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## How to use feedback, advice and judgement after an exam

Guidelines to enhance the learning process

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## Preface

This research paper is the final product of my master study at the Royal Conservatory. It is meant for those who are interested in how to use feedback, judging and advice during the jury conversation with a candidate and as a teacher during the preparation.

I want to thank the people who helped me writing this report. Special thanks to my coach Susan Williams, who helped me a lot. Thanks Susanne van Els and Martin Prchal for the master circle meetings and thanks to all who had discussions with me about this topic.

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## Abstract

**Name:** Barbara Bekhof

**Main Subject:** Viola

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**Title of Research:** How to use feedback, advice and judgement after an exam

**Research Question:** How can feedback, advice and judgement be used in such a way, that it contributes to the learning process of the students?

### **Summary of Results:**

This research paper is to conclude the study at the Royal Conservatory. This paper answers the question of how to use feedback, advice and judgments during an exam, and during the preparation of it. Feedback is information about how we are doing in our efforts to reach a goal. Important when giving feedback is that the learner is aware of receiving the feedback, and that the comments are objective. Advice is an opinion or recommendation offered as a guide to action. Important when giving advice is that the person receiving the advice is willing to receive advice and understands on what feedback the advice is based. A value judgment is a judgment of the rightness or wrongness of something or someone, or of the usefulness of something or someone, based on a comparison or other relativity. Judgement is an important part of an exam. For students it is important to know what the criteria are, and towards what they have to work to. To understand more of the learning process, different aspects of playing a string instrument are discussed in the fifth chapter. These aspects are technical facility, musicality and performance quality. The different phases in a musician's preparation are discussed in the sixth chapter. From learning the score till mastering a piece. In this research all those aspects are combined to offer a guideline for juries and guideline for teachers during the preparation. Recommended for the examinations of the Royal Conservatoire would be to draw up a set of criteria, which are clear for the students and for the teachers who will grade the students.

### **Biography:**

Barbara Bekhof (1991) first started playing the violin at age 6. From age 12 she attended the external preliminary program of the Royal Conservatoire, where she was taught by Koosje van Haeringen and from 2008 viola with Liesbeth Steffens. After graduating from the gymnasium, she went on to study Building Engineering at the TU Delft, while simultaneously continuing the viola. In 2013 she received her bachelor diplomas for both Building Engineering as Viola. Her masters at the Royal Conservatoire enabled her to go on exchange to the Haute Ecole de Musique in Lausanne, where she studied under the renowned violist Alexander Zemtsov. After her return, she continued her master with Michael Zemtsov, as well as the master Urbanism at the TU Delft.

# 1 Introduction

This research paper is about how to use feedback, advice and judging after an exam/performance, as well during the preparation phase. In many cases these three things are confused with each other, and used in the wrong way. Giving verbal feedback in an inappropriate way can result in reducing the learning process, confidence and motivation instead of enhancing these things. To learn how to play an instrument, feedback, advice and judgments are a crucial part of the process. It is almost impossible to learn music just from books and observing others. As a musician we receive and give a lot of feedback, advice and judgments. From our teachers and to our friends/colleagues and students. Therefore it is important to know how to give feedback, advice and grades in a way that the person you address, will benefit.

This report answers the question of how to use feedback, advice and judging. This is done through looking deeper into these aspects. Furthermore a distinction will be made between the aspect you address, for example vibrato, intonation or musicality, and the phase of learning a piece, someone is in. When you start practicing a new piece it is acceptable when it is not yet perfectly in tune. However, when almost ready to perform it should not be out of tune anymore. The person needs different help in this final stage with solving the intonation problem, than in the beginning.

To answer the question how to use feedback, advice and judging after an exam in order to enhance the learning process, principles of giving feedback will be discussed in the second chapter, principles of giving advice in the third chapter, and principles of judging in the fourth chapter. The fifth chapter will explain the different aspects of playing a string instrument. The sixth is about the different stages that exist during learning a piece and the seventh chapter offers a guideline on how to use feedback, advice and judgement in a jury conversation, so that it enhances the learning process. The eighth chapter offers a guideline on how to use these three methods in different phases during the preparation of an exam. In the last chapter, general recommendations are given for the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague.

## 2 Feedback

A very common situation in music lessons is that there are individual instructions, dominated by the teacher's critique of the student's performance through use of verbal feedback. Recently, critique has arisen of this model within the field of music education (Wulf & Mornell, 2008). Wulf and Mornell even state that aside from the psychological and emotional problems associated with error correction, feedback may be perceived as negative, and the focus is on the judgment of others instead of one's own assessment.

### 2.1 Definition of feedback

In order to answer the question how to use feedback, it is needed to define what feedback is. To describe all kinds of comments including advice, praise, and evaluation, after the fact, the term feedback is often used. But strictly speaking, none of these are feedback.

