Template for Pedagogically Useful Feedback on Students' Work

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This template models the kind of thinking and communicating with evidence that we expect from students, while it offers useful feedback targeted to the student's needs and stage of learning. Merely identifying errors or weaknesses does not help the student to improve the quality of their work. Helpful feedback will focus a student's attention on strategies to improve the quality of their *subsequent* work.

To focus students more on their learning than on their emotional reaction to a grade or score, two strategies are highly effective: 1) introduce them to the idea that learning involves the growth of neural networks, and persistent learning efforts can increase their intelligence, 2) assure them that safe risks and small failures are expected and essential parts of the learning process.

Providing more feedback than a student needs can be pedagogically counterproductive by overwhelming the student, distracting them from the most important areas for their focus, and derailing their learning progress. Pedagogical responsibility requires a teacher/mentor to select the feedback that will best help the student focus on the top priority actions that will increase their learning and improve their subsequent academic work. Introductory level or novice students usually benefit from adopting 1 or 2 new strategies at a time, while advanced undergraduate and graduate/professional students may benefit from more strategies for improving their work. Pedagogically helpful feedback also prioritizes those strategies.

1. Write a positive or true statement to establish credibility, foster student's receptiveness, including:
    a. Goals of the assigned work that the student approached
    b. Strengths of the work
    c. Specific example(s) to offer evidence of the above statement(s)
    d. Comparison to the student's previous work that identifies a point of improvement or a pattern of error they corrected
2. Suggest strategies for improvement (1 or 2, prioritized, that student can apply to the next assignment)
    a. Specific examples (citing sections / page numbers / URLs / figure numbers / formulas from the students' work)
    b. Questions to push the student's thinking further
3. Optional: Identify a pattern of error in the students' work or a process that the student can control. Cite an authoritative reference that the student can access to learn how to correct the pattern.

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Here is a TILTed summary of the teacher's feedback process:

Purpose:

- Offer feedback on their *current* work that helps students improve their *upcoming* work.

Task:

- Provide feedback on a student's work using the *Template for Pedagogically Useful Feedback* above.

Criteria for the success of teacher's feedback

- Did the student apply your (teacher's) suggested strategies to their subsequent work?
- If not, then meet the student to clarify how your prior feedback might have been applied more effectively to their subsequent work.
- Confirm the student's understanding by asking them to explain the ideas back to you. Ask the student to point to examples where they could apply the feedback to current and future work.

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