

Feedback: Keeping it simple

There are **multiple** challenges around assessment and feedback. Marking can be a pressurized process where time is short. Students may feel feedback is unsatisfactory, believing it to be unconstructive, containing limited feedforward.

How does one effectively resolve this?

Many assessment and feedback models require markers to remember too many things about the process; eleven, ten or even seven principles is, I suggest, too many. After all, we are always trying to give our students simple structures to apply to answering problem questions to make things easier for them, so why should markers be any different?

That is why I try and adhere to these 4 precepts when giving feedback

01

The Problem:

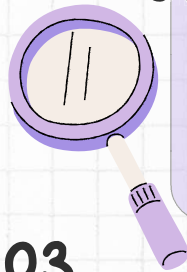
This is where an issue should be specifically and clearly defined, whether that be one of substance or of style.



02

The Explanation:

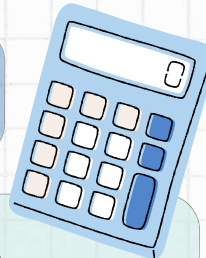
Without this, students tell me they feel feedback is arbitrary. The explanation should make sure students understand why what they have done is wrong. For example, if the problem is that the student has provided no authority for their conclusion, the explanation would be: "Without this, I don't know as an examiner whether you know the law."



03

The Remedy:

This turns feedback into feedforward. Again, a clear explanation of the remedy should be given, if necessary with an example.



04

Support:

This is indispensable. Without it, feedback can seem unduly negative or demoralizing.

But what of implementation? How does this model interface with brief comments in the margins of essays? Does one have to cover all four precepts in everything we say?

It might be suggested that this model does not address the issue of student understanding of feedback. This, however, need not necessarily be so, for provided the demarcation between the four phases is made very clear and the whole is in plain and concise English, understanding might even be enhanced. Yet even if one acknowledges these potential challenges, they are offset by manifest advantages.

Markers need only remember 4 precepts which serve to provide specific, relevant, constructive and supportive feedback, to support students to know what they are doing wrong, why they are doing it and what they can do about it and reduce instances of arbitrary or unconstructive feedback.

Finally, such is the simplicity of this model that students can be taught to use it when providing feedback to their peers. The 4 precepts represent a process students can easily remember, thereby offsetting the natural insecurities about giving one's peers feedback.

Please do not follow the 4 precepts slavishly

This model is not a panacea, but offered as a simple tool enhance feedback practices and to help avoid giving unconstructive and ultimately useless feedback.