feedback someone could use.



01 / THE DECISION

Help the next version exist

Feedback is useful when the maker can do something with it. "It needs more energy" may express a real reaction, but it leaves the writer guessing where the energy is missing and why that matters. "Make the headline bigger" gives an action but may solve the wrong problem. Both can produce a revised file without producing better work.

Begin with the assignment and the specific encounter the work creates. What should somebody notice, understand, feel or do? What does the current version make likely instead? Point to the moment, sentence, relationship or missing information that led to your concern. The maker can then investigate the problem rather than trying to imitate your taste.

This guide helps you write a small set of useful notes and agree how the next version will be reviewed. It is not a script for sounding kind while avoiding a difficult verdict. You can say that an idea fails the brief. You need to show where that judgment comes from and leave a workable route forward.

The standard applies to praise as well. "Love it" does not tell the team what to preserve. "The silent pause makes the character's decision clear; keep that pause while repairing the end frame" protects something concrete. Useful feedback gives the next version a direction and a memory of what already works.

02 / LOCATE THE FAILURE

Do not polish the wrong layer

A review can go wrong because it attacks the easiest visible detail. It is simple to debate colour, wording or the size of a logo. It is harder to decide whether the idea answers the assignment. Check the level of the problem before prescribing a change, or the team may spend a day making the wrong answer look more finished.

+ Assignment: the work is answering a different audience problem or communication job. Return to the agreed decision before revising execution.
+ Idea: the central action does not make the intended relationship visible. Develop a clearer mechanism rather than adding explanatory copy to everything.
+ Execution: the idea is sound, but timing, hierarchy, performance or wording prevents it from landing. Protect the idea while repairing the encounter.
+ Delivery: a required fact, destination, service provision or production constraint is wrong or missing. Identify who can confirm it.
+ Preference: you would personally choose another style. State that honestly and decide whether it is relevant to the agreed objective.

Several levels can be involved at once. Prioritise the change that unlocks the others. There is little value in perfecting a film's final line if the audience cannot follow the preceding action. There is also no reason to replace a good concept when a readable date and clear next step would solve the actual failure.

03 / WRITE THE NOTE

Make your reasoning inspectable

A strong note usually contains a location, an observation, an implication and an intended repair. That is a writing aid, not a compulsory sentence formula. Use enough detail for the maker to understand the concern without turning the review into a defence of your own authority.

01 Locate it: identify the frame, line, page or stage of the experience. Avoid a general verdict when the failure occurs in one specific place.

02 Describe what happens: say what you can actually see or hear. Separate that from your interpretation of how an audience might respond.

03 Connect it to the job: explain why the observation matters to this brief. If the effect is uncertain, name the uncertainty rather than describing it as measured fact.

04 State the change needed: clarify the outcome the next version should achieve. Offer a possible solution as an option when it is not mandatory.

05 Protect what works: name the element that should survive so that the repair does not accidentally remove the strongest part of the execution.

For example: "In the last frame, the date is smaller than the decorative caption. A viewer may miss when the event happens. Please make the date and booking step readable at the intended size. Keep the image's empty space if possible; it is helping the central object stand out." The note is direct without claiming audience evidence you do not have.

04 / WORKED EXAMPLE

From a reaction to a usable diagnosis

> INVENTED TEACHING CASE
>
> A fictional museum is promoting a clay-making session for children aged eight and above. The poster and all review comments are teaching material.

The draft poster shows a pair of clay-covered hands beside an unfinished creature. Its large line is "Small hands. Big discoveries." A small paragraph names the workshop, Saturday at 10am, the age range and the requirement to book. The creative intention is to show that visitors make something themselves.

Unhelpful note: "It feels a bit young. Make it more premium and exciting." This mixes a possible age concern with two undefined style preferences. Another weak note says: "Change the headline to Make a museum piece." That might be a useful line, but it does not tell the maker what problem the reviewer is trying to solve.