Feedback is information about how we are doing in our efforts to reach a goal (Wiggins, 2012)<sup>1</sup>. For example, I throw a bowling ball with the aim to knock down the cones, and I see if I hit the cones - they stay up or not. Or I tell a joke with the aim of making people laugh, and I observe the audience's reaction – they laugh loudly or barely snicker. I teach a lesson with the aim of engaging students, and I see that some students have their eyes riveted on me while others are nodding off. Here are some more examples of feedback:

- My colleague tells me, “You know, when you put it that way and speak in that softer tone of voice, it makes me feel better.”
- A teacher comments on a short story I wrote, “The first few paragraphs kept my full attention. The scene painted was vivid and interesting, but then the dialogue became hard to follow. As a reader I was confused about who was talking and the sequence of actions was puzzling, so I became less engaged.”
- A baseball coach tells me: “Each time you swung and missed, you raised your head as you swung so you didn't really have your eyes on the ball. On the one you hit very hard, you kept your head down and you saw the ball with your eyes.

There is a difference between the last three examples and the first three – the bowling ball, the joke and the student responses to teaching. In the first group I only had to take note of the tangible effect of my actions, while keeping my goals in mind. Although no one volunteered to give feedback, there was still plenty of feedback to get and use. In the second group other people were involved, who gave explicit feedback to me.

It doesn't matter whether the feedback was received from other people or just an observable effect. In every case the received information was not advice, or a judgement of the performance. In none of the examples did anyone tell me what to do differently or how “good” or “bad” my results were. Even the example of my reading skills wasn't a judgement. The teacher simply related which effect the reading had on him as a reader. Nor did any of the people tell me what to do. They didn't give me advice.

It is important to realize, that in all six cases, information was conveyed about the effects of my actions in relationship to a goal. This information did not include value judgements or recommendations on how to improve (Wiggins, 2012).

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<sup>1</sup> Grant Wiggins is president of Authentic Education in Hopewell, New Jersey; [www.authenticeducation.org](http://www.authenticeducation.org). He is the author of *Educative Assessment: Designing Assessments to Inform and Improve Student Performance* (Jossey-Bass, 1998) and coauthor, with Jay McTighe, of many books in ASCD's *Understanding by Design* series.

## 2.2 Principles of giving feedback

It occurs, that even when the information is tangible and transparent, the performers don't obtain it. This can be the case when they don't look for it, or because they are too busy performing to focus on the effects. For example, when your student doesn't stand straight, and you tell them to stand straighter, they often protest, because they are too busy with playing the piece to notice that their attitude is changed. Constantly telling them "stand straight" rarely works. The student is too busy with all the other aspects of playing, that they are not listening. This is why in addition to feedback from coaches or other able observers, video or audio recordings can help us perceive things that we may not perceive as we perform (Wiggins, 2012).

Effective feedback should lead to action. Effective feedback is concrete, specific and useful (Wiggins, 2012). Therefore in order to be actionable, feedback must be accepted by the performer. To avoid situations, where an argument occurs, the giver should pay attention to mentions facts, and not judgements. Wiggins uses in his article the example of the supervisor in a class. Instead of stating: many students were bored in class (which is a judgement, not an observation), the supervisor could say: I counted ongoing inattentive behaviours in 12 of the 25 students once the lecture was underway. The behaviours included texting under desks, passing notes, and making eye contact with other students. Offering neutral, goal-related facts is exactly where a teacher or coach can help the student to improve. It can help as well, to ask beforehand to the student what he or she wants you to pay attention to. This pure feedback is often very welcomed. Furthermore it is important to pay as much attention to what went right as to what didn't work (Wiggins, 2012).

There are a number of basic principles to keep in mind while giving feedback. Looking at the definition of feedback from various sources is useful to find good guidelines for musicians. These principles are retrieved from a website for medical students. ("How to Give Feedback," 2012), but are also applicable for musicians.

- Give feedback only when asked to do so or when your offer is accepted.
- Give feedback as soon after the event as possible.
- Focus on the positive.
- Feedback needs to be given privately wherever possible, especially more negative feedback.
- Feedback needs to be part of the overall communication process and 'developmental dialogue'. Use skills such as rapport or mirroring, developing respect and trust with the learner.
- Stay in the 'here and now', don't bring up old concerns or previous mistakes, unless this is to highlight a pattern of behaviours.
- Focus on behaviours that can be changed, not personality traits.
- Talk about and describe specific behaviours, giving examples where possible and do not evaluate or assume motives.
- Use 'I' and give your experience of the behaviour ('when you said..., I thought that you were...').
- When giving negative feedback, suggest alternative behaviours.
- Feedback is for the recipient, not the giver – be sensitive to the impact of your message.
- Consider the content of the message, the process of giving feedback and the congruence between your verbal and non-verbal messages.
- Encourage reflection. This will involve posing open questions such as:
  - Did it go as planned? If not why not?
  - If you were doing it again what would you do the same next time and what would you do differently? Why?
  - How did you feel during the session? How would you feel about doing it again?
  - How do you think the audience liked it? What makes you think that?
  - What did you learn from this performance?
- Be clear about what you are giving feedback on and link this to the learner's overall professional development and/or intended programme outcomes.
- Do not overload – identify two or three key messages that you summarise at the end.



