



Fear of Judgment: How Students May Interpret Feedback

As mentioned in the first part, feedback that is critical can make students feel defensive and hinder their ability to improve their performance. However, you may be under the impression that feedback is inherently evaluative, assessing a student's test or paper writing abilities. To challenge this notion, let's examine three concepts that can alter your perception of feedback:

Feedback is not the same as grading

How feedback can be judgmental

Why judgmental feedback does not work

Feedback is not the same as grading

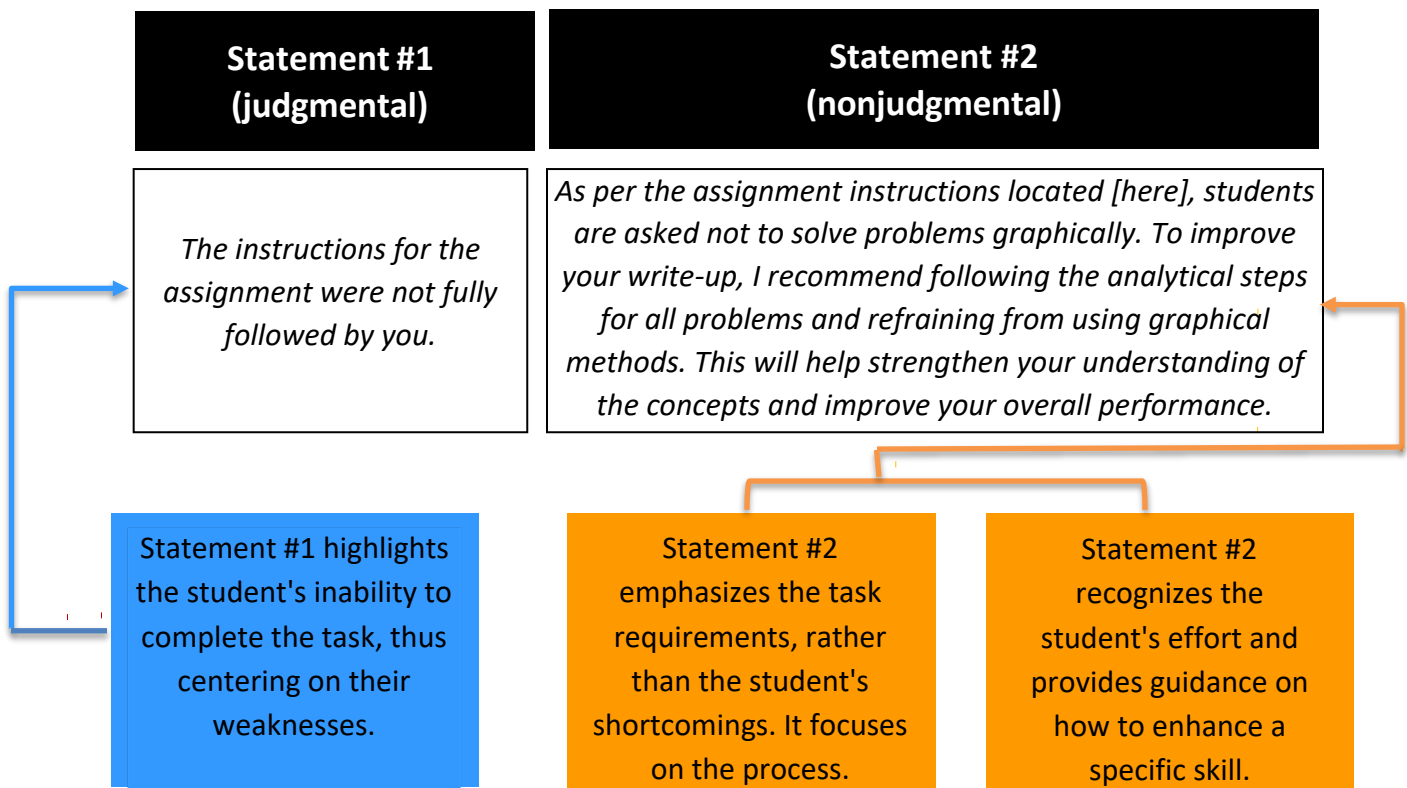
The purpose of feedback is to elevate a student's skills from their current level to a more proficient one, irrespective of their existing skills. The focus is on improvement rather than the student's current abilities. In contrast, grading evaluates a student's performance in the past, scrutinizing their skills at that particular moment.

Although both feedback and grading are crucial, their intended focus differs. While feedback is directed towards future improvement, grading looks at the past performance of the student. The purpose of grading is to evaluate the student's work and assign a score or grade, whereas feedback aims to identify areas of improvement and provide guidance on how to achieve better results. It is important to note that while grading may involve some form of judgment, feedback should solely prioritize constructive improvement.

