Guidelines for using the feedback profiling tool

What is this tool?

The tool was developed as part of a JISC funded project "Assessment Careers: enhancing learning pathways through assessment" www.ioe.ac.uk/assessmentcareers. The tool puts any written or verbal feedback into categories so that feedback can be analysed. A very detailed analysis of feedback to understand which meanings are intended and what meanings are interpreted by students would be a complex undertaking, and this tool aims to give a quick general profile of feedback which can form the basis for further reflection and deeper analysis.

Why use this tool?

The profiling tool has the following aims:

- To enable individual staff (or programme teams or students) to reflect on the purposes of feedback they provide;
- To enable individual staff (or programme teams) to consider changing feedback profiles to enhance student learning;
- To enable comparisons of feedback profiles before and after an intervention so that change can be made visible;
- To monitor institution-wide changes in feedback practice in response to other changes in practice.

The feedback categories

There are many ways of categorising feedback and identifying good practice, but this tool provides an overview of different types of feedback. It does not provide information on the presentation of feedback or the amount of detail and explanation given to students although these are important areas that might need further consideration after using the tool. The tool draws on a categorisation tested by Orsmond & Merry (2011) with an additional category of ipsative feedback (feedback on progress made or not made since a previous piece of work) which is not often used, but Hughes (2011) has suggested could be very valuable if included in the feedback typology.

The categories are:

- Praise. Praise is thought to be motivating for students, but if used indiscriminately it can appear insincere. Praise is only useful if it provides detail on what has been done well and is perhaps best used sparingly.
- Recognising Progress. Acknowledging progress can be motivating and informs students about their learning. Lack of progress also serves as an early warning that action is needed.
- Critical feedback. Learners need to know how their work falls short of expectations or criteria, however, for some critique can be discouraging especially when not accompanied by information on how to improve.
- Advice. Important when the main purpose of feedback is to help students take future action to improve.

- Clarification requests. Asking learners to think more deeply about their work and generate actions themselves can be achieved through questioning and dialogue.
- Unclassified statements. Neutral comments, for example that describe the piece of work but do not make any judgement, are unclassified.

The categories of critical feedback and giving advice are complex because errors can be corrected and/or highlighted and because feedback can be highly specific to the current assignment or applied more generally. These categories are therefore further sub-divided:

Critical feedback
- Correction of errors – numerical or verbal
- Factual critiques (of content)
- Critique of approach (structure and argument)

Giving advice
- Specific to current assignment
- General points that refer to the current assignment
- General points for future assignments

Sampling and Scoring for each category

The default unit for analysis is the sentence, because we are looking at the rhetoric and purpose of feedback. However, where a sentence contains clauses that make distinct points, it should be split into separate clauses that are classified separately.

Example: When you mention Y's model you do so uncritically, but you have responded to feedback on your draft and now mention the limitations of applying model Z to your design.

The first highlighted section is a critique - so 1 point for this - while the second part of the sentence highlighted is a reference to making progress - 1 point for this.

Where a sentence does not stand on its own, but only makes sense in relation to the prior unit, it should be incorporated into that prior unit.

Example: You need to be critical of assumptions made in the literature. For example, you could explore what is meant by "institutional values" and who holds these values.

The second sentence illustrates the first sentence so this would be given a score of 1 point for advice specific to current assignment, not 2 points.

The score is the number of times a classification appears in the feedback and repetitions are included in the score as these demonstrate prevalence of a category.

Example

Category of feedback	Number per script	
Praise	7	
Ipsative	1	
Critique (NB this category can be further subdivided or the total critique recorded).	4	= 9 for total critique comments
	4	
	1	

It is better to include a large number of samples of feedback taken from across a cohort in the profiling as this will give a more accurate overall picture and avoid the problem of analysing a single piece of feedback that is atypical. The score can be converted into an average score per sample of feedback by dividing the total score by the number of pieces of feedback.

Example

Category of feedback	Average per script
Praise	2.0
Ipsative	1.8
Critique	2.8
Advice for current or future assignments	2.5
Questions and clarification requests	2.1

Analysing feedback profiles

The score for each category is ranked in order of frequency of use. You can combine the scores for the critique and advice sections by adding the scores or rank the sub-categories.

Example

Category of feedback	Samples (N= 27)		Rank
	Average per script		
Praise	2.0		4
Ipsative	1.8		5
Critique	1.9	Total 2.8	1
	0.5		
	0.4		
Advice	0.1	Total 2.5	2
	0.5		
	1.9		
Questions and clarification requests	2.1		3

Some points to discuss:

- Consider the top ranking categories of feedback. You might it useful to highlight these with colours. Are these expected? Are these what your learners find helpful?
- Consider any particularly low ranking categories. You might it useful to highlight these with another colour. Are these expected? Is this feedback that your learners might find helpful?
- How balanced is the profile? Is a balanced profile desirable for your learners?
- **There is no 'correct' profile** but is there a preferred profile for your programme and your learners?
- Which category rankings or balance between categories might you wish to change or have already changed?
- What further considerations for feedback practice arise from your preferred profile? For example: are feedback statements qualified with examples or explanations, how much detail is appropriate or is the tone of the feedback supportive?

Displaying feedback profiles

There are many ways of displaying feedback profiles for discussion with others. Possibilities include coloured rankings as suggested above, use of bar charts or pie charts.

References

Orsmond, P. & Merry, S. 2011. Feedback alignment: effective and ineffective links between tutors' and students' understanding of coursework feedback. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education.* 36(2): 125-126.

Hughes, G. 2011. Aiming for Personal Best: a Case for Introducing Ipsative Assessment in Higher Education. *Studies in Higher Education.* 36 (3): 353 – 367.