In general, students learn more of focussing on the movement effects, than on the movements themselves.

One of the principles stated to encourage reflection. The feedback that is given in addition to the individual's own intrinsic feedback is called augmented feedback (Wulf & Mornell, 2008). The research related to the effects of this augmented feedback has a long history. There has been a shift in the opinion of the researchers. First, researchers believed that learning did not occur without feedback. They thought that practice without feedback would weaken the representation of movement in memory. They assumed that learning was to be optimized when feedback was provided frequently and immediately (Wulf & Mornell). However, many of the early studies inferred learning from performance during practice. They did not include transfer tests, which are now standard in feedback studies. The findings of those studies have largely refuted earlier assumptions regarding the role of feedback.

Nowadays, feedback is assumed to guide the learner to a correct action. But, feedback also has negative effects. When it is provided too frequently, learners tend to become dependent on it, and they don't make use of their own intrinsic motivation anymore. This effect is particularly pronounced when feedback is provided concurrently with the action, or immediately afterwards. This results in the fact that students fail to develop their own error-detection-and correction mechanisms that would allow them to perform effectively when they augmented feedback is withdrawn (Wulf & Mornell). To make it even more complex, it should be mentioned, that frequent feedback might be required for the learning of complex skills. Frequent feedback appears to be less detrimental for the learning of complex tasks because feedback is generally not as prescriptive as it often is in many simple tasks. To conclude, the likelihood of the learner becoming dependent on the augmented feedback and neglecting the processing of intrinsic feedback might be reduced in complex skill learning.

All those principles should be taken into consideration, when modelling an effective teaching strategy that uses both reduced and delayed feedback. Students should be allowed to play through a piece without interruption. By asking the student: "How do you think you played?" the student will be encouraged to reflect and learn. It is often assumed that mistakes should be avoided at all costs. However, a teacher calling out corrections while the student is playing does not prevent errors. It even may hamper learning when giving feedback immediately afterwards. This is, because the processing of performance is disrupted, resulting in poorer mental representations; the student does not learn to judge his or her own performance; and movement stability necessary for learning is reduced. Furthermore it is important to keep in mind that the performance being evaluated is only a temporary result and not necessarily a sign of learning. This could mean that the student receives feedback that may be confusing or counterproductive to the learning process. In contrast, using feedback sparingly and providing it only after the student has had a chance to process his or her intrinsic feedback, could result in more effective learning (Wulf & Mornell, 2008).

## 3 Advice

The three statements underneath are not feedback, they're advice. In this chapter a distinction will be made between these two.

- You need to lift your first finger more.
- You might want to use a different branch for your A-string.
- You should have written down your fingerings and bowings.

### 3.1 Definition of advice

To make a distinction between feedback and advice, we now look at the definition of advice. According to the online dictionary advice is: “an opinion or recommendation offered as a guide to action” (Dictionary.com, 2015). This definition automatically leads to some basic principles on how, and when to give advice.

The three examples at the beginning of this chapter are advice. Such advice can be, when given out of the blue, unhelpful and annoying. Unless advice is preceded by descriptive feedback, the natural response of the performer is to wonder, why this is suggested (Wiggins, 2012).

According to Wiggins, it happens too often that coaches, teachers and parents jump right to advice, without first ensuring that the learner has sought, grasped and tentatively accepted the feedback on which the advice is based. The result of this, is that the students become increasingly insecure about their own judgement and become dependent on the advice of experts. It also leads to panic about what to do when varied advice comes from different people or no advice is available at all (Wiggins, 2012).

### 3.2 Rules for giving advice

One can ask an expert for advice, but also as a friend. Even if you're not a professional in a certain topic, friends can ask you for your advice. The basic principles are the same.

#### Give advice with permission

As a teacher, you may recognise a problem that a student is dealing with. But also as a friend you often think you know how to improve their situation. In both situations, ask the student (or friend) if they want your ideas on how to improve the situation. This way, they have the possibility to reject, and they'll likely give you more attention when they've agreed to take your help (Frattaroli, 2014).

#### Be honest

It can happen, especially when you are a starting teacher, that a student has difficulties with something and you don't know how to solve it. It's ok to not know everything. Tell the student that you are not sure, and advise them who to go to. Or, alternatively, discuss the problem with another teacher, and tell your student this.

#### Avoid judging

If a friend comes to you for help, he or she feels probably already pretty vulnerable. They're trusting you to hear them out without you judging them. This is actually not different in the case of a student teacher relationship. Especially teenagers are very insecure about how they are playing. It's better not to start your advice with “you should have” or “why didn't you....?” It is better to focus on what they can change right now. Phrases like, “it might help to consider...” work very well, especially when combined with the teachers support along the path (Frattaroli, 2014).

