

Chris Morgan, RMIT Teacher Talks  
Targeted Feedback

### Key Messages

- Activity type should always be considered – if students are developing their fluency, do not correct on the spot but provide delayed feedback on the target language.
- If there is a focus on accuracy (controlled practice), address errors on the spot with individual students discreetly, then share the high-yield (recurring) errors in delayed correction.
- Getting learners to correct themselves is vastly more effective than the teacher doing it – when providing a feedback stage, consider boarding and giving them time to correct errors themselves as part of the lesson.
- Ironically, showing corrections is likely to make learners repeat the errors more, not less. A possible way around this is to only show language you have recast without the original error and drilling it to avoid students only staring at it. If you must show it, use colour to highlight the actual error.
- Students are only likely to retain correction feedback if they approach it as a problem-solving activity. (Robb and Ross, 1986)
- Corrections are likely to be forgotten quickly unless presented as a problem-solving activity.
- Errors that block meaning, rather than form or accuracy, should be prioritized, and here the teacher should take a more direct role, clarifying rather than correcting.
- It is best to give students opportunities to correct themselves when dealing with “mistakes”, through elicitation, clarification requests, repetition or metalinguistic feedback.
- If errors can be identified to a student, students are likely to identify with errors. This decreases motivation, willingness to speak and subsequently hampers opportunities to learn.

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- Errors connected to the target language specifically should always be prioritized, while incidental and “stigmatizing” errors should sometimes be left alone.

Direct feedback is minimally helpful, requires more energy from the teacher than is worthwhile, and unlikely to facilitate language acquisition.

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### Activities

- Rainbow Errors - Present examples of erroneous student language as problems for them to solve in groups (use a colour code to highlight problem types e.g. pron, grammar) in open class feedback. Encourage them to use this in peer feedback.
- Tap Tap – gently tap on a student’s table when they’ve made an accuracy error (only for accuracy focused activities)
- Hall Monitor - Get students to peer monitor for specific things – one student monitors pronunciation, another grammar – play to students’ strengths here
- Error Log - Try to have student’s keep a personal error log so they can identify for themselves what mistakes they’re making. This may be wishful thinking, so consider keeping a class log instead.
- One You Made Earlier - Show students corrections without the errors, then ask them predict what errors they made.
- Future Mistakes - Give students model texts and have them identify grammar or lexis they would likely make mistakes with themselves then practise using it (once they have higher levels of autonomy).
- Dumbed Down - Have students rewrite language so it is less complex and more clear, rather than overcomplicated and confusing. If they are Upper Intermediate, ask them to write at Intermediate level to focus on their accuracy and clarity.
- Wheat from Chaff - Each student must speak for a minimum of two minutes. Then have them repeat the activity stressing they paraphrase what they said before in one minute. Then halve it again to thirty seconds. This will help develop their fluency and focus to convey what really matters most.

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### **Expert Opinions: What Doesn't Work**

“In general the more direct methods of feedback do not tend to produce results commensurate with the amount of effort required of the instructor to draw the student’s attention to surface errors.” Robb and Ross (1986:88)

Cathcart and Olsen (1976) asked a teacher to comply with their students requests to correct every error. The result was students were unable to think clearly and produce complete sentences, indicating that overcorrection prevents students from concentrating on the meaning of the message.

“When correcting errors, students are likely attach their sense of self to their utterances –if an utterance is ‘wrong’, they too are ‘wrong’. It is therefore crucial that teachers make the distinction between the student and the error.” Miele (1982)

### **Expert Opinions: What Does Work**

During fluency practice, teachers should correct only the errors that hinder communication, whereas in accuracy practice, the errors concerning the specific grammatical point of the class, function, vocabulary, and skill should be strictly corrected (Carranza, 2007).

...it’s good practice (sic)...to actively involve the learners in the process of identifying and correcting their own errors, as this approach seems to produce more positive results. (ibid)

50 percent of the time, students were able to self-correct themselves when they made stigmatizing errors if the teacher waited five to ten seconds after they began to speak. (Waltz, 1982)

Focus should always be on the message, not the form. (Krashen 1983)

Teachers should only intervene after stimulating self-correction and peer-correction (Sillig, 2012)