GRF Guidelines for Giving Personalized Feedback to Students

Daniel L. Reinholz
Center for STEM Learning, University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder, CO 80304

Dimitri R. Dounas-Frazer
Department of Physics, University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder, CO 80304

August 19, 2015

Framing Instructor feedback plays two roles for students, related to the **structure** and the **content** of the reflections. In both cases, giving "good" feedback means:

- Using user-friendly language (e.g., being neither harsh nor overly-technical), and
- Making sure you and your student are on the same page about the goal of the feedback.

When you introduce the activity to the students, it's important to let them know the purpose of both (a) the reflection activity and (b) your feedback.

Structure "Structure" refers to the way a student writes their reflection. Are they connecting their reflection to a specific experience? Are they articulating aspirations for growth and/or outlining plans for improvement?

The purpose of structure-related feedback is to help students get better at reflection itself. In this way, the goal is not to provide feedback on whether or not their plans or goals are "good." Instead, the goal is to support students in generating sufficiently detailed reflections that contain relevant information. Here are some questions to guide structure-focused feedback:

- Is the goal relevant to the student's articulated experience?
- Does the goal strike a good balance between ambitious and achievable?
- Did the student outline a plan for improvement?
- Does the plan align with the goal?
- Can the plan realistically be implemented in the coming week(s)?
- Do the goal and plan build off of previous goals and plans?

Content "Content" refers to the actual experiences and struggles that students describe in their reflections. Here are some tips for giving content-focused feedback:

- Empathize with students. Let them know you understand where they're coming from.
- Normalize students' experiences. If you've gone through something similar and you feel comfortable sharing that experience with them, let them know.
- Point students to resources. "Resources" can be online tutorials, tutoring services, office hours, etc. Let them know of any relevant resources you think might be helpful.