

# PRACTICING GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Giving and receiving productive feedback are skills that you will need throughout your life; this process will help you grow as you move towards your goals. When you make the conscious decision to give and receive useful feedback on a regular basis, you will be able to continue your development in a more informed way and gain more from your mentoring relationship.

Effective feedback identifies and reinforces behaviors which contribute towards your growth, and the mentoring relationship, positively while altering those which get in the way. Be prepared to work on yourself and help your mentor understand their role in the relationship better. The more practice you have with giving and receiving feedback, the better you will become!

## Giving Feedback

There are four basic parts to giving productive feedback.

### 1. Check Your Motives

Feedback is meant to assist the recipient in their growth; avoid being harsh or offensive. You will likely find your approach to be more effective if it is positive and focused on what could be done to improve in the future. This does not mean that every comment needs to be positive, but the discussion should be fair and balanced. If you are unsure if your critique is too tough, err on the side of caution.

**Tip:** Before entering into your mentoring meeting, take a moment to think about the positive aspects of your mentoring relationship and what you have learned from your mentor so far. Going through a mini-SWOT analysis, similar to your Self Evaluation, can be helpful in organizing your thoughts with regards to perceived strengths and weaknesses of your mentor or mentoring relationship.

### 2. Make It Regular

Setting regular, private meetings with your mentor to give and receive feedback will help keep communication open between you both. However, if the need for feedback is more urgent than your scheduled check-ins, do not hesitate to reach out and express that desire. By providing frequent feedback, you will ensure that it is timely and closely related to the events it refers to. Set a timeline with your mentor to exchange feedback; for example, dedicating part of a monthly meeting to this process will help you both stay in top shape.

**Tip:** Think about other major deadlines that may exist in the timeline towards your goals; are there any conference dates, submission times, or other relevant schedules to consider? Planning opportunities for feedback in relation to these other responsibilities will assist you in plotting your growth and your mentor in tracking areas which may require additional support.

### 3. Be Sincere

Feedback should be a conversation, not a lecture, and all feedback should be sincere and honest. If positive feedback is forced, it will lose its value and undermine your credibility. If negative feedback is forced, it can seem nit-picky. Remember that this is meant to be a two-way dialogue which enriches both you and your mentor, so engage them in a conversation. Ask questions to make sure they understand your input and actively listen when it is your turn to receive feedback.

**Tip:** It is recommended that you give and receive feedback face-to-face, since tone and message can be easily misinterpreted over text communications.

### 4. Be Specific

Limit your feedback to one or two main action items per meeting. After sharing your point of view, ask your mentor what their perspective is on the situation. Using phrases like “What is your reaction to this?” and “Do you have any additional context or perspective you would like to share?” can help you both achieve clarity and address gaps in communication. You can use the SMART goals framework to help you both understand what exactly needs to be done to improve the situation and establish a time-frame for change.

**Tip:** It can be helpful to take a few minutes before meeting with your mentor to write down the main ideas behind the feedback you will be giving. This can help you determine your desired outcomes from the conversation, as well as good places to start the dialogue.

# Receiving Feedback

There are four basic parts to requesting and receiving productive feedback.

## 1. Be Specific

Start on a positive note by asking about what you are doing well so far, then ask about one or two action areas that your mentor feels need improvement. Together, you can celebrate achievements and also work productively towards completing your SMART goals, taking time to update them if needed. Before your meeting, consider if you want feedback on your general progress or on a particular project you are working on. You will receive better feedback if you ask specific questions such as “What’s one thing I could do, in your opinion, to improve my work?” and “What did you think about the last update to my project?”.

**Tip:** If you are unsure why your mentor is providing a specific type of feedback, then ask further questions. Example questions could include “I’m not sure I understand, can you please explain further?” and “I’ve felt like I’m doing a good job, why do you feel like this is an area where I need more support?”. It is important to clarify any confusion over feedback in the moment it is given so that you do not jump to any incorrect conclusions.

## 2. Make It Regular

Setting regular, private meetings with your mentor to give and receive feedback will help keep communication open between you both. However, if the need for feedback is more urgent than your scheduled check-ins, do not hesitate to reach out and express that desire. By providing frequent feedback, you will ensure that it is timely and closely related to the events it refers to. Set a timeline with your mentor to exchange feedback; for example, dedicating part of a monthly meeting to this process will help you both stay in top shape.

**Tip:** When receiving feedback, actively listen and take notes on what your mentor is sharing. This will help you get the full measure of what they are saying so that you can respond efficiently during your conversation and better prepare a plan towards improvement together.

## Example

- At the beginning of their relationship, Gabi, a young professional, and her career mentor, Mx. Eng, decided that their meetings would last an hour on Tuesdays. However, Mx. Eng has had to cut their past two meetings short. Gabi feels she needs the full hour, so she emails Mx. Eng and lets them know that she would like to exchange feedback during their next face-to-face meeting.
- Before the two speak, Gabi takes some time and reflects on what she appreciates about the mentoring relationship. She also decides that her main piece of feedback will be centered around the desired versus actual length of their mentoring meetings.
- During the meeting, Gabi opens by thanking Mx. Eng for assisting them with their career questions and providing detailed critique on job applications. She then expresses her desire for the original hour-long meetings because it makes her feel best supported as a mentee. Gabi then asks Mx. Eng for their point of view and they explain that they did not realize Gabi felt that way. Mx. Eng then states that Tuesdays no longer work for their schedule, but that they have appreciated the mentoring relationship and would like to continue working with Gabi.
- After engaging in an active conversation with each other, Gabi and Mx. Eng decided to switch their meetings to Thursdays to avoid future scheduling conflicts. After this point is settled, Mx. Eng provides feedback on Gabi’s progress. She practices active listening and takes notes on the comments she receives, asking for clarification when needed. Both leave the meeting feeling satisfied; after the meeting, Gabi takes action to incorporate the feedback she received from Mx. Eng into her progress moving forward.

