

## Learning from feedback

### Aim of feedback sessions

- Feedback contributes to group learning in a *creative* and *didactic* setting: it is a form of knowledge production
- Separating feedback from evaluation
- Group feedback sessions are a learning opportunity for the presenter, for those giving feedback and for others who are present.
- The aim is to break our usual patterns

### Usual feedback practices

The experience of receiving rapid-fire feedback:

- Becoming overwhelmed and defensive
- It's hard not to take it personally
- We feel judged
- We cannot always use the advice

### Artificiality and thinking

- Create space for thinking by cutting the automatic response mechanism
- Make it impersonal: separate emotion from thinking
- Produce a great variety of insights and proposals
- From artificial and ritualistic formats to new forms of fluid interaction

### Feedback formats

1. *The Presenter's Question* is the invitation for feedback. Format, content, questions.
2. *Affirmative Feedback*: learning from what works. "What worked for me is x".
3. *Perspectives Feedback*: are you speaking as an audience member, maker, peer, friend, journalist, curator, critic? What do you need? "As x, I need y".
4. *Open Questions* are simple but powerful; they open space for divergent thinking. Start open questions with "why", "how", "who", "when", "what".
5. *Concept Reflection*. Propose a concept to start a series of associations in the mind of the presenter.
6. *Gossip*: speak as if the presenter is not here, in the third person. Allows views to be aired, free-flow discussion.
7. *Tips & Tricks*: practical advice. Technical issues, ideas, reading and viewing, links.
8. *Personal Letter*: private, delayed communication for personal and additional content. A reflective end to the feedback session.

## Feedback formats

### 0. Learning from feedback

How does asking questions and being asked questions contribute to learning? There is an art and a practice to asking questions, and being aware of what you want to achieve with them. With the right kind of questions, feedback sessions contribute to group learning.

Before you formulate a question, ask yourself what you want to achieve with it. Are you genuinely interested in an answer? Does your question help the presenter? Is your question interesting for others in the group? Try to achieve the following:

<i>Your question opens up a learning opportunity for</i>		
Yourself	The presenter	The other listeners

### 1. The Presenter’s Question

The Presenter’s Question is an invitation for feedback. What are we going to experience in your presentation? Is it a finished piece, a work-in-progress, or just an idea? What part of the work will we look at? What are the questions you have at the moment? What would you like to get feedback on? – Be ready to present this in less than three minutes.

### 2. Affirmative Feedback

Feedback is usually associated with criticism, but we also want to learn from what works. This is different from giving a compliment. The aim is to communicate what worked for us. Start your Affirmative Feedback with “What worked for me is x”.

### 3. Perspectives Feedback

What perspective are you asking your question from? Are you reacting as an audience member, as a peer, as a friend, as a journalist, as a fellow German? Make clear what your most important need is from this perspective. Start your Perspectives Feedback with “As x, I need y”.

<i>From the perspective of a</i>		
Audience member	Creator	Peer
Mentor / Advisor	Friend	Critic
Journalist	Curator	Assessor
“German”	“Dog”	“Alien”
<i>I need ...</i>		

#### 4. Open Questions

Closed questions can be answered by a “yes” or a “no”. Closed Questions guide the answer in a certain direction: “did his refusal make you really angry?” Open questions give as much space as possible. Start open questions with “why”, “how”, “who”, “when”, “what”. For example: “What did you do?” “Why did you use this effect?” “How did this make you feel?” Open question may seem simple, but they are very powerful. Open Questions open up space for divergent thinking, and are thus more suited for initial ideas or work-in-progress than for finished work.

#### 5. Concept Reflection

In order to open the reflective space of the person whose work you are questioning, come up with a concept to start their thinking process. This concept should start a series of associations that help the presenter think about their work in a way that is productive for them. The concept could be a single word or a short expression. Examples: “How does your work relate to *time*?” “What role does *home* play in your piece?” “What is *explicit* in your work?”

#### 6. Gossip

Gossip is a group discussion; everyone can speak freely, as if the presenter was not there, in the third person. The presenter listens attentively without reacting. A gossip session allows views to be aired for which there is no space in the more regulated forms of feedback.

#### 7. Tips & Tricks

Tips & tricks are bits of practical advice that will help the presenter. These can include technical advice, ideas for the piece, recommendations for further reading or references to other artists. Make sure the advice is practical and helpful rather than critical and general.

#### 8. Personal Letter

It is very useful to conclude a feedback session with a Personal Letter to the presenter. Everyone takes five minutes to write down a personal message. This can include things that were not mentioned in the session or personal anecdotes. It also serves as a personal reflection for the people giving feedback, and concludes the session in silence.

**Facilitating a feedback session**

Successfully facilitating a feedback session requires a number of skills that are strengthened through practice. The facilitator structures the session, is in charge of the interaction, and “conducts the energy flow”.

**Structuring the session**

- Discuss with the presenter what they want from the session and help to formulate the presenter’s question.
- Structure the program by deciding on the number, length and order of feedback methods. Resist the tendency to squeeze in too much.
- Get everyone to the presentation and to the feedback session on time.

**Facilitating the interaction**

- Make sure the rules about who speaks are followed. Establish that you are in charge, but do this in your own style. Some people are dominant, others soft-spoken, some are energetic and others more relaxed. All these styles are possible. The important thing is for you to feel confident. This gets easier with practice.
- As the facilitator, you do not contribute to the content of the discussion. You are the referee of the session, and suddenly playing along confuses people and will be perceived as unfair, as you decide who speaks.
- Steer the interaction in the direction that you think is right. If you need more contributions, ask for them. If you have too many, choose the most important ones and move on.
- Challenge participants if the feedback they give is too long, too short, unclear, or in the wrong format. It helps everyone to get this right.
- Write the feedback in key terms on the flipchart. Find a balance between writing too much, which takes too much time, and too little, which does not capture the essence of the contribution. Write in large clear letters so the audience can see it. Sometimes you will need to check your key terms with the feedback giver to clarify the intent. Try to write from the side, and keep the connection with the audience while you write.
- Stay aware of the time and the number of feedback formats in your program. It is very easy to fall behind schedule and to have to rush at the end.
- Close the session by giving the feedback sheets to the presenter and thanking the contributors.

**Conducting energy flows**

- A key element is to hold “dual awareness”: awareness of the process (time, format, number of contributions) and awareness of the content (writing key terms, getting to the essence of the format, capturing useful feedback). You are always doing both. If you focus too much on the process, the session will feel stifled and artificial. If you focus too much on the content, you will run out of time and have to cut formats.
- Feel the energy of the room. If it is low, speed things up. If it feels rushed, slow down and focus on key elements without trying to capture everything. If people seem unhappy, address the issue. Be aware of emotions, especially those of the presenter.
- You are the conductor of the session, facilitating the outcome and the overall experience. Your confidence, enjoyment and personality – using your own style – are key ingredients for a successful and productive session.