

## Feedback: A Key to Skill Development

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Do any of these sound familiar: "Golly, Janice. What are you thinking out there? Molly made a perfect set and you spiked the ball right into the net. Get your head into the game!" or this: "That's the way to run-block Mike. Good balance and foot position!" or this, to Donny who just missed a ground ball: "Hey dummy, how many times have I told you to get your glove down on the ground?" All of the folks making these statements have good intentions. They are trying to help Janice, Mike, and Donny perform their skills better. But not all of them are using good techniques for providing feedback to athletes. They should think a little more about what the purposes are for giving feedback and how feedback should be given.

Feedback can be given to accomplish three purposes: 1. error correction, 2. motivation, and 3. reinforcement. Note that error identification is not listed. Error identification information should only be included in feedback statements when it is used to set up the skill correction information that is coming immediately. Let's face it, most athletes know when they have made a mistake. They really do not need to be reminded of the mistake; they need help to fix the problem. That is what error correction feedback is meant to accomplish. The athlete is given information that will help them perform the skill better or execute a strategy more properly. Feedback can also serve as a form of motivation by giving direction to future attempts at the skill. It can help athletes focus their efforts and also lets the athlete know that you care about their level of performance and want to help them improve. Feedback serves as a form of reinforcement by providing athletes with information about their progress towards goals that they are trying to achieve.

Although we often use the term feedback in a very broad sense, it is worth noting that there are many different forms of feedback. There are two categories of feedback: 1. sensory feedback and 2. augmented feedback. The sensory feedback category includes that information that is produced by the movement itself. Most commonly we refer to how the movement "feels" when we talk about sensory feedback, but information such as sounds produced by the movement and visual information such as seeing where the ball went, are included in this category. The athlete gets sensory feedback every time they do a movement but they need some other source of information to provide the augmented feedback. Augmented feedback can be information about what happened as a result of the movement (Knowledge of Results) or how well the movement was done (Knowledge of Performance). This information often comes from the coach but can also come from a wide variety of sources, even mechanical devices such as stop watches, video tape and so forth. As its name suggests, augmented feedback is meant to add information to the sensory feedback the athlete already has available. Using both types of feedback is essential to skill development.