

Ten Ways to give feedback without marks

1. Think about dart boards and hitting the bulls-eye. Lisa McCluskey, a kindergarten teacher, used this strategy with her students. The inner circle was called “right on,” the next circle “working on it,” and the outside circle, “needs improvement.” The teacher modeled its use, the class used it as a group, and then, when students were ready, they used it to peer and self-assess.

2. A high school teacher, Donna Cunningham, used the same dart board idea only she used pigs since they connected to her name (CunningHAM). The dart board she used had four layers. The inside circle had a flying pig, the outside circle a sleeping pig and the layers in between had pigs walking and running. Sometimes, she worked with students to construct criteria for the inner circle. Other times, they were given a rubric to completely define what quality looked liked at the different levels.

3. Researchers Paul Black and Dylan William shared the invention of UK teachers using traffic lights for feedback. Each color is defined by teachers to make sense for the respective learning situation, but the gist of each color’s representation is:

- green moving forward confidently
- yellow moving forward cautiously
- red stopped

Teachers have adapted this in many ways including three colored cups on student desks, to two-sided red and green discs, to students drawing the three lights as margin notes, to using technology responders. The advantage is that teachers can receive feedback from students *during* the learning rather than waiting until the end. When students become familiar with the traffic light strategy, they are able to signal to teachers where they found the written work to be easy or difficult. Eventually, they can use it as a rapid peer or self-assessment strategy.

4. A New Zealand colleague shared this quick and easy strategy. As she circulates through the room examining student work she takes two highlighters – PINK means “I’m tickled pink with the quality of this work” and GREEN means “This is a goal area for next time.” Another colleague adapted this strategy still further and used several colors, all of which have a meaning to students. She works with students to define the highlighter color’s meaning, which is then posted for student reference. She used the coded highlighters for her feedback and students began to use the same highlighter codes for peer and self-assessment.

5. A secondary school principal explained that his staff had decided that if work submitted by students was of high quality (80% and above), the work would be marked/graded. If it was not of high quality, students would receive specific, descriptive feedback to assist them in improving the quality of the work to re-submit for grading.

6. Kathleen Gregory started using acronyms with her students in English (see *Setting and Using Criteria* at <http://connect2learning.com/store/setting-and-using-criteria>). At the end of silent reading time students received **BROW** if they had **BROUGHT** a book; **READ** for 15 minutes; stayed **ON** task; and **WRITTEN** 5 lines. If a student had, for example, forgotten to bring a book but borrowed one from the in-class library the student would receive **ROW** as specific feedback about what had been done and what needed to be done. Another teacher adapted this idea for self-assessment and asked students to complete a quick assessment using **I-BROW**.

7. Dylan Wiliam shared this strategy based on work implementing assessment *for* learning in secondary schools in the UK. Student work was returned with symbols that meant one of three things:

- This work is better than previous work.
- This work is not as good as previous work.

- This work is of the same quality as previous work.

8. Many years ago I found myself needing to let parents know I had assessed student work even though I had chosen to NOT mark or grade the work. I used a stamp with two bare feet to signal that I had assessed the work. I had students take home a letter from me to parents explaining what the stamp meant. (There is a similar letter on page 90 of *Making Classroom Assessment Work*.)

9. Another idea from Murray Guest, a high school teacher in Saskatoon, is to NOT mark any quizzes in his math class. The students get feedback about what is working and what is not, but no grades are given. To read more, you can find his article under STORIES on our website at:

http://www.annedavies.com/assessment_for_learning_stories.html

10. Highlighting criteria that have been met to a high degree of quality also give students specific feedback about what IS WORKING. Circling one or two criteria that need more attention can help focus a student's future efforts.