

ACTPS Performance Framework

The Art of Feedback: Giving, Seeking and Receiving Feedback

What is performance feedback?

Feedback is a part of how we work. It can be a simple comment on a piece of work or can be a more detailed and structured discussion about how we are going and what we could do even better.

It can happen in a 'day to day' way, ie:

- *You just handled that enquiry really well. You gave the correct information and communicated it very clearly.*
- *I think you could improve the report by talking with X to find out more...*

'Day to day' feedback happens naturally and continuously as part of the way we interact with each other at work.

More structured feedback discussions happen when you talk with your supervisor/manager about how you are going in your job. Structured feedback discussions can happen as part of the performance cycle (e.g. performance planning discussions and mid or end of cycle review discussions) or at other times if there is a particular matter you wish to discuss, ie:

- *I think the things you do really well are ...*
- *I've arranged this time to talk with you about a couple of issues I've noticed with your work recently...*
- *Some areas I would like to see you develop in are ...*

Who can I give feedback to?

We can all give feedback to people that we work with in the ACTPS:

- our supervisors/managers
- the staff we supervise/manage (this is a responsibility of all supervisors/managers)
- our peers and colleagues
- people in other teams/areas that we interact with or rely on to do our job.

It doesn't matter what level they are, or whether our job is at the same, higher or lower level.

In general we don't give feedback to members of the public or our clients/customers. This may be different in some roles (e.g. teachers will give feedback to students and parents).

Who are the people that need or expect feedback from you at work? Do you provide them with useful feedback?

If you have a concern about providing feedback to anyone at work, it's a good idea to discuss it with someone whose professional opinion you trust first. Your HR team will be able to offer you advice or further guidance.

The following image demonstrates the impact of getting and giving useful feedback:



Getting and giving good quality feedback means that we have an accurate idea of how we are going at work. We all need to hear:

- what we did well; and
- what improvements we can make.

Sometimes we may not recognise comments like these as feedback:

- *I noticed that you presented really well in that meeting. You were able to talk confidently but next time - try and resolve any IT issues beforehand.*
- *I like the way you tried to resolve this issue on your own but next time you come across this problem, please ask X so they can show you a more effective way to approach it.*
- *You handled that really well because you really listened to the member of the public. In future you can call a colleague over if you feel you need some more support.*

We are all responsible for being alert to feedback when it is given and using it to improve the way we work.

- sometimes supervisors/managers may need to make it clear that what is being said is feedback, ie, *I'd like to give you some feedback about your progress on...*

Giving feedback

Five top tips

These tips will work best for more structured feedback sessions but are worth bearing in mind for less planned conversations too.

1. Choose an appropriate time and place.

- Don't store it up. Give feedback as soon as possible and practical (within 24 hours of a specific event or instance if you can).
- Consider your schedules – make sure you and the person are both able to prepare for and focus on the discussion
- Have you chosen a meeting place which is overly conspicuous and might make the other person feel 'singled out'? Do you have another option of a different time of day or another place?
- Allow enough time so that you are not rushed.
- Never give "negative" feedback in public.
- On some occasions 'sleep on it' if you are angry, upset or stressed because feedback given at the wrong time often does more harm than good. The feedback should be provided as soon as possible thereafter.

A word of caution: *Some staff and managers choose to have performance discussions outside the workplace (ie: walking back from a meeting, in a vehicle on the way to another worksite or in a coffee shop). While this creates a private and relaxed discussion it is slightly less formal. If your discussion is potentially difficult, you may want another setting such as an office or meeting room.*

2. Give feedback in person whenever you can.

- Face-to-face feedback conversations are 'two-way' (rather than feedback in an email, through another person or over the phone). This gives both people more of a chance to understand exactly what the other is saying.
- Be aware of your/their body language. Smile when it's appropriate and listen by turning your body toward the other person and nodding to show when you understand their words.
- If you can't give feedback in person choose your words very carefully to reduce the chance that they are misunderstood. Maybe ask your manager to check an email before you send it and try to fix up a later time to talk 'face to face'.
- If you are passing feedback from one person to another (ie: from your manager to a colleague) ensure that you have enough information to make it meaningful and accurate.



