



Effective approaches to whole-class feedback

Mahmoud Dahman

suggests a student-centred approach.

Giving effective feedback at the end of tasks is a vital part of the learning process. It provides a sense of closure, helps consolidate learning and allows the teacher to assess whether students are ready to progress or if further support is needed. Despite its importance, this stage is often overlooked or mismanaged. Some teachers may rush through it without tailoring the type or length of feedback to the task at hand, while others may spend too much time on feedback, leaving little room for the tasks that serve the lesson aims. This article explores practical, student-centred strategies for conducting whole-class feedback more effectively and efficiently.

Choose a feedback method that fits the task

The feedback method you choose should depend on the nature of the task. Some activities – such as reading comprehension questions, vocabulary gap-fills or matching exercises – tend to have clear answers. In contrast, tasks like speaking or writing often allow for a range of valid responses, where variation is expected and acceptable.

A common issue arises when teachers rely on the same feedback technique regardless of the task type. This one-

size-fits-all approach can reduce the effectiveness of feedback and sometimes hinder student engagement. An example of this is the overuse of one of the most traditional methods: nominating individual students to provide answers in an open-class setting. In this approach, the teacher confirms correct responses or invites students to correct wrong answers. While this method is simple and widely used, it tends to be teacher-centred and can disengage less vocal students. It may also become time-consuming, especially when the teacher addresses all the items in a particular task.

Diversify feedback techniques for greater engagement

For challenging tasks, it's often effective to start the feedback stage with peer checking. Have students compare their answers in pairs or small groups before moving to open-class feedback. This encourages active engagement and builds confidence, especially for students who may be unsure of their responses. While students are discussing, the teacher can monitor for common issues or errors. In the whole-class feedback, focus on eliciting explanations for the more difficult items, allowing students to justify their answers. This keeps feedback targeted and meaningful, while reducing the need to go through every answer in detail.

Another useful technique involves inviting a few early finishers to write their answers on the board, especially for tasks with

short, clear answers (e.g. gap-fills). Avoid correcting mistakes yourself right away; instead, wait till all answers are written on the whiteboard, then prompt the class to spot and correct errors. This collaborative process encourages critical thinking and active participation.

Another dynamic way is using student-led nominations, where students call on one another to answer instead of the teacher always leading the discussion. This can be more engaging and encourages equal participation. The teacher can still support as needed, stepping in to clarify difficult items or guide the discussion when necessary.

Finally, audio answer keys can be an effective tool. Some coursebooks provide recorded answer tracks that allow students to check their work independently. After listening to the answers, the teacher can address any difficulties or expand on the most challenging parts of the task.

Balance content and language feedback in communicative tasks

When giving feedback on speaking and writing tasks, it's important to consider two types of feedback: content-based feedback and language-focused feedback. The first is essential – it shows you value students' ideas – while the second is desirable and helps improve accuracy.

For speaking tasks that set the context for the lesson topic during the lead-in stage, content feedback is usually sufficient.

Invite a few students to share their ideas – or even better, ask them to report on their partners' opinions. This encourages active listening and gives the initial interaction a clearer purpose. At this point, focus on the content rather than accuracy. Only briefly address language if you notice a repeated error that could cause confusion or lead to a breakdown in communication.

For more structured communicative activities – especially those designed to practise specific grammar or language structures while speaking – both content and language feedback are important. For example, if students are speaking about their last holidays using the past simple and past continuous, monitor their conversations carefully, noting examples of both effective language use and common errors. Avoid interrupting their fluency to correct mistakes during the task. Instead, collect examples discreetly and use them during the feedback stage to guide reflection and correction.

Always begin the feedback stage with a focus on content. Ask a few students to share something interesting about their partners' holidays. Once students have shared their ideas, move on to language feedback. Write selected examples of both good language and common errors on the board – anonymously – and have students work in pairs to correct the mistakes before discussing them as a class. This keeps students actively involved in the learning process and encourages collaborative learning.

The same principles apply to writing tasks. Whether students are writing a few sentences or a full paragraph, monitor discreetly as they write and collect examples of strong language and common errors. Once the task is complete, begin with content feedback. If the texts are short, ask a few students to read part of their writing aloud and invite class comments. For more active engagement, have students exchange work and provide peer comments.

If time permits, consider turning content feedback into a more interactive experience. You can display the written work around the classroom and have students walk around, read their peers' paragraphs and vote on their favourite based on a clear criterion (e.g. Which

city would you like to visit and why?). This encourages purposeful reading and class involvement.

After content feedback, move on to language focus. Highlight common errors from the task and let students work in pairs or groups to correct them. If you're teaching online, use shared documents (e.g. Google Docs) where students can paste their work, read each other's writing and leave comments.

Finally, keep in mind: when giving language feedback as part of a delayed error correction procedure – after speaking or writing tasks – always present errors anonymously. This helps prevent embarrassment and maintains a supportive classroom atmosphere where students feel comfortable taking risks with language.

How much time should you spend on feedback?

The amount of time you dedicate to the feedback stage should depend on both how students perform during the task and the main objective of the lesson.

If the task is relatively easy and students complete it successfully, keep the feedback stage brief and move on to more engaging or challenging activities. However, if students struggle, the feedback stage becomes a key opportunity for learning. You may need to spend more time clarifying the target language if necessary.

The lesson's aims also play a crucial role in determining how much time to spend on feedback. In a grammar-focused lesson, for instance, if you begin with a listening task to contextualise and expose students to the target language, feedback on this listening task should be kept short. Allow students to quickly compare answers in pairs if needed, then elicit responses or display the answer key to have more time for the grammar tasks that follow.

In contrast, if the lesson aims to develop listening subskills, more time should be devoted to the feedback stage of the listening tasks. If students struggle, you might replay the whole recording, allow further discussion in pairs, or replay some segments of the audio to build their confidence in listening and improve their comprehension strategies.

Final tips and reminders for whole-class feedback

- Encourage peer checking before the feedback stage, especially after challenging tasks. Let students compare answers with a partner or group – this builds confidence and prepares them for whole-class discussion.
- Monitor actively during tasks to identify common challenges – this will help you decide what to prioritise during feedback (see my article on monitoring in *MET*, Volume 34, Issue 4).
- Vary your feedback techniques to keep the process engaging and student-centred.
- Nominate individual students instead of taking answers from the whole class at once. This keeps everyone alert and accountable.
- Focus on problem areas and encourage students to explain or justify their answers to deepen understanding.
- Keep students in their seats during feedback. Asking them to come to the front – whether to answer or role play – can feel intimidating for many. Only do this when there's a clear reason and students have had time to prepare.

Careful planning is essential when it comes to feedback. Many teachers run out of time because they either don't plan the feedback stage or allow it to overrun. To stay on track, plan your feedback with both the lesson's aims and students' performance in mind. Keep it concise for simpler tasks, but allow more time when it directly supports the learning aims. Striking this balance ensures your feedback is purposeful and supports the overall flow of the lesson.



Mahmoud Dahman

is a CELTA and Trinity CertTESOL trainer and Professional Development Coordinator at the School of Languages, Ibn Haldun University. He holds

a BA in English Language and Literature, an MA in Linguistics and the Cambridge DELTA. Email: mahmoud.dahman@ihu.edu.tr