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8 Tips on Getting Great Feedback on Your Latest Draft

Writing can be an individual sport until you need feedback on what you've written and then it can be become the ultimate team event; these 8 tips can help you get great feedback on your latest draft.

1. **Know what you want from your reviewer**

   You know that you need another set of eyes on what you've just written but what kind of feedback do you really want? A complete edit of your draft or just a quick look? Some detailed comments or just a couple of suggestions? Are you even targeting the right people for this kind of feedback? Be explicit about what you want to make the best use of everyone's time and expertise.

2. **Communicate your expectations**

   What expectations do you have for the feedback? Should it cover style and structure or consistency against set standards and guidelines? Or do you need marketing feedback to make sure you have the audience and company message squarely in your sights? Or does this need to be technical feedback to make sure you have covered the concepts correctly. You might even need all of this feedback from the same piece. Remember, you will not get the same read from everyone, you need to communicate your expectations for each reviewer.

3. **Set the ground rules**

   Feedback on content need not cover format and style feedback need not cover content. Will you be pointing reviewers to specific areas? Inserting questions directly into your draft so reviewers can answer them in context? Or other notes for them to look at? Or do you not expect to have any questions as you want the content to stand on its own? Will your reviewers get a chance to see the next draft or is it a one-shot deal? Do you need lots of people to look at little pieces or one person to look at it all? Do you expect to talk with them afterward to talk about the comments? Give reviewers these details so they know what they are looking for.

4. **Know how your reviewer prefers to work**

   People work differently. I've had project teams want everyone in on a review where ordered pizzas and locked ourselves away for days. While another group had one person do the reviews and all her feedback was done in red pen. While you might have a specific picture in your head on how you would expect reviewers to work, let them choose how they want to work and you'll actually get better results. Do you want feedback as comments in the text or marked up hard copy or communicated in a meeting format? The ultimate approach you take should depend on how your reviewers want to work. While the comments and feedback are all about you, how you get them is all about the reviewer so make it as easy for them as possible.

5. **Give people the back-story**

So you have been thinking about this project for weeks. You have about 6 versions of an outline and extraneous paragraphs stuffed into obscurely named files. But does your reader know what the project is all about? Are they part of the project team and know you are working on the Security Guide for the next software release? Or know there is a meeting next week and you are doing the keynote slides? Or that the company really has a blog and you are doing content that touches their area? You have to give people the context within which to review your work. Without that, it's nearly impossible to get feedback that will help you to create a better product.

6. **Remember your deadline**

Writers need deadlines. Otherwise things would never get done. So, when you figure in the review time, and then the time to make corrections and perhaps another round of reviews, are you still on target to meet your deadline? And don't surprise anyone with a request to review your draft just hours away from your deadline. Give people realistic expectations on when you need comments back to you; if you respect their time you will get a better response.

7. **Respect your reviewer's time**

Reviews that you can use take time. Really. And, more than likely, longer than you think it should. A review is not like just reading something; reviewers have to process the text to do their jobs. And then it takes time to get the answers or comments together. Don't be impatient. If you did set your deadlines correctly you've already built the time for reviews into the overall project from the start. Pressure reviewers to complete their feedback faster than they have time for and you'll be disappointed in the results.

8. **Use their feedback or tell them why you aren't**

You went through all this trouble and work to get a reviewer's help, now use their input to give you a better draft. Or meet with (or mail) them to talk about the feedback. They put in all the work you asked them to do and then their comments seem to fade away. It is, after all, your name on the piece (or at least your internal reputation) so you might actually have a case to make the work completely yours. But, you might want to use this resource again so you want to make sure you respect their comments. You might want to thank them, as well. Again, it's easier to go back to a source when you were very professional about the work.