3. Be prepared

- Ask yourself what you want to achieve from the discussion? Do you want to thank the other person or get them to change in some way?
- Plan what you want to talk about and what you will say:
 - » be specific and use examples (see more information on being specific below)
 - » develop questions to seek the other person's views and ideas and encourage a two-way discussion
 - e.g. how do you think it went?
 - what could we have done differently?
 - » if you are seeking change or improvement clarify exactly what you want.

NB: when planning your discussion; it might help to write your plan down. You can take it into the meeting with you and use it to help you keep the discussion on track.

- Have an open-mind. You should be prepared for new information to come to your attention as you discuss your feedback with the other person.
- How does the other person prefer to receive feedback? Plan and adjust your approach accordingly. For example:
 - » Find a more private place if you are thanking someone who is uncomfortable receiving lots of attention.
 - » Keep your communication very focussed if you know the other person prefers to be direct and to the point.
 - » Ask about their weekend/journey/family before launching straight into the feedback if you know this will help the other person feel more comfortable.
- If the feedback is about conduct or behaviour the following may help you to get 'the right words' clear in your mind prior to the discussion or 'pin down' exactly what want to see changed:
 - » the ACTPS Values and Signature Behaviours
 - » Talking about Behaviours: A Guide for Employees and Managers
 - » directorate or team specific values or codes of conduct
 - » your/their professional standards or codes of conduct
 - » seeking advice or guidance from a mentor, trusted adviser or the Employee Assistance Program.

4. During a feedback discussion

- First, confirm with the other person that it is a suitable time and place.
- Begin the conversation by outlining the background/situation/issue and say what you'd like to get from the discussion.

For example:

"today is your six-month performance review and I'd really like to thank you for your contribution to the team and give you some feedback on an area I think you could improve".

OR

"I've asked you to meet with me because of the incident that happened yesterday. I'd like you to help me understand what happened from your point of view and then I'd like us to talk about how we can stop it happening again".

- Encourage a two-way discussion by asking questions and listening (the other person should do most of the talking) – see below for more information on listening.
- When talking about behaviour; remember to describe the behaviour and its impact rather than using language which labels or 'targets' the other person. This will help you keep the discussion from turning very emotional.

For example, rather than saying:

"You're being very rude to me".

Say instead

"When you roll your eyes while I'm speaking; it makes me feel you don't respect what I'm saying".

- Remember your plan: Be specific and provide examples (see below for tips on being specific).
- Decide together what action you both will take after the meeting.
- Take time out: If the conversation begins to get emotional or you/they need time to 'digest' what is being said - arrange a break and reschedule the meeting for a later time.
- Check that the other person has understood what you have said.
- Think about appropriate confidentiality: who has a need to know about the feedback? Are you copying too many people into an email which contains feedback? How public are you being about your feedback conversation?

5. Following the discussion

- If the discussion was a scheduled Performance and Development session, complete the template to record what was discussed.
- In other circumstances, if it is appropriate, record your discussion (including any action either of you have committed to) in an email, by letter or as a personal file note and provide a copy to the other person. Appropriate circumstances to do this may include: a challenging discussion/a serious occurrence or topic/what you discussed was complicated and you both need something to remind you in the future.
- Remember that the other person may need a little time to reflect on what was said in your feedback discussion - they may come to you later with questions or comments.
- Make sure to follow through on any action you have committed to and if this isn't possible, tell the other person immediately.

More about being specific

How helpful would it be to hear the statements below?

- *You're doing ok, I'm happy.*
- *I don't feel supported by you.*
- *You need to manage this better.*

Being specific involves giving concrete and recent examples of what expectations they did or didn't meet. By doing this you're giving the other person (or people) a much better chance of improving the way they work.

STAR - You can use this model to prepare feedback before actually giving it.

