Instructor Resource

# Providing Ongoing Opportunities for Feedback in Online Language Learning

A major responsibility when facilitating an online course or activity is providing opportunities for feedback for your learners. In language learning, this means that in addition to the formal feedback of marked assignments, learners also need opportunities to practice and experiment with target language. Using target language will help learners gain insights on their own language development and help to clarify the goals and intentions of the course or activity.

Practice and experimentation with the target language will let learners know if they are on the right path by enabling them to see evidence of their own skill development and by enabling them to test their comprehension of the new language and concepts. The importance of providing learners with opportunities for language practice

is not different from face-to-face classrooms; however, in the online space there are nuances to consider that can either make an opportunity for feedback useful or make it a source of miscommunication.

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On the next pages are some tips to help you when creating opportunities for feedback.

# Tips for Feedback

### STRIKE A BALANCE BETWEEN GUIDING AND DOMINATING

When providing feedback to learners in asynchronous environments, it is easy to jump in too quickly with comments, and it is easy to jump in too often with guidance. Be patient, and allow for a bit more time for learners to process and respond to language. The conversational pauses required in digital environments are a bit longer than in face-to-face conversations. At the same time, it is easy for a learner to feel alone or disconnected in an asynchronous space. Try to give your learners space, while at the same time building your presence – a challenging task, but an achievable one.

### ENCOURAGE PEER-TO-PEER FEEDBACK

One effective way to maintain the balance between guiding and dominating is to encourage classmates to provide feedback, either explicitly or implicitly. Peers will need prompts to jump into conversations and discussion, as many learners will be careful not to undermine your instruction or position as the authority in the class. The more you can instill peer-to-peer interaction in the online space, the more opportunities for language feedback your learners will have.

### PROVIDE A VARIETY OF LANGUAGE FEEDBACK

Language use in online spaces is heavily reliant on reading and writing. Online language learners will often ask for more opportunities for listening and speaking. Ways to provide variety in the type of language feedback your learners have access to are as follows:

- Submit feedback to your learners in audio messages.
- Set-up an open web-conference room for the course that anyone can use, and spend your office hours in there.
- Set-up a synchronous web-conference meeting during the course, for additional language practice and review see *Planning and Facilitating Web-Conferences for Language Learning*.
- Challenge learners to post messages using audio or video, instead of text.
- Post course content in both text and audio formats.
- Set assessment criteria to measure both quantity and quality of online messages.
- Provide and post models for using language in the online space.

## FOSTER CONNECTIONS BETWEEN COURSE ELEMENTS

As you provide language feedback to your learners, try to actively and explicitly make connections between learners, between learners and content, and between content and real world issues or examples. Learners need more prompting online than they do in face-to-face spaces to connect and start talking – there is no small talk before class starts or during breaks in an online setting, and there are no chance meetings in the hallways between classes. One of the affordances of digital environments is how easy it is to link to content from past units or to link news stories from popular websites. Learners need explicit connections to these examples to help bridge their language development with a larger context and with real-world, practical situations.

Here is an example of a response post written by a facilitator that actively tries to foster connections between learners and between content and real world examples.

> This is an interesting comment about community involvement, Jo. I read a news story yesterday about some problems surrounding the opening of a new community center in the South end of the city. Here's the link. Notice the language and vocabulary that the writer uses in the story – there are several phrases in there that are very specific to discussing about communities and neighborhoods. See if you can notice them.
>
> Jane, you live in the South end of the city. Have you had any experience with this particular community center? Has anyone?

Reply 💬