

Questions and answers about language testing statistics:

What is assessment feedback and where can I find out more about it?

James Dean Brown
brownj@hawaii.edu
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

Question:

In the latest issue of the *Journal of Asia TEFL* [see Brown, 2019], you wrote an article about the importance of assessment feedback. While it was informative, your article left me wondering if there is any *research* supporting the usefulness of assessment feedback and where I can learn more about such feedback.

Answer:

The article you referred to was aimed at language teachers across Asia. To answer your questions here, I will provide information and resources that testers and language researchers in Japan might find useful for further understanding and/or investigating the issue of feedback in language assessment. To those ends, I will address the following questions:

1. How can we define *feedback* and specifically *assessment feedback*?
2. What does the literature say about the effectiveness and usefulness of assessment feedback?
3. What resources are available for learning more about feedback and assessment feedback?

How can we define *feedback* and specifically *assessment feedback*?

Richards and Schmidt (2010, p. 217) broadly defined *feedback* as “any information that provides information on the result of behavior.” They go on to define it in teaching terms where “...feedback refers to comments or other information that learners receive concerning their success on learning tasks or tests, either from the teacher or other persons.” Shute (2007, p. i) defined *classroom assessment feedback* as “information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify the learner’s thinking or behavior for the purpose of improving learning.” Brown (2013) explained that assessment feedback can take many forms including “...a score or other information (for example, notes in the margin, written prose reactions, oral critiques, teacher conferences) that can enlighten the students and teachers about the effectiveness of the language learning and teaching involved” (p. x).

In Brown (2019, pp. 334-344), I addressed the following in some detail:

- Why feedback is important in classroom assessment
- The different forms that teacher-feedback, self-feedback, peer-feedback, and individual/group conference-feedback from teachers can take using a variety of feedback tools (including traditional types of feedback, and newer tools like analytic and holistic rubrics, checklists, and praise sandwiches)
- More than twenty different language points that language classroom assessment feedback can focus on
- A variety of strategies that can be used to make assessment feedback more efficient and effective

I concluded that “When all is said and done, it should now be clear that assessment without feedback is not truly assessment. Or put another way, it is important to recognize that, if you are giving feedback, you are doing assessment. It can also be argued that language practice without feedback does not maximally promote learning, which would seem to be a good argument for including classroom assessment (and its inherent feedback) for as many classroom activities as possible” (Brown, 2019, p. 343).

What does the literature say about the effectiveness and usefulness of assessment feedback?

Based on Shute (2007) and others, Popham (2008) argued as follows:

Thanks to this research base, we can say with considerable confidence that teachers should supply students with assessment-based *descriptive feedback*. Descriptive feedback indicates what students can currently do and what they need to do in order to achieve a target curricular aim or master an en route building block related to that aim. Empirical research tells us that such feedback is far more effective in improving student learning than *comparative feedback*, in which a student receives only an assessment-based grade or class ranking. We know enough about the viscera of evidence-based feedback to endorse certain kinds and denigrate others. (p. 114)

Since Shute’s (2007) overview, a number of other overview literature review articles have appeared on the following topics related to assessment feedback:

- The effectiveness of using rubrics for feedback (Cockett & Jackson, 2018)
- The utility of feedback on writing (Li & De Luca, 2014)
- Enhancing assessment feedback (Evans, 2013)
- Assessment feedback methods that synthesize existing methods of assessment feedback while focusing on improvement rather than on performance (Watling & Ginsburg, 2019)

Other recent empirical studies have tended to take different *perspectives* on assessment feedback including:

- Learners’ perspectives if they are taught feedback literacy (Price, Handley, Millar, & O’Donovan, 2010)
- The effectiveness of written feedback from the students’ perspective (Poulos & Mahony, 2008; Lizzio & Wilson, 2008; and Nicol, 2010)
- Teachers’ and students’ views on feedback (Beaumont, O’Doherty, & Shannon, 2011)
- Teachers’ reflections on the efficacy of feedback (Bailey & Garner, 2010)
- An integrated and holistic “360 degree” perspective on assessment feedback (Tee & Ahmed, 2014, p. 579)

What resources are available for learning more about feedback and assessment feedback?

Several online resources address effective strategies for giving feedback in a general way:

- Center for Education Innovation. (2016). Good practices of feedback. Hong Kong: Author. Available online at <http://cei.ust.hk/learner-centered-course-design/learning-assessment/feedback-enhance-learning/good-practices-feedback>
- Crockett, R. (2016). Giving student feedback: 7 best practices for success. Available online at <https://globaldigitalcitizen.org/giving-student-feedback-7-best-practices>
- Evans, C. (2013). Making sense of assessment feedback in higher education. Review of Educational Research, 83(1), 70-120. Available online at

https://innsida.ntnu.no/documents/portlet_file_entry/10157/Making+Sense+of+Assessment+Feedback+in+Higher+Education.pdf/48fec9d2-e779-465c-b352-a93f0a64d971?status=0

- Hattie, J. (1999). Influences on student learning. Inaugural lecture: Professor of Education. University of Auckland. Available online at <https://cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/education/about/research/documents/influences-on-student-learning.pdf>
- University of New South Wales. (2019). Giving assessment feedback. Sydney, Australia: Author. Available online at <https://teaching.unsw.edu.au/assessment-feedback>

Other online resources, closer to home, provide information about rubrics as one form of assessment feedback:

- Brown, J. D. (2017a). Statistics Corner. Questions and answers about language testing statistics: Developing and using rubrics: Analytic or holistic? *Shiken Research Bulletin*, 21(2), 20-26. Available online at http://teval.jalt.org/sites/teval.jalt.org/files/21_02_20_Brown_Statistics_Corner.pdf
- Brown, J. D. (2017b). *Evaluation criteria and rubrics in online courses*. One-hour invited lesson in the Assessment in Online Language Courses series for the National Foreign Language Resource Center, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, Honolulu, HI, 2017. Available from the series website (under Lesson 4) at <https://sites.google.com/a/hawaii.edu/assessment-online-language-courses/schedule-1>; also available from TED-Ed at <https://ed.ted.com/on/7gzI3bES>
- Brown, J. D. (2018). Statistics Corner. Questions and answers about language testing statistics: Developing rubrics: What steps are needed? *Shiken Research Bulletin*, 22(1), 7-13. Available online at http://teval.jalt.org/sites/teval.jalt.org/files/22_01_07_Brown_Statistics_Corner.pdf

Conclusion

In addressing your questions here, I have essentially added to the information provided in the Brown (2019) article on assessment feedback by defining *feedback* and *assessment feedback*; by exploring what the literature has to say about the effectiveness and usefulness of assessment feedback; and by listing some of the available online resources for learning more about assessment feedback. I hope in doing so that this column has addressed your questions adequately and provided you with the information you can use to further explore this important assessment issue.

References

- Bailey, R., & Garner, M. (2010). Is the feedback in higher education assessment worth the paper it is written on? Teachers' reflections on their practices. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 15(2), 187-198.
- Beaumont, C., O'Doherty, M., & Shannon, L. (2011). Reconceptualising assessment feedback: A key to improving student learning. *Studies in Higher Education*, 36(6) 671-687.
- Brown, J. D. (2017a). Statistics Corner. Questions and answers about language testing statistics: Developing and using rubrics: Analytic or holistic? *Shiken Research Bulletin*, 21(2), 20-26. Available online at http://teval.jalt.org/sites/teval.jalt.org/files/21_02_20_Brown_Statistics_Corner.pdf
- Brown, J. D. (2017b). *Evaluation criteria and rubrics in online courses*. One-hour invited lesson in the Assessment in Online Language Courses series for the National Foreign Language Resource Center, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, Honolulu, HI, 2017. Available from the series website (under

- Lesson 4) at <https://sites.google.com/a/hawaii.edu/assessment-online-language-courses/schedule-1>; also available from TED-Ed at <https://ed.ted.com/on/7gzI3bES>
- Brown, J. D. (2018). Statistics Corner. Questions and answers about language testing statistics: Developing rubrics: What steps are needed? *Shiken Research Bulletin*, 22(1), 7-13. Available online at http://teval.jalt.org/sites/teval.jalt.org/files/22_01_07_Brown_Statistics_Corner.pdf
- Brown, J. D. (2019). Assessment feedback. *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, 16(1), 334-344. Available online at http://journal.asiatefl.org/main/main.php?inx_journals=59&inx_contents=675&main=1&sub=3&submode=3&PageMode=JournalView&s_title=Assessment_Feedback
- Brown, J. D. (Ed.) (2013). *New ways of classroom assessment, revised*. Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.
- Center for Education Innovation. (2016). *Good practices of feedback*. Hong Kong: Author. Available online at <http://cei.ust.hk/learner-centered-course-design/learning-assessment/feedback-enhance-learning/good-practices-feedback>
- Cockett, A., & Jackson, C. (2018). The use of assessment rubrics to enhance feedback in higher education: An integrative literature review. *Nurse Education Today*, 69, 8-13.
- Crockett, R. (2016). Giving student feedback: 7 best practices for success. Available online at <https://globaldigitalcitizen.org/giving-student-feedback-7-best-practices>
- Evans, C. (2013). Making sense of assessment feedback in higher education. *Review of Educational Research* 83(1), 70-120. Available online at https://innsida.ntnu.no/documents/portlet_file_entry/10157/Making+Sense+of+Assessment+Feedback+in+Higher+Education.pdf/48fec9d2-e779-465c-b352-a93f0a64d971?status=0
- Hattie, J. (1999) *Influences on student learning*. Inaugural Lecture: Professor of Education, University of Auckland. Available online at <https://cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/education/about/research/documents/influences-on-student-learning.pdf>
- Li, J., & De Luca, R. (2014). Review of assessment feedback. *Studies in Higher Education*, 39(2), 378-393.
- Lizzio, A., & Wilson, K. (2008). Feedback on assessment: Students' perceptions of quality and effectiveness. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 33(3), 263-275.
- Nicol, D. (2010). From monologue to dialogue: Improving written feedback processes in mass higher education. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35(5), 501-517.
- Popham, W. J. (2008). *Transformative assessment*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Poulos, A., & Mahony, M. J. (2008). Effectiveness of feedback: The students' perspective. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 33(2), 143-154.
- Price, M., Handley, K., Millar, J., & O'Donovan, B. (2010). Feedback: All that effort, but what is the effect? *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35(3), 277-289.
- Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. (2010). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics* (4th ed.). Harlow, UK: Longman.

-
- Shute, V. J. (2007). *Focus on formative feedback*. ETS Research Report Series, 2007. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- Tee, D. T., & Ahmed, P. K. (2014). 360 degree feedback: An integrative framework for learning and assessment. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 19(6), 579-591.
- University of New South Wales. (2019). *Giving assessment feedback*. Sydney, Australia: Author. Available online at <https://teaching.unsw.edu.au/assessment-feedback>
- Watling, C. J., & Ginsburg, S. (2019). Assessment, feedback and the alchemy of learning. *Medical Education*, 53, 76-85.

Where to submit questions:

Your question can remain anonymous if you so desire. Please submit questions for this column to the following e-mail or snail-mail addresses:

brownj@hawaii.edu.

JD Brown

Department of Second Language Studies, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa
1890 East-West Road
Honolulu, HI 96822 USA