### Make it a collaboration

As a teacher you have a certain role towards your students. However, the role of being the person who has to figure out alone exactly what someone should or can do, can come off as superiority, which mostly isn't the intention. This can be avoided by for example starting with: "I don't have all the answers, but I'd love to help you figure out what's right for you." You can then talk for a few minutes, give your thoughts on how to improve, and bring it then back to the student with "What are your thoughts about that?" (Frattaroli, 2014).

### Offer long-term support

It can happen that a student plays his piece for you and is making all kind of small mistakes. Most likely they don't need you to fix every mistake, but are in need of general support. It can help to tell them that it's ok if they make a mistake and just focus on the positive things, so they feel supported.

### Don't make promises

Every person is unique and so is every situation. You can't guarantee a specific outcome, even if you've been there before. A student can enter a competition as well prepared as the winner of last year but still not win. It is important to keep the expectations of the student realistic by focussing on possibilities within the realm of uncertainty. When something is a risk, make sure the student is aware of this. The possible outcomes have to be weighed both positive and negative, so the student can decide whether taking the risk is worth the potential reward. In the case of a competition, there is the chance on winning a prize, but also the chance of disappointment and the resulting demotivation (Frattaroli, 2014).

## 4 Judgement

### 4.1 Definition of judging

“A value judgment is a judgment of the rightness or wrongness of something or someone, or of the usefulness of something or someone, based on a comparison or other relativity” (Sporre, 2014).

The following comments make a value judgement:

- Well done!
- You didn't play well.
- I give you a 7 for your performance
- I'm so happy with the way you played it.

The student/musician is being rated, evaluated, praised or criticised. There is no feedback here and no actionable information about what occurred. As performers, we only receive the information that someone else gave us a low or high evaluation on what we did (Wiggins, 2012).

These comments are not feedback, but value judgements. Sometimes this is necessary, for example after an exam. “Assessment is a central element in the overall quality of teaching and learning in higher education”(James, McInnis, & Devlin, 2002). The jury has the task to give the candidate a grade. But to enhance the learning process of the candidate, the jury can add some feedback as well. This can be done, for example, by adding observations after a statement of value (Wiggins, 2012). For example: Well done, I noticed that your sound had a much bigger tone than before, and that your gesture was much more open than it used to be.

### 4.2 Rules for judging

As for giving feedback and advice, also for making judgements basic principles are required. Enhancing the assessment can enhance learning. Well-designed assessments set clear expectations, establishes a reasonable workload, and provides opportunities for students to self-monitor, rehearse, practise and receive feedback (James et al., 2002). “The relationship between assessment practices and the overall quality of teaching and learning is often underestimated, yet assessment requirements and the clarity of assessment criteria and standards significantly influence the effectiveness of student learning”(James et al., 2002). James et al explains that carefully designed assessment contributes directly to the way students approach their study and therefore contributes indirectly, to the quality of their learning. James et al made a checklist for quality in student assessment for assessments in Australian Universities. A selection of principles applicable for musicians is presented here.

- The judgement (assessment) is treated by teachers and students as an integral and prominent component of the entire teaching and learning process, rather than a final adjunct to it.
- The multiple roles of assessments have to be recognised. Assessment requirements can have a powerful motivating effect on students.
- Between the expected learning outcomes, what is taught and learnt, and the knowledge and skills assessed a clear coherence should exist.
- Assessment tasks are designed to assess relevant generic skills as well as subject-specific knowledge and skills
- There is a steady progression in the complexity and demands of assessment requirements in the later years of courses.
- Excessive assessment is avoided. Assessment tasks are designed to sample student learning.
- Grades are calculated and reported on the basis of clearly articulated learning outcomes and criteria for levels of achievement.

- Students receive explanatory and diagnostic feedback as well as grades.

(James et al., 2002)

#### 4.3 What students value in judgements

The goal of studying is to learn. Therefore it is important that students learn from exams, and with that, the judgement. In his research discusses James three elements that students value in assessments. These aspects are general, but to a certain extent, applicable for music students.

##### Unambiguous expectations

For students it is important to know what they are working towards. When they know what is expected from them, they study more effectively. Transparency in the way their knowledge, and in our case, skills are assessed, is something that students value, but also expect. In “normal” studies they wish to see a clear relationship between lectures, practical classes, tutorials and subject resources. In the case of the music student, this isn’t much different. Off course the study path is very focused on individual development, but when you have for example an orchestra part exam, a specific checklist for that exam could give clearness. Students also wish to understand how grades are determined and they expect timely feedback that explains the grade they have received, rewards their achievement and offers suggestions for how they can improve.

##### Authentic tasks

Because students study to gain knowledge, they value assessment tasks they perceive to be real. For the student the goal of an exam is not to receive a certain grade, but for the nature of the knowledge and skills they are expected to demonstrate. They want to be taken seriously. Students value exams they believe mirror the skills needed in the workplace. For the example of the orchestra part exam, this would be the audition itself. In general, students are anxious to test themselves and to compare their performance against others.

