

## Receiving Meaningful Feedback

There are plenty of studies to show that it's nearly impossible to learn and grow without constructive feedback. Naturally, this is all the more relevant in a training environment as purposeful as an internship or any similar kind of experiential learning.

- **Set Expectations.** Begin by agreeing on a structured review process, be it on a weekly basis or with formal mid-point and end-of-term evaluations. Getting meaningful feedback on an ongoing basis will depend on the interpersonal comfort level you can establish early on. It may take time to learn how to get it. Communicate with your supervisor frequently regarding your work performance.
- **Diffuse discomfort.** Some people simply do not know how to provide “constructive” feedback with enough substance to help you grow. It may simply be a matter of not wanting to hurt another’s feelings, especially if they perceive students to be thin-skinned, even if you’re not. Diffuse this at every opportunity by expressing genuine appreciation, especially whenever you receive the more constructive kind.
- **A positive attitude and professionalism are key.** Always view feedback as an opportunity for growth and development, not as a personal attack. This will keep the lines of communication flowing.
- **Listen actively to understand all aspects.** Paraphrase what is shared. Ask questions to gain understanding. Be mindful of your own and others’ non-verbal behaviors. Try to understand their perspective. Avoid being defensive or dismissive; it’s not a personal attack.
- **Wait not.** Managers often get caught up in the daily grind, leaving little time to devote to being proactive or thoughtful with their comments. This scenario makes the dialogue prone to generic strokes, such as: “You did a good job.” That may be nice to hear, but it’s useless for cultivating development or even skill confirmation.
- **Take the lead.** The best feedback comes when an intern views it as a two-way responsibility by being thoughtful, concrete, focused, and specific in asking for it.
- **Coach it out of your manager.** One of the best ways to elicit feedback is to remove yourself from the equation by avoiding words like, “I,” “me,” and “my.” Instead, you can either depersonalize the question by asking about “the” work. Even better may be to pose the question in a way that puts the same shoe on their foot by asking what they would do in your situation, or how they might have done something differently. In other words, when asking for feedback, present your case as if it's only the other person's problem.
- **Set goals.** Once you have something of merit, take responsibility and the best course of action to improve. Seek resources and guidance for added perspective. If the feedback is less about your technique and more in the way of “criticism,” seek to make constructive changes to the behavior that prompted it. Your supervisor may be willing to follow through to help you find a solution.
- **Demonstrate progress.** Beyond taking the opportunity to express appreciation for constructive feedback, the best way to encourage more of it is to find ways to show you’ve acted on what you learned. That can be a pretty good thing for you, too.