Situation Describe the situation – What? When? Who?	<i>"I felt you really supported me when the project missed the deadline on Friday".</i>	<i>"I've noticed that you have come in to work at 9:30 AM three times this week."</i>
Task What is expected in relation to work, behaviours skills or tasks?	<i>"I had expected you to be really frustrated by that because we had committed to it but..."</i>	<i>"Your shift starts at 8:00 AM. It's in our team agreement that we are all on time in the morning."</i>
Action How did what happened meet or fall short of those expectations?	<i>"You understood and told everyone that it wasn't my fault."</i>	<i>"Because you came into work later it meant that someone else had to answer both your phone and theirs and open the mail".</i>
Result The outcome or impact of the action.	<i>"So I'd like to say thanks, I feel much better about things."</i>	<i>"It was extremely busy and being 'one person down' put a lot of unnecessary pressure on the rest of the team".</i>

Providing balanced feedback

Balanced feedback involves recognising positive things as well as negatives while ensuring that important feedback messages are understood and acted on. Balanced feedback stops people feeling de-motivated by feedback they may find challenging. It is especially important to provide balanced feedback during Performance and Development reviews and assessments because those discussions relate to a stretch of time and not an isolated issue or incident. When providing feedback, below is a useful model to consider:

Commend	<i>I appreciate the time you spent on ...</i> <i>In general I am really happy with your performance. I have been impressed with the way you have ...</i>
Recommend	<i>One area where I'd like to see an improvement is ...</i> <i>Perhaps next time around you could also ...</i> <i>It's not yet meeting my expectations. What I'd like to see is ...</i> <i>One way of developing your skills even further would be to ...</i>
Commend	<i>I feel confident that it will go better next time.</i> <i>I appreciate your willingness to take on board feedback.</i>

How to provide 'difficult' feedback in a balanced way:

Remember: any positive feedback needs to be genuine. If you are finding it difficult to find something positive to say, check that your perception has not been influenced by a recent or negative event.

- Be prepared for an emotional reaction, anger, rejection of your feedback or maybe tears. Stay calm and professional. Tell the other person that they can take a break at any time.
- Try and talk mainly about options for doing things differently or solutions to the issue.
- Check the other person's understanding, summarise and confirm agreement of the actions you have made and make it clear how, and when you will follow up.

Try this sequence

When you ...	A statement that describes the behaviour without judgment, exaggeration, labelling or motives. Just state the facts as specifically as possible (You could use the STAR model outlined above).
I am concerned because ...	Say who or what it impacts and what the impact is.
Pause for discussion	Let the other person respond.
I would like ... Because ...	Describe the change to the other person to consider and why you think the change will address the issue/concern.
What do you think?	Listen to the other person's responses. Be prepared to discuss options.

Managing Up: How to give feedback to your Manager or Supervisor

Giving your manager or boss feedback is known as managing up or upwards feedback.

Upwards feedback is an integral part of performance discussions.

The approach to performance and development in the ACTPS is a two-way conversation. This means that employees and their supervisor/manager are encouraged to exchange information, ideas, suggestions and feedback.

Upwards feedback should include positive feedback as well as feedback about what you would like to see changed or improved.

Remember that:

- managers need to know what the people they supervise need from them, what they do well and where they could improve
- if you don't tell them they may not know or understand your expectations of them
- managers aren't perfect and require feedback to develop their skills and improve – the same as you do.

When can I give upwards feedback?

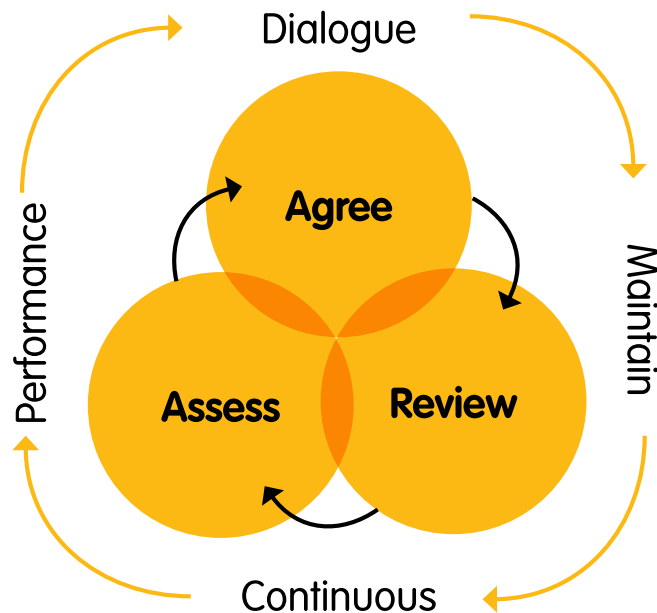
Upwards feedback is no different to any respectful and useful feedback - see the advice provided above. Be just as mindful of privacy and appropriate ways of conducting the feedback session.