##### Choice and flexibility

In “normal” studies many students express a strong preference for choices in the nature, weighting and timing of assessment tasks. “This preference for negotiated assessment is a logical extension of the trend towards offering students more flexible ways of studying and more choice in study options” (James et al., 2002). Because the path of every musician is already very personal, it could be the question if there is any need for this as well, or if it would be the other way around (finally something fixed?). The advantage of a flexible schedule, is that the student can arrange his schedule in such a way, that the overall workload is spread out. However, this does not always mirror the reality of a professional.

(James et al., 2002)

## 5 Different aspects of playing a string instrument

Many different aspects play a role in playing an instrument. These different aspects require different feedback methods. Therefore a distinction will be made between aspects that address technical facility, musicality and performance quality.

“A great performance is the result of diligent lesson preparation” (Gourley, 2003). The goal is to present a concert. To successfully achieve that goal we must create instructional objectives that logically progress to the fulfilment of our goal. Gourley (2003) explains that: “one cannot perform music unless one has developed musical skills. Tone production, intonation, rhythmic proficiency, technical facility, tonguing or bowing proficiency, understanding music symbols, phrasing and musicality must be mastered before we can expect the composition to be masterfully performed. We need to ask ourselves what the music requires of the musician and create a sequential pedagogical skills development curriculum to achieve these goals”(Gourley, 2003).

### 5.1 Technical facility

“A major roadblock musicians encounter is an inability to get around the notes” (Gourley, 2003). Gourley explains that in order to realize the composer’s art, musicians must possess adequate technical facility. “Fluidity is the result of long-term practice and cannot be adequately realized in the three or four weeks prior to a performance” (Gourley, 2003). He added to this that the fingers need to have eyes and ears of their own. Over time, a musician’s ears will develop the ability to identify a tonality and his fingers will follow along creating a sort of musical intuition.

Aspects of technical facility for a string player are:

- Rhythm and sight reading
- Finger speed
- Bow articulation
- Control of vibrato
- Tone

This last one, tone, is a major aspect for the experience of music. “Tone is the most important skill in musical performance. All the right notes, terrific technique and flawless rhythm are useless if the audience cannot stand the sound from the ensemble” (Gourley, 2003). Tone is formed by intonation, resonance, vibration and articulation.

These facets are influenced by the following techniques (adjusted to string players):

- The speed of the bow
- The amount of hair
- The amount of pressure
- The place of the bow, at the frog or near the tip
- The place of the bow, at the bridge or near the fingerboard
- Your posture
- The string you are playing on, so the relevant fingering
- Direction of the bow
- Position of the left hand

## 5.2 Musicality

Musicality has to do with audiation: the perception of sound. The term audiation is coined by Edwin Gordon in 1975. He explains that through audiation we give meaning to sound as music and it involves an understanding of the music, “audiation is the ability to hear and to understand music for which the sound is not physically present. ... It is neither imitation nor memorization”(Gordon, 2001).

“Audiation is to music what thought is to language.”

“Music is the result of the need to communicate.”

“Audiation is what is communicated.”

(Gordon, 1999)

A musical person is able to sing the music, make gestures with the music and is able to play the music in more than one version (Williams, 2014).

Components of musicality are:

- Pulse awareness
- Understanding of style
- Being able to play together
- Timing
- Phrasing
- Rhythmic vitality
- Being able to play in tune

## 5.3 Performance quality

The third category is performance quality. Although there is overlap between the categories of musicality and technical facility a distinction has to be made.

Facets that belong to this category are:

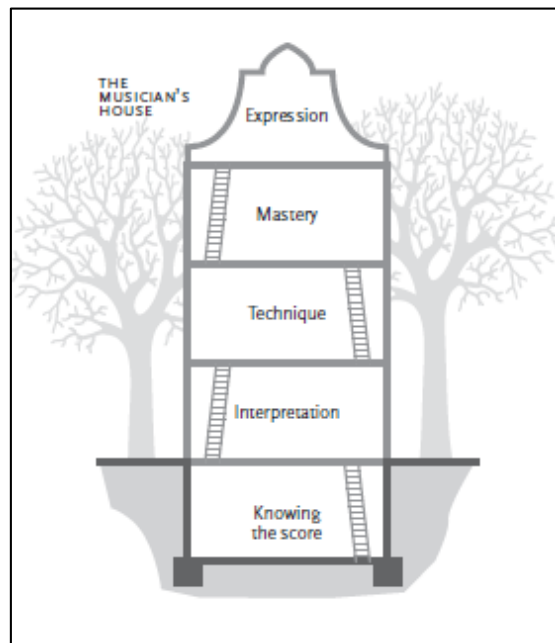
- Communication among the members of the ensemble (e.g. leadership and listening)
- Confidence, a performance should be both convincing and purposeful
- Interest; the degree to which a performer holds the audience’s attention, maintains a sense of direction, creates a sense of occasion and ends the work convincingly.
- Projection of interpretative, expressive, and structural features of the composition performed.

