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## Constructive Criticism: Analyzing and Implementing Student Feedback as a Tutor

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Constructive Criticism: Analyzing and Implementing Student Feedback As A Tutor

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Abstract

Writing centers are subject to student feedback as they operate, collecting both negative and positive comments through exit surveys after appointments. This essay analyzes these types of feedback and how tutors and writing centers can use both types of feedback to their advantage when serving their students. Being able to analyze the feedback that they receive can allow a tutor to make adjustments, when needed, to their tutoring process.

Keywords

negative feedback, tutoring, writing center, positive feedback, non-directive non-productivity, consultation, writing, writing process, feedback, survey

## Constructive Criticism: Analyzing and Implementing Student Feedback as a Tutor

Within the first few months of starting my new job as a writing tutor, I found myself desperate for feedback. Day after day, I would help students refresh their memories on the basics of sentence structure, correct their grammar mistakes, and help them understand citation formatting without any response or feedback from them on what was working and what wasn't. I wanted to make adjustments to my tutoring style so that I could give the best help possible to my students, but I also wanted to establish a solid routine that I, as a tutor, could rely on. It wasn't until roughly two months in, when my directors sent out the student feedback they had been receiving from the Writing Center student survey, that I finally got the answers I was looking for.

It is common for many writing centers to utilize a survey system to collect student feedback after appointments. Surprisingly, in the experience of Mary Hendengren and Martin Lockerd, most of the feedback that they receive from their surveys is positive. However, in almost any case where you tell students to tell you what they really think, you will get some negative responses. According to their Writing Center Journal article titled, "Tell Me What You Really Think: Lessons from Negative Student Feedback," this feedback enables tutors to "make meaningful observations about negative student feedback" (Hendengren and Lockerd 131). From both personal experience and thorough research, I have learned that feedback, both positive and negative, can help tutors enhance their consultation process.

Hendengren and Lockerd call negative feedback non-directive non-productivity (NDNP). They found that negative feedback can be classified three ways: through suggestions to administrators, complaints about tutor's perceived emotions, and complaints about productivity (Hendengren and Lockerd). When we look at each category, we are able to take this information

that we receive, especially the negative feedback, and reconsider our practices and develop new processes that can better serve our students.

The main focus of Hendengren and Lockerd's research is direct questioning and how this practice affects student-tutor relations. When analyzing the negative feedback they were getting from surveys, they saw that the one thing that frustrated students the most and gave the most answers in the NDNP category was asking vague and non-direct questions. A student who had replied to Hendengren and Lockerd's survey had been frustrated with their consultant asking, "What do you think?" when they had asked for assistance in interpreting a poem for a class. The student felt that this response was "as good as doing the assignment on my own, without any help" (Hendengren and Lockerd 139).

While it may not seem like it, the tutor was doing what they thought was right. As tutors, we aren't meant to tell students how to do the work or do the work for them. We are meant to assist students with the writing process and help students find ways to do that work on their own. Hendengren and Lockerd state, "In this case, the assignment was some form of literary analysis, and the writer was trying to get the consultant to do the interpretive work" (Hendengren and Lockerd 139). As the authors discuss, many students can interpret non-directive questioning as the tutor being unwilling to answer questions, and this can cause a rift in the tutor-student dynamic. "Excessive non-directivity can lead to feelings of isolation or even hostility when students feel abandoned or as if consultants are withholding valuable information, playing keep-away with their expertise," state Hendengren and Lockerd (139). The authors go on to state that the NDNP can cause students to feel isolated, and it can lead to the student "feeling like they are in the consultation alone" (Hendengren and Lockerd 139).

I have seen this in my own experience as a tutor. Many times, students have come to me expecting a solid answer to a question, looking for the “right” answer. When I give a vague answer in an attempt to lead the student to the tools that can help them understand the subject on their own, I feel a lot of pushback. As a new tutor, this caused a lot of fear. I expected negative student evaluations, and didn’t think I’d have any students returning to me for tutoring appointments in the future. Instead, when I received my tutoring evaluations, I was the recipient of Hendengren and Lockerd’s “overwhelmingly positive” feedback. A few of the students I felt this pushback from ended up making appointments with me again, each time saying how great they felt our last appointments had been. What I realized is that as a tutor, it’s easy for students to come to you expecting an easy answer or a quick fix to their questions. Instead, I review a skill or give them a resource to do the work on their own. This gives the student the tools to succeed not just on the assignment, but on future assignments throughout the semester. Had I not received positive feedback from students regarding this strategy, I wouldn’t have continued to do so, and my tutoring strategy would be immensely different.

Student feedback, both positive and negative, is what allows tutors to fine-tune their processes to benefit their students. We can take the strategy of Hendengren and Lockerd and analyze the negative feedback to make adjustments, or we can take the positive feedback and use it as peace of mind that our strategies are working. While every tutoring appointment is different, and feedback isn’t always the answer, it can be a great tool for tutors to develop the tutor-student relationship as they continue their work in the future.

Works Cited

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