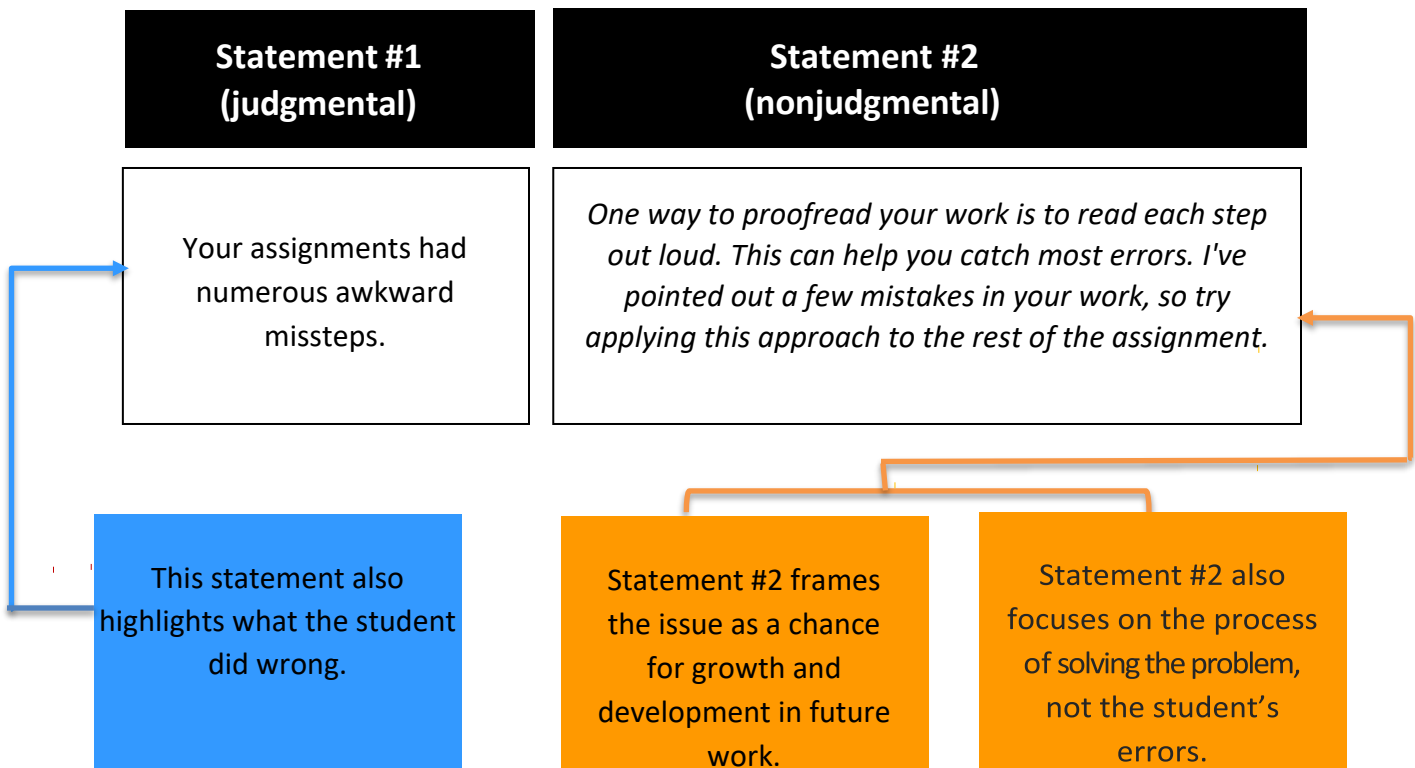
How feedback can be judgmental

The feedback that involves passing judgment may seem obvious. For example, comments like "This assignment is terribly done" or "You're just not getting this" are clearly judgmental. However, some feedback that may seem harmless can be perceived as judgmental. To illustrate, consider these two statements:

Here is one example that illustrates three crucial points:



Statement #1 is judgmental feedback. Statement #2 is nonjudgmental. Here is a second example:



Why judgmental feedback does not work



The student's mind closes off

It is natural for people to feel uncomfortable with being judged. When a student perceives any form of judgment, even if unintended, they may become defensive and less receptive to your feedback.



Your disapproval of the student escalates

When a student is not receptive to feedback, it may be tempting to resort to more critical feedback. However, escalating the level of judgmental feedback typically doesn't work, as the student is likely to become even more defensive.



It inhibits improvement

Judgmental feedback is ineffective. It hinders the improvement of the student's skills instead of promoting it.



It may not provide useful information

Phrasing feedback as "you didn't follow the assignment instructions" does not offer guidance on how the student can improve their work.



It doesn't demonstrate empathy

Extensive research indicates that when educators assist students in addressing and resolving personal life difficulties, it enhances their likelihood of remaining enrolled. It is imperative to acknowledge that students may face life obstacles and disregarding them would not be beneficial.