(Williamon, 2004)

## 6 Different phases in a musicians preparation

When learning a piece, musicians go through a lot of different phases, from looking at the score for the first time till the last performance. The different phases requires different feedback and therefore the different phases will be explained in this chapter.

In Making music, practicing and the brain Wieke Karsten discusses the musician's house. This is also an elective at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague, where Wieke Karsten teach this subject. This illustration offers a guideline for what to practice. She explains that practicing repertoire, which is regarded as the basement, can be done by thoroughly studying the score. "Then little by little students can move up to the roof" (Karsten, 2013). "The House offers opportunities for running down and up the stairs again, as practicing on the higher floors may generate new ideas for working in the basement and on the lower floors and vice versa"(Karsten, 2013).



(Karsten, 2013)

Karsten explains that a large part of practicing is learning the score, developing an interpretation and being able to perform the music (including technical challenges) at a high level. This is called a learning process: "new connectivity in the brain is needed to be able to do so" (Karsten). But performing is more than learn --> play --> result. Otherwise we would play exactly the way we have practiced, and that is not the case. Next to executing the score, performing is about being flexible on the spot (Karsten). Musicians respond to other musicians (when playing chamber music). Furthermore musicians want to play with spontaneity and sensitivity to the acoustics of the hall and they want to bring over emotions and to communicate with the public (Karsten). Karsten explains that musicians slightly change their sound projection, timing, colouring, dynamics, vibrato and articulations during a performance. In order to be flexible, musicians need control of their muscles (which is what making music is), directed by their imaginations and use of their senses and expression. This is what happens in the higher floors of The Musicians House: mastery and expression.



## 7 Recommendations for juries

In the previous chapters different aspects have been discussed. Verbal tools to use after an exam are feedback, advice and judging. They all can contribute to an enhanced learning process of the student. However, to be able to do so, they should be used correctly. The principles that are discussed in this paper can offer a guidance of how to use them correctly. In this chapter I will discuss my personal recommendations for the teachers at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague of how to facilitate the verbal response to the students after their exam.

I would like to make a distinction in the type of exam that is addressed. In the bachelor and master students have exams that measure their improvements, have orchestra parts exams, chamber music exams and final exams.

I will start with some general aspects that are of importance for the verbal reaction on a student's exam.

Feedback must be given sensitively and appropriately (Parsloe, 1995). It is easy for those who are giving feedback to take the relationship aspect of their roles for granted, particularly if the teacher has been working with their students or some time (p. 149). Students are often dependent on their teachers, and it is easy to dismiss issues of organisational power and authority that often underpin work relationships. This is particularly important when the organisational culture is bureaucratic, hierarchical or results oriented. The music education at the Royal Conservatoire is hierarchical. Students look very much up to their teachers. Music is more than just a study, therefore music teachers at the Royal Conservatoire receive high regard from their students. This influences the feedback. Feedback should be clear about the expectations and aiming to develop a supportive, relaxed and informal environment. It is also about having respect for the person giving feedback (Parsloe, 1995).

Formal feedback, as you may call the verbal feedback after an exam, should not contain any surprises for the students. Especially not, when their teacher is in the committee, and they have received ongoing feedback during the preparation ("How to Give Feedback," 2012).

Prior to a formal feedback session, a few actions have to be taken.

1. Ensure the student is aware they are to receive feedback, so clearly define the purpose of the feedback session prior to or at the outset of the session.
2. Collect any information you need from other people.
3. Summarise the feedback and ensure you know the positive aspects and areas for improvement are listed (with supporting evidence).
4. Make sure you know how the feedback relates to the learning programme and defined outcomes

### 7.1 The final bachelor or master exam

When students perform at their final exam, they are expected to master their pieces. They are situated in the highest floors of the musician's house of Karsten. It is very likely that the students are extremely well prepared for such an important exam. Not only do they receive their diploma that day, it is also their chance to show their friends, family and colleagues what they have learned during their studies. They can show their musicality, their gained technical level and their gained performance level. You can imagine, that after such an exam, students are not always willing to listen to more advice. Advice after an exam can feel useless, because the exam has already taken place. I recommend to ask the student if he or she wants general advice, and if yes not to mention too many different aspects. I would rather focus on the feedback and assessment. As explained in chapter 4 judging, it is very important for students to know the criteria. Explaining the student what grade he or she got, by using these criteria, can help them accepting a disappointing grade, and make them even happier with a high grade. Feedback can be utilized during the discussion of these criteria.

One of the principles of feedback was: feedback should be given privately where possible. Because this is not possible after an exam, I would recommend that teachers reserve a moment as soon as possible after an exam, to discuss the feedback very extensive, privately.

From personal experience, the principle of asking the student how he or she thought it went, is not always the best options, especially when a large group of jury members is sitting in front of him/she. It can feel like a trick question. This would work much better during the preparation, privately with the teacher or after an exam with only a smaller committee of familiar teachers.

