What to do about student comments in eVALUate.

Every student who completes an **eVALUate** survey has the opportunity to comment in three locations,

- comments associated with the teaching of their unit (feedback on teaching)
- experiences in the unit that were helpful (feedback on units)
- experiences in the unit needing improvement (feedback on units)

Analyzing the data

- **Focus on one area at a time**

  Read one set of comments at a time, for example, review the comments related to student satisfaction, then all the comments on helpful aspects, etc. This will allow you to focus on one topic at a time.

- **Group the comments by theme**

  Try assembling the comments into thematic groups as a rough guide to frequency and the range of responses to an issue. You can do this by (see examples below):
  - Highlighting related comments in the same colour
  - Copy and paste into the same column of a spreadsheet
  - Record frequency of similar comments

- **Once all the comments have been organized, compare them to the quantitative data**.

  Examine the comments for any relationship with the forced-choice data noting the relative frequency. Two comments about poor readings could be balanced against an rating of 80% agreement that 'learning resources helped me to achieve the learning outcomes'.

Keeping perspective

- **Consider that positive comments tend to be genuine**

  The anonymity of student surveys usually indicates that students won't provide anything positive unless they mean it.

- **Negative comments need to be considered with caution**

  Normal human behavior often means that negative comments are taken to heart, regardless of how few there may be. Try to consider objectively what is being said and determine if there is a relationship with the overall quantitative data. Look for the positive action that you can take. Remember you have more information and control than the students.

  If you feel comments are unprofessional or abusive, review them with a colleague or seek assistance from a Faculty T&L leader. Students are expected to behave professionally in giving feedback and can be counselled if their feedback breaches the Deakin code of conduct.

- **Student negative commentary may not be due to you or their area of study**

  Students may be experiencing any manner of influences, both positive and negative in their lives and this will affect how they will comment. It may have nothing to do with you.

- **Contradictory student comments**
  - o Student feedback often produces contradictory comments. Check the relative frequency of positive and negative comments on the same theme.
  - o Are comments really contradictory or do they reflect different aspects? For example, individual texts may be very helpful but a long list could be confusing for some students.
- **Different approaches to teaching and learning**
  - o Learners have different approaches to learning that may or may not align with your teaching approach. This can appear as contradictory comments. Aim for a range of learning experiences to cater for all students.
  - o Students who are new to university study may have difficulty adapting to your expectations or to independent learning. Look for indicators for confusion and check students' self-rating. What can you do to help the students become more capable and confident?.

Simple data analysis

1. **Colour coding** comments allows you to scan through comments quickly. In this example:
   - Orange for assessments
   - Blue for lecture materials
   - Green for positive comments
   - Purple for negative comments

In spite of one strongly negative comment, the green outweighs the purple. Lecture materials and exams are both areas of importance to students.

Helpful Aspects	Needing improvement
Assessments are adequate. Appreciate unit content/material looking at different areas of <discipline> as well as common theories. Exam provide a good insightful assessing of different core areas.	Maybe a bit more of a focus on definitions, ideas and terms for us to use in the exam, even if it is just an additional resource which students can use to collate different definitions and terminology for better understanding or explanation.
PowerPoint access; Engaging tutorials; Group work; Discussion board	Do not continue to employ the lecturer.
The detailed exam briefing guide really helped me thoroughly prepare for my exam, and gave me a sense of ease about it.	More quizzes to help students by testing them on what they know.
The content during the lectures was really easy to understand and was very interesting. As a first year student I found the exam briefing paper really helpful.	If some topics were described in more depth before examples were used to ensure that we understand the content and not just in the context of the example provided.

2. **Coding and frequency**

Gather comments on a theme together in a table/spreadsheet and review the balance.

Theme	Helpful	Needs improvement
Assessment	• Assessments are adequate • Exam provide a good insightful assessing of different core areas • The detailed exam briefing guide really helped me • I found the exam briefing paper really helpful	• More of a focus on definitions ideas and terms for us to use in the exam • More quizzes to help students by testing them on what they know
Content	• Appreciate unit content/material looking at different areas of <discipline> as well as common theories • Content during the lecture was really easy to understand and was very interesting	some topics <were> described in more depth not just in the context
Teaching activities	PowerPoint access; Engaging tutorials; Group work; Discussion board	Do not continue to employ the lecturer.

3. Summary table

For large classes with many comments, collate themes/actions as you review and note frequency

Comment/item	Helpful	Needs improvement
Assessment guides useful	2	
More formative assessment		1
Provide content in context		1

Reflection

When reflecting on the **eVALUate** scores and comments, consider the following:

- Are the student evaluations relatively consistent?
- What stands out? How representative are the comments?
- How does the student comments compare to other information you have about the unit and the teaching?
- What's happening in the classes and seminars that could result in this type of commentary?
- What's effective, what needs improving?
- Does the commentary tell you something clearly, or is it confusing and disjointed?
- Does your opinion of your teaching match that of your students?
- What new insights have you gained from this?
- Do you need to improve something in your teaching? If so, what do you want to improve and what can you do to improve it?

If you found the student remarks in the eVALUate survey upsetting, you may find support through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), a counselling service available to all Deakin staff. Unprofessional comments may be reviewed by the Dean of Students for follow up.

For further information concerning the eVALUate survey, please contact Deakin Learning Futures

Or, email, evaluate@deakin.edu.au