Guidelines for giving and receiving feedback

Giving feedback

Feedback is most useful within a culture of learning and development. While giving positive feedback is relatively easy, being a supervisor can involve occasions when it is important to give negative feedback on research, on writing, and on progress in general. Being prepared for these kinds of responses is important since without addressing them the feedback is unlikely to have much effect.

To be helpful, feedback needs to be given in a concerned and supportive way and to include both positive and negative observations. In giving feedback, remember to limit the amount of information to what the receiver can use rather than the amount you would like to give.

Some things to consider when giving feedback

1.	Invite the individual to self-assess	For instance, "what do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of your analysis?"
2.	Comment on positives	Whenever possible, try to give some (genuine) positive feedback – it makes the negative easier to bear.
3.	Focus on the behaviour not the person	For instance, "I think that the draft you've given me needs more thorough editing here, and here", rather than "Your writing is really shoddy."
4.	Be specific and clear; if possible, suggest concrete ways to make improvements	For instance, "The proposed method does not align well with the methodology. Are there studies in the literature that can provide guidance?
5.	Own the statement	Use 'I' statements rather than 'you' statements, e.g. "I find your description confusing" rather than "you sound confused here".
6.	Don't wait	Immediate feedback is the most valuable. If this is not possible, give it as soon as you can.
7.	Recognize that an immediate response to negative feedback may be defensive.	Be prepared for these kinds of responses since without addressing them the feedback is unlikely to have much effect.

Receiving feedback

Feedback helps us to become more aware of what we do and how we do it.
Receiving it gives us an opportunity to change and modify in order to become more effective.

Some things to consider when receiving feedback

1. Self-assess your ideas and work beforehand	Prepare some specific questions that you want the other person to provide feedback on.
2. Ask for help in finding solutions to the difficulties	For instance, "Can you tell me what you think would work better?"
3. Remember that it is easy not to "hear" feedback, particularly if it's negative.	There are several ways in which individuals may prevent themselves from taking in negative feedback. They may justify (e.g. "Well, you'd have done the same thing in that situation"), explain (e.g. "Well you don't really know the situation"), deny or become angry or hurt.
4. Remind yourself that all feedback, even negative, can be useful.	Take notes so that you can think through more thoughtfully the specifics of any negative feedback you receive.
5. Check that you have fully understood the specifics of the feedback.	For instance, "So the main things I should focus on are xxx, yyy, etc."