

Reflect on your experience of giving and receiving feedback to identify what makes for effective communication, and review examples where feedback has led to improved outcomes

When I first began writing archaeological reports, I felt a significant amount of insecurity about my knowledge and capability. During my first assessment with my line-manager, I was given a balance of positive reinforcement that imbued me with a reaffirmed feeling of confidence and specific constructive criticisms that made me reflect on how I can improve my work. The criticisms were not relayed as personal shortcomings, instead they were simply conveyed as comments on a particular action; such feedback reduces the risk of recipients feeling personally attacked. While reducing the likelihood of the recipient becoming disheartened, the inclusion of positives in feedback – even if the feedback is largely negative, like it was on this occasion – reinforces good practice. Indeed, high-performing teams tend to share more positive feedback (Losada and Heaphy 2004). Although probably unintentionally, my line-manager employed the “evidence+communication tactic” of interaction (Brown *et al* 2016), whereby errors are candidly relayed using demonstrable examples and the employee is urged to self-assess their performance. This made the process collaborative and educational, as opposed to passive and condemnatory. The way in which my mistakes were relayed, in particular, imparted the need for consistency and exactness – qualities that I was subsequently commended for in later feedback.

I am perpetually concerned about offending people when giving feedback. This is why I believe it is important to be ‘vulnerable’ and human when communicating so that a trusting partnership can be formed – caring personally, while challenging directly. I practiced this when giving feedback on a report in 2021 to a new-starter (Fig.1). This created a collaborative relationship with the recipient, who actioned most of the suggestions in their subsequent report. Whenever possible, I also give the feedback as soon as possible. Feedback should be proffered while it is still fresh in the mind – while there is still time to adjust their practice and while the feedback is still an accurate representation of their work (Bindal *et al* 2011; Baker *et al* 2013).

FEEDBACK	
Feedback for:	
Feedback from:	Liam Podbury
Site:	Strawberry Farm, Great Abington, Cambridgeshire
Project Type:	Archaeological Evaluation
Project Number:	BE10228
Date:	20/07/2021
Approved by:	Andrew Peachey

Considering this is the first time you have compiled a TT report in the new Wardell style, and didn't have all of the relevant finds reports or environmental samples, this is a great attempt. Please don't feel disheartened by any of my comments or the tracked changes on your original document – this is your first attempt using the more detailed and convoluted WA style (my first report was also covered in highlighted bits and all sorts of changes). I will schedule a call or teams meeting in the coming days for us to have a quick chat about things.

Fig.1: An excerpt from a feedback form (Podbury 2021)

the most memorable piece of feedback I have received was during the peer-review of a forthcoming article (Podbury *forthcoming*). What initially struck me were a small number of

sentences that were highlighted and accompanied by a comment comprising a single question-mark. I found this 'feedback' unhelpful and time-consuming, as the nature of the mistakes were not initially apparent. The communication of feedback should be clear and unambiguous, as the recipient needs to undoubtedly understand the way in which their performance can be improved (Kluger and DeNisi 1996; Goodman and Wood 2004). Most of the feedback, nonetheless, was clearly and unambiguously communicated. The reviewer succinctly noted that several passages were not particularly concise and included unnecessary preambles; this insight was completely correct upon re-reading. As a result of this perspicuous feedback, I am much more conscious of my conciseness and I believe this is reflected in my writing. This is why, when I have given feedback on archaeological report writing, I initially communicate it via a feedback form and subsequently follow-up with the recipient in person (Fig. 1). This gives the recipient a re-examinable written account that they can subsequently ask questions of for clarity, and me an opportunity to belay any concerns in person.

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