## 3. Reflect On The Future

Asking for feedback can be intimidating, especially if the person receiving feedback holds more power in the relationship. Mentors, remember that asking the mentee to share negative feedback puts the mentee in a vulnerable position. Mentees, in asking for feedback, you are being courageous and taking concrete steps towards your future. After your meeting, take time to reflect on the feedback that you and your mentor exchanged, remembering that the critique is meant to help you further develop. You may find the Feedback Matrix exercise at the end of this document to be useful during this process.

**Tip:** At the end of your meeting, thank your mentor for providing feedback and listening to what you have to contribute towards the relationship. This will end the conversation on an upwards note and remind you that receiving feedback is a good thing.

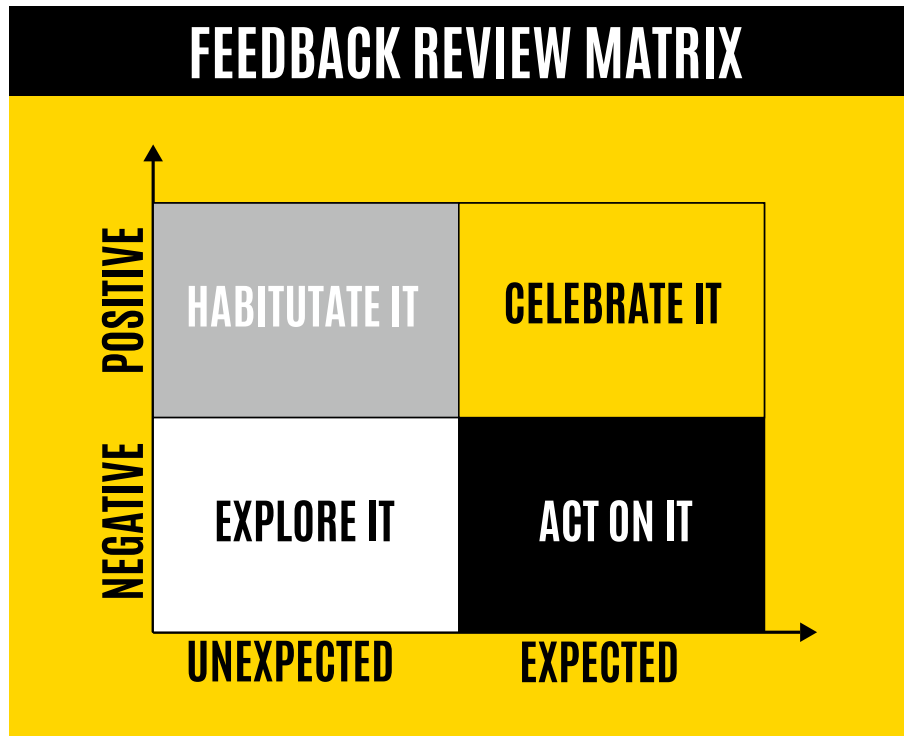
## 4. Take Positive Action

Feedback is only helpful when you take the next step and make a change to address areas for improvement. If you were previously unaware of an issue your mentor is raising, do not get defensive. Instead, ask for an example of where you fell short and if they have ideas for how you could improve. Return to your SMART goals framework and use this structure to establish checkpoints for incorporating the feedback you received into your progress timeline.

**Tip:** During your next feedback meeting, take some time to check in with your mentor to determine if the changes you have made are making a positive difference in your progress.

## Feedback Matrix

Acting on feedback is the next step towards development. Using the Feedback Matrix to organize the feedback you receive can help you understand what should be celebrated, what needs to be changed, and where you can build more self-awareness.



Using the matrix, feedback falls into four categories:

### 1. Positive and Unexpected

**Habituate It** - This is feedback which points out a positive behavior you may not have been aware of. Think about how you can turn this behavior into a habit or routine so that you continue to succeed in the future. For example, if you did a great job organizing yourself for a particular project without even realizing it, apply the same scheduling principles to your next assignment. You may have unlocked a brand new skill set that you can grow with.

### 2. Positive and Expected

**Celebrate It** - Take note of your successes and accomplishments as they come so that you and your mentor can celebrate the things you already do well. You should acknowledge that your hard work has paid off. Good job!

### 3. Negative and Unexpected

**Explore It** - After discussing this feedback with your mentor, explore it in detail outside of your meeting to gain a deeper understanding of where you could improve moving forward. You can also ask your mentor if they have any specific ideas for how you could alter your behavior or outlook. Reflect on potential spaces in your growth where you could foster more self-awareness and nurture positive change within yourself.

### 4. Negative and Expected

**Change It** - Design an action plan, set SMART goals, and continue exchanging consistent feedback with your mentor to help you change the problematic behavior or mindset.

→ [MENTOR.UIOWA.EDU](https://mentor.uiowa.edu)

\*Adapted from [MindTools](https://www.mindtools.com)