease as a result of this practice? If so, how?
  - Did you uncover any unconscious biases toward students' ability to achieve? For example, do you have different expectations for different students? If so, are there any patterns to these expectations? To disrupt any discrepancies, try this [practice](#).

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Research found that teachers who gave their 7th grade students "[wise feedback](#)" on a written assignment increased the likelihood of students not only revising their essays, but also showing improvements on their final draft. In another study, students who were taught to see their teachers' feedback as communicating their high standards and belief in students' potential increased their grades.

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

All students want to be successful in school and in life, but some face more barriers than others in reaching their dreams. [Stereotype threat](#) — or the anxiety that results from the possibility of being reduced to a negative stereotype based on group membership — is one such barrier. If experienced multiple times, a student may eventually stop caring about a particular subject area or even academic success, in general, and give up.

By the time students reach 7th grade, they are aware of negative stereotypes associated with their racial, ethnic, or gender group membership and may be concerned that their teachers believe these stereotypes. Teachers can unknowingly confirm these concerns by giving remedial schoolwork, overpraising students' efforts, or some other act that demonstrates teachers' unconscious biases.

However, research shows that by communicating high expectations and a belief in students' ability to reach those expectations, or "Wise Feedback", teachers can assure students that they are not being judged based on a negative stereotype — instead, they are being seen in their full humanity.

This not only builds trust between teachers and students, but also helps students to view themselves as academically capable — thus enhancing their academic identity as a learner and, hopefully, lessening the effect of any future stereotype threat.

Scientists have discovered that many groups experience stereotype threat. Here are just a few examples from research:

- African-American students when told they are [taking a test](#) designed to test their intellectual ability
- Men when told that a test would measure [social sensitivity](#) in comparison to women
- Women when told that a math test would produce [gender differences](#)
- Hispanic and African-American students when worried about whether their [professors see them stereotypically](#)
- Low socio-economic students when told they are [taking a test](#) that measures intellectual ability
- Muslim immigrant students from Turkey and Morocco when they [perceive discrimination](#) at their Belgian school
- Students with ADHD who are asked about their diagnosis, and then warned that [people with ADHD](#) score lower on GRE questions
- White men when compared to Asian men in [math](#)