Tips for upward feedback

<p>At any time: when there is a burning issue, don't store it up:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how you are being supported to do your job • what you appreciate about how you are supervised or managed • what you would like your supervisor/manager to do differently • how your supervisor can continue to support you to achieve the performance plan 	<p>During a performance planning discussion: know your own likes/dislikes and tell your manager about them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how you prefer work to be delegated to you • support you need to achieve work/life balance • what sort of guidance you need on particular tasks • how you prefer to receive feedback (e.g. how frequently you would like feedback and how you prefer it to be given) 	<p>During a review discussion: be specific</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how you have been supported to achieve your performance plan including what has gone well and what could be done differently or better • what you appreciate about how you are supervised or managed • what you would like your supervisor/manager to do differently • how your supervisor can continue to support you to achieve the performance plan
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Best practice performance cycle:



The process of managing up or providing upwards feedback forms part of an effective performance cycle. This involves ongoing discussion, reviewing and assessing performance.

Some more tips for providing upwards feedback....

- Take a constructive approach to upwards feedback. Be clear on your purpose for providing upwards feedback and communicate this purpose. If action isn't important, and you just want your supervisor/manager to listen, let them know this.
- Present feedback in a positive and supporting manner. Don't just state the problem. Offer options or solutions.
- Make sure your feedback is specific. Use examples to explain your feedback and describe what you would prefer your supervisor/manager to do. General statements such as 'I don't feel supported' or 'I'm happy with your supervision' are not overly helpful.
- If appropriate, thank your supervisor/manager for listening and being open to your feedback.
- Acknowledge any changes that have been made in response to your feedback.
- If you think that the discussion may be difficult, refer to *Tips for a Difficult Performance Discussion* for information about preparing for, and having the discussion.

What if my feedback is not accepted or acted on?

- Have the feedback discussion again:
 - » check that they understand your expectations and what this means in a practical way – be as specific as you can
 - » reiterate the impact it is having on you, your capacity to do your work or achievement of your performance plan
 - » ask if there is a reason why your expectations aren't able to be met.
- Seek advice from a mentor, a trusted advisor, the HR team area in your Directorate or the Employee Assistance Program
- If you feel you are not getting anywhere with your supervisor/manager and the issue is important to you, raise the issue with a more senior manager.



Seeking Feedback

How to ask for feedback

Asking for feedback is one of the best ways to feel 'in control' of your work, get an accurate idea of what is expected of you and judge how you can improve even further.

You can ask for feedback from your manager/supervisor or colleagues at any time:

- Let the other person know you would like feedback so that they have time to prepare.
- You can help the other person prepare by being specific about what you would like feedback on. Prepare a set of questions and let the other person see them if you have time.
- Ask 'open questions'. These questions will often begin with the word 'Why' or 'How'. Open questions are designed to get full and meaningful answers – they can't be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no'.
- Some good 'open' questions for seeking feedback are:
 - » Why did my work on X hit the right mark for you?
 - » How do you think I could handle Mrs Y better?
 - » If I was really successful in this job, what would I be doing and how would I be doing it?
 - » Why do you think I keep having this issue and how could I improve things?
 - » What is your opinion on the way I handled that question from Mr Z?
 - » How would you approach this if you were me?

If you are a Supervisor or Manager

Why seek feedback?

It can have a number of positive benefits for you and your team:

- *it helps build a feedback culture (where feedback is part of the 'way we do things')*
- *it builds relationships that are based on trust*
- *it builds your own self-awareness about your supervisory skills and style.*

Example questions for seeking feedback

During a performance discussion	As part of everyday work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can I better support you to do your job? • What could I do differently that would help you do your job? • What am I doing that helps you do your job? • Am I giving you enough feedback? • Am I providing enough guidance and information when delegating work? • Do you feel supported to achieve work-life balance? • Do you feel you have been given opportunities to use and develop your knowledge and skills – how could we do this better? • Have I supported you enough over the last ...? • Am I doing anything that hinders your capacity to do your job? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How could I have supported you better on this task? • Have I given you enough information and guidance? • Is there anything more I can/could have done when you were working on this? • What would you like me to do differently next time? • Were you happy with the level of autonomy/responsibility you were given? • Could I have provided you with more feedback along the way? • Have you been able to develop your skills while doing this work – how could we have better supported you to develop your skills

By asking questions like these, you'll let the people that you manage or supervise know that it's 'ok' to give you respectful and useful feedback.