## 7.2 The Technical Orchestra parts Exams

The orchestra parts exam is different from the other exams, because it assess a specific skill: playing orchestra parts. It is also special, because it already mirrors a bit how an audition in real life looks like. My recommendations would be mostly about the defining of the grade. Currently there is no list of criteria available. The judgment is not an integral component of the teaching process. Because of this, not so much subject-specific knowledge is being judged, but more relevant generic skills. This way, someone with a high general level, will always pass the course, even if this student didn't prepare that well. With a clear list of criteria, this can be avoided.

## 7.3 Chamber Music Exams

In this type of exams, students have to collaborate. This means that different study years, new combinations etc. will work together. It is again very important that a list of criteria is available, so the grade can be granted that doesn't raise questions. The conversation with the committee can be used to explain the grade more. Furthermore this type of exam would be very suitable to use for reflective questions. Also advice could be useful, especially when the members of the ensemble are planning to play more often together. As well for individuals as for groups, an interactive approach is deemed to be most helpful. This helps to develop a dialogue between the students and the members of the committee and builds on the student's own self-assessment, it is collaborative and helps students take responsibility for their own learning (Al-Taïar, 2014).

## 7.4 Interim exams

During the bachelor and master at the Royal Conservatoire, students have multiple interim exams. Two in their first year, one at the end of the second and third year. To enhance and structure the learning process, I would recommend, to have a list of criteria that students have to achieve, in order to get a certain grade. This list should become more and more complex for higher education years. It should be stated very clear what will be assessed, and what is expected of the students. Do they receive a grade for their improvements? Or for their level? Or their effort? This should be all taken into account with the criteria list. The list could pay special attention to the three aspects of playing an instrument: technical facility, musicality, and performance quality, discussed in chapter 5.

Because it is an interim exam, the students are not done after an exam. Most important is the feedback for the student. In 1984 wrote Pendleton a model for giving feedback (McKimm, 2013), that would be very suitable in this occasion:

Pendleton's rules:

1. Check if the learner wants and is ready for feedback.
2. Let the learner give comments/background to the material that is being assessed.
3. The learner states what was done well.
4. The observer(s) state what was done well.
5. The learner states what could be improved.
6. The observer(s) state how it could be improved.
7. An action plan for improvement is made.

## 8 Recommendations for teachers

In the previous chapter, recommendations are given for members of the committee of an exam. At the Royal Conservatoire, the teacher of the student is always in the committee. The teacher sees the student weekly and they work intensively on a study program. These lessons are the preparation for the exams. Also here feedback, advice and even judging play an important role in enhancing the learning process. In this chapter I will look into the role that these three elements can play during the preparation phase.

### 8.1 Teacher's Toolbox

The guidelines for giving and receiving feedback during the preparation phase, are the same as mentioned in the chapter feedback. An example will be discussed here, of what a teacher can do and not do during a weekly music lesson.

Giving feedback do's (Deanery):

- Establish the student's agenda
- Get the student to start with what went well – the positive
- Teacher starts positive– however difficult it may seem
- Comment on specific aspects of the consultation – i.e. in history taking
- Active listening (eye contact, stance etc.)
- Use of silence
- Clarifying
- Responding to cues (verbal, non-verbal, psychosocial)
- Summarising
- Empathising etc.
- Move to areas “to be improved” (avoid the term “negative”!) – follow the student's agenda first
- If in a group, ask other students to comment – but remind them “No criticism without recommendation” · Teacher offers own observations & constructive criticisms
- Be specific
- Always offer alternatives
- Begin with “...I wonder if you had tried”, “...perhaps you could have...”, “...sometimes I find....helpful...”
- Distinguish between the intention and the effect of a comment or behaviour
- Distinguish between the person and the performance (“what you said sounded judgmental” – rather than “You are judgmental”)

Giving feedback – don'ts

- Don't forget the student's emotional response
- Don't criticise without recommending
- Don't comment on personal attributes (that can't be changed)
- Don't generalise
- Don't be dishonestly kind – if there was room for improvement be specific and explore alternative approaches

One of the principles of giving feedback was to only focus on things that can be changed. Technical facility and performance quality are aspects that students have to learn. Musicality is an aspect that can be developed, but only to a certain extent. This means that after the student is accepted at the Royal Conservatoire, teachers should focus on this anymore.

Vassilas and Ho (2000) describe a structured approach to make sure that both teachers and students know what is expected of them during a feedback session. This model summarises the key points for problem based analysis and gives feedback to groups.

1. Start with the agenda of the students
2. Look at the outcome of what the feedback session is trying to achieve
3. Encourage self-assessment and self-problem solving first
4. Make sure everyone is involved
5. Use descriptive feedback. Make sure the feedback is balanced (what worked and what could be done differently).
6. Suggest alternatives
7. Rehearse suggestions and while doing this, be supportive
8. At the end, structure and summarise what has been learnt.

