

NON-EVALUATIVE FEEDBACK

“What we need most as writers is not evaluation of the quality of our writing or advice about how to fix it, but an accurate account of what goes on inside readers’ heads as they read our words.”

--Peter Elbow and Patricia Belanoff, *Sharing and Responding:
A Community of Writers: A Workshop Course in Writing*

The goal of **non-evaluative feedback** is to provide engaged commentary on writing that avoids surface-level assessment. According to Elbow and Belanoff, we can enact this by **responding as a reader**, and **offering descriptive and analytic feedback**.

Example to avoid: “Your thesis looks great!”

Improved example: “Your new thesis takes a firm stance and provides a sense of what’s at stake. You’ve made a lot of progress since your first draft.”

Descriptive Feedback:

- **Sayback:** Say in your own words what you hear the writer saying as an invitation for further discussion and clarification.
- **Summarizing:** List the main and subsidiary points.
- **Pointing:** Identify which words, phrases, and/or passages stick in your mind.
- **Center of Gravity:** Identify the essay’s “source of energy” or “generative center”
- **The Almost Said:** Ask questions about what is almost said or implied in the essay; identify what you’d like to hear more about.
- **Voice, Perspective, Tone, Diction, Syntax:** Describe each of these features of the writer’s language.

Analytic Feedback:

- **Says/Does:** Explain what parts of the paper *say* in relation to what these same parts *do*.
- **Believing and Doubting:** Imagine that you believe everything argued in the essay, and respond as an ally with more ideas to support the case; then be a devil’s advocate and present opposition.
- **Skeleton Feedback:** List what you see as the essay’s reasons and support, basic assumptions, and audience.

Reader-Based Feedback:

- **Play-By-Play/Movies in Your Mind:** Explain the reactions in your head as you read the essay.

Works Cited:

Elbow, Peter and Patricia Belanoff. *Sharing and Responding. A Community of Writers: A Workshop Course in Writing*. 2nd ed. NY: McGraw-Hill, 1995. Print.