Receiving feedback

When we receive feedback we usually go through three stages – we react, we reflect and we respond. For feedback to be useful it is important that we ‘analyse’ the feedback before responding. The following tips provide guidance on how to approach each of these stages:

React	<p>During this stage we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to be aware of and manage our emotional reaction to what we are hearing. Think about how what we say and do now will seem to us (and others) later on. • Should concentrate on listening to the feedback and ask questions to ensure that we understand the other person’s views and expectations. • Must remember not to skip the next stage! Depending on what the feedback is, we might need to end the discussion at this point to give ourselves time to think properly about what we have heard.
Reflect	<p>During this stage we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should be honest with ourselves about our own performance and be open minded about what the other person has said. • Should allow ourselves extra time for our emotions to calm down if necessary. • Ask for specific examples to help us to understand the feedback e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » “What would you have preferred me to do”? » “How could I do it differently next time”?
Respond	<p>During this stage we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept the feedback by thanking the person giving it. • If we don’t agree, we respectfully say so and support what we’re saying with facts or our alternative views. • Should focus on the future and improvement - suggest options or solutions. We respectfully negotiate and agree to ‘next steps’ (to address issues raised in the feedback). • Need to ensure we understand the next steps and we are committed and able to implement what have agreed to do.

If you are a Supervisor or Manager

As a supervisor or manager, it is really important that we accept feedback from staff in a positive way. Responding negatively is likely to damage the working relationship and discourage the employee from providing you with feedback in the future.

Here's how.....

Take responsibility for the feedback

- even if you don't agree with the feedback take responsibility for the other person's perception
- "I understand that this has made you angry, thank you for taking the time to tell me."

Take time to listen to feedback

- if it isn't an appropriate time apologise and schedule a time to discuss the feedback as soon as you can, ie, "I'd really like to talk with you properly about this so can we meet tomorrow at...."

REACT, REFLECT AND RESPOND (as outlined above)

- some questions which may help you reflect are:
 - » What would you have preferred?
 - » What would you like me to have done differently?
 - » Can you give me an example of how I could have handled that better?
- don't respond straight away if you are upset or angry
 - » "I'd like to take this afternoon to think this through, let's meet again tomorrow at...."

Talk about solutions/options

- ask what they would like you to do next time/in future
- suggest solutions
- agree actions

Take action

- do what you said you would do
- if you are unable to take action straight away explain the reasons

Thank the person

- tell them why feedback is important to you
- if appropriate, acknowledge that it may have been difficult for them to give you this feedback

Follow-up

- seek feedback on the impact of the changes you have made

How to really listen when giving or receiving feedback

Listening skills have a big impact on feedback discussions. Active listening helps us to:

- understand what the other person is saying and their point of view
- get to know the other person
- know when the other person has understood what we are saying.

The following diagram outlines different levels of listening:



In feedback discussions we should be using Level 2 (active listening) and Level 3 (observational listening).

Level 1: Internal listening

At this level:

- we may be hearing the words the other person is saying but the focus is on listening to our own thoughts
- we may be:
 - » thinking about what we are going to say next
 - » focused on what we think or feel about what the other person is saying
 - » thinking about something else.

Level 2: Attentive listening

At this level:

- we are totally focused on what the person is saying
- we aren't distracted and we are able to give them our full attention
- we use active listening techniques such as paraphrasing or asking questions to confirm understanding.

This level allows us to listen for facts, meaning and intention. This level leads to a common understanding about what is being said and what the other person wants to achieve.

Level 3: Observational listening

This is a much deeper level of listening. At this level we are totally focused on what the person is saying and:

- we are attuned to body language, facial expressions and tone of voice
- we are more likely to identify the other person's feelings
- we are aware of the impact of our communication on the other person.

At this level we are able to help the other person understand their own feelings and views by reflecting what they are saying back to them. This is called a reflective listening technique. For example we may say things like:

- 'I can see you are worried about this because you have said
- 'so what I am hearing is that you really like working in the team because you've mentioned several times.'