This method for groups is more likely to motivate adults to learn. Teachers start with the learner's agenda and ask them what problems they experienced and what help they would like. Then you look at the outcome that they are trying to achieve. Next you encourage them to solve the problems and then you get the students and eventually the whole group involved ("How to Give Feedback," 2012).

Remarkable is that that none of the methods mention the word advice. This is something to keep in mind, when teaching. Advice should be used only occasionally, and always with permission. Also judging is completely left out. Apparently this doesn't contribute to the learning process. It should be used only when necessary, in this case, the exams.

To conclude I would like share a letter of F.G. Campos, that he wrote in his book *Trumpet Technique* (Campos, 2005, p. 165). He explains the role as a teacher in a way I strongly agree with.

*"Teaching the trumpet is a difficult task. The development and refinement of high-level psychomotor skill is a slow and frequently frustrating process. We teachers rely on our personal experience, training, and intuition to solve the problems that come into the studio each day. Every student has a unique pattern of physical and mental characteristics that must be explored and understood in order to properly prescribe workable solutions for the obstacles that halt forward progress. Not every ailment has an immediate solution, and a diagnosis may be a shot in the dark until more is known. For most situations, patience is the order of the day.*

*The ability to demonstrate on your instrument the desired musical product, even without uttering a single word of instruction, is generally regarded as an extremely important qualification of a fine teacher, but not every artist can teach. How we choose to teach is every bit as important as what we teach. Noting that there are many different ways to teach successfully, I would like to explain some of the principles that are the foundation for the way I work. The wonderful teachers to whom I owe so much shared these ideas with me, and now I pass them on to you.*

- *"It is my job to help you to become the best musician you can be." I am committed to helping you realize as much of your potential as possible during our time together. I will address your problems individually, giving each of you what you need to take the next step on your own path.*
- *"You are the only teacher you will ever have." I am a coach, a guide, a resource, or any number of roles according to your needs, but you must spend the time in the practice room required to apply what we have discussed in the lesson. Knowing about the trumpet intellectually is not the same as knowing it as reflex in your muscles and nerves. I cannot teach you how to play – you must do it alone. There are no shortcuts.*

- *“We learn through a process of imitation and trial and error.” Musical expression is best learned through the imitation of that which we strive to become, so we must closely study the greatest practitioners of our art and apply the pertinent aspects of their lives and work. Experimentation with new techniques and ideas rarely leads to success immediately, so you must try over and over, modifying your approach until you succeed. Learning cannot occur without failure – there is no other way.*
- *“Repetition is the mother of all learning.” Complex psychomotor skills acquired through repetition. One of the most important aspects of high-level skill is the ability to perform a task with no conscious mental effort. This is called automaticity, and it can only be gained through repetition. The most efficient and effective method of learning any physical task is by repeating it slowly and perfectly until it is automatic.*
- *“It is not the instrument we must master, but ourselves.” We must diligently address our areas of weakness and not blame any person, thing, or condition outside of ourselves for our inability to improve. Knowledge of our strengths and weaknesses is essential to growth, as this shows us where we need to direct our energies for maximum benefit.*
- *“I won’t take credit for your success or your failure.” I will play an important part in your growth, but you will do all the work and you are solely responsible for the outcome. I am proud of my students, but I will never claim credit for their successes, nor will I accept responsibility for their failures.*
- *“Take what you can use and leave the rest.” I do not have all the answers, but I ask that you make a good-faith effort to apply the gestures we have discussed. If they don’t work for you, we’ll try something else. If you come across other ideas that are more effective, by all means use them, but running from one new thing to another without a sincere attempt at application will only lead to frustration.*
- *“Give without thought of reward.” We can never really thank those who have helped us become what we are today, but we can pass on, in the same spirit, all that they have shared. Do not think that you will be given reward, credit, or even gratitude for your work with a student. Do it with love. There is no greater way to honour your teachers.*

(Campos, 2005, p. 165)

## 9 Further recommendations

In the chapters recommendations for juries and teachers is written how they can use feedback, advice and judgment. An important element that comes back all the time are the criteria for judgement. At this moment exams at the Royal Conservatoire are not judged according to a list of criteria. A big opportunity arise here, to enhance the learning process of the students. I would strongly recommend to draw up a list of criteria. I know that at this moment there is already taken some initiative to draw up such a list, but I would recommend to make it very specific. This “assessment sheet” should be different for different types of exams and different study years. Aspects that should be taken into account are for example the technical facility, musicality and performance ability, but also the specific aspects that are being assessed. A student should not be able to pass an exam on his general level. The specific aspects of that course should always be one of the criteria. Furthermore it should be clear, to what extend the progress is being judged, the effort and the general level.

In general I would recommend every teacher to read now and then the principles of giving feedback, advice and judgements through. Fantastic musicians, are not necessarily psychologist or even pedagogics, and therefore it is easy to forget about these small things, that can actually make a hug different in the learning process of the students.

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