

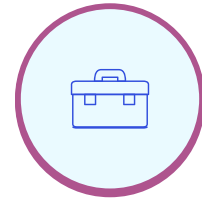


# THE TOOLKIT

A collection of resources designed to provide practical tools for women and non-binary undergraduate students.

## Giving Constructive Criticism

Constructive criticism (as opposed to destructive) is the process of offering opinions on the work of others that are both valid and well-reasoned. The most effective constructive criticism involves both positive and negative comments delivered in a friendly manner. Constructive criticism can provide people with a new perspective and help them grow both professionally and personally - it offers people a chance for improvement. The value of constructive criticism is so high, it's incredibly important to deliver it effectively. In this issue of The Toolkit we'll take a look at the best way to deliver feedback.



**"GROWTH AND  
COMFORT NEVER  
COEXIST."**

- GINNI ROMETTI | FORMER  
CEO OF IBM

# Tips & Tools

1

**Use the feedback sandwich.** The feedback sandwich refers to the popular method of giving constructive feedback - positive-improve-positive. When giving feedback begin by focusing on strengths, what you like about the subject in question, then provide the criticism, what somebody could improve upon, then end with a reiteration of the previous positive comments and the positive results that you can expect when the feedback is acted on.

2

**Focus on the situation, not the person.** Constructive criticism is only effective when it isn't intended nor appears to be targeted at the person receiving it. Detach the situation from the person, you're critiquing an action, a situation, a behavior rather than the person. Try using a passive voice rather than an active one - "the presentation you used was a bit wordy" versus "you were wordy in your presentation". You can also share how it affects you rather than focusing solely on the negative - "the words on the slides made it a bit more difficult for me to focus on what you were saying".

4

**Give recommendations on how to improve.** The purpose of constructive criticism is to spark growth and improvement, providing recommendations on how somebody can take action on your criticisms will ensure this happens. Recommendations will ensure that the person receiving criticism understands exactly what you're talking about and has an idea of what steps they can take to improve - "If there were fewer words on the slides it would be easier for the audience to focus on what you're saying. Perhaps you could pull out key words and phrases or substitute the paragraphs with graphics."

**EXAMPLE:** *That was a really great presentation, I like how you told a story and kept the audience engaged. However, I thought there was one thing that could be better. I think if there were fewer words on the slides it would be easier for the audience to focus on what you're saying rather than reading the slides. Overall, this was great! I loved the story you told and I was engaged the entire time. I think if you could reduce the words on the slides it'd make for an even more engaging presentation.*

3

**Be specific.** Rather than giving vague feedback that skirts around the real issue, try being as specific as possible - "the additional words on the slides made it more difficult for me to focus" versus "I had a hard time focusing during your presentation". The more specific the feedback the more actionable it is - if the only feedback a presenter received was that the audience had trouble focusing they wouldn't know how to make improvements. Try breaking your feedback down into key points and give specific examples of each point - what are the exact situations or examples where the person exhibits the behaviors you highlighted?

Tips inspired by - "[How to Give Constructive Criticism: 6 Helpful Tips](#)" by Celes | Personal Excellence

## Further Reading

"[15 Ways to Offer Truly Constructive Feedback](#)" by Forbes Coaches Council | Forbes

"[Giving Constructive Criticism - That Won't Make Anyone Cringe](#)" by Jennifer Winter | The Muse

"[How to Give Creative Feedback: 9 Tips for Constructive Criticism](#)" by MasterClass | MasterClass

## Note from the Author

*The ability to effectively give constructive criticism is integral for developing both teamwork and leadership skills. When working in teams or when supervising people, if you can't give feedback that will help people improve not only will those who need the feedback suffer, you will too. Unfortunately this skill isn't something you can read a Toolkit about and \*snap\* you've mastered it. This is something you practice over and over again until you've honed it. I recommend practicing with your peers in a low stake environment and/or making note every time you receive feedback you particularly appreciated. Don't worry if you don't get it right away, as long as you work at it you'll do great! - Sam Collins, MA.*