A more useful note

"The hands and unfinished creature make participation visible; keep that relationship. The headline could describe almost any children's activity, and the workshop description is difficult to find. Please make clay-making the first clear promise, with the age range and booking step easy to read. Explore a more specific line before changing the entire visual style. Check the hands and object against the intended age group; I cannot tell from this rough whether the activity looks too simple."

The note separates a visible communication weakness from an uncertain audience interpretation. It also gives the maker room to find a stronger line.

05 / REVISE AND REVIEW

Agree what the next version must resolve

A possible revision

The maker keeps the clay-covered hands and unfinished creature. The new headline is "Make a creature from clay." The support reads: "Saturday, 10am. For ages 8+. Reserve a place for the museum's clay-making session." In this invented scenario the details are confirmed. The booking destination sits beside that instruction. The decorative caption is removed to give the information space.

This revision is more explicit, but it is not the only good answer. A more surprising line could work if the image and supporting information still make the activity clear. The reviewer should judge whether the stated problem is resolved, not whether the maker copied the reviewer's preferred sentence.

Close the first review with a short agreement: protect the hands/object relationship; clarify what visitors make; improve the event information; check the age impression with relevant people. Assign the factual check to the programme owner and the execution to the creative team. The next review can then focus on those decisions instead of restarting the entire conversation.

When new feedback appears, ask whether it is a newly discovered problem, a changed requirement or a preference that was not raised earlier. All can be discussed, but they have different implications for time and scope. A useful process allows correction without pretending that every late suggestion was part of the original brief.

06 / TRY IT

Translate the vague note

Invented exercise: a short video promotes a community garden open day. It shows tools, soil and close-ups of plants, then displays the garden name. The brief is to invite first-time visitors to try a planting activity. The feedback says, "Needs more humanity and a stronger call to action." Rewrite that as two prioritised notes. Avoid dictating a complete replacement film.

A model response

"First, the current sequence shows the materials but not what a visitor can do. Please make the planting activity visible through a person's action, so a newcomer can picture joining. Keep the close detail of the soil; it gives the activity a tangible quality. A hand making the first planting hole is one possible way to do this."

"Second, the end frame names the garden but gives no date or joining instruction. Add the confirmed open-day details and the required booking or arrival step. We need to check that information with the organiser before deciding the final frame's timing."

These notes identify two different failures and preserve an existing strength. The first allows creative interpretation; the second requires verified information. They are more useful than "add a person and a button", which gives two surface changes without explaining what they must achieve. Compare your version against the same test: could a maker propose a different repair and still satisfy the note?

07 / WORKSHEET

The next-version agreement

Use one sheet for the most consequential issue. If there are many comments, agree priorities before handing them over. The worksheet should help the maker understand the work to do, not become a record of every opinion expressed in the room.

What is the agreed job, and what currently works?

Where is the problem, and what can we actually observe?

What effect do we expect, and what remains uncertain?

What must the next version resolve, with which boundaries?

Who owns the revision and factual checks, and how will we review it?

08 / KEEP THE REVIEW USEFUL

Candour needs a workable relationship

The quality of a note depends partly on the conditions in which it is given. A junior maker may hear a casual suggestion from a senior person as an instruction. State whether you are naming a required outcome, offering a possible route or expressing a preference. Do not expect someone to infer the difference from your tone.

+ Review the work at the appropriate stage. A rough needs judgment about the idea and sequence; it should not be punished for lacking final production polish.
+ Let the maker explain the intention after people have encountered the work. That explanation can clarify a choice, but it does not erase what the execution actually communicated.
+ Challenge the work without attacking the maker's character, effort or competence. Bluntness is not a substitute for precision.
+ Keep the number of priority notes proportionate to the next revision. State which issue matters most when instructions compete.
+ Allow the maker to propose another solution and explain how it addresses the concern. Preserve responsibility rather than turning the team into operators for the loudest reviewer.

A collaborative review does not mean every decision is made by vote. Someone still owns the assignment and someone owns the creative execution. Their responsibilities should be explicit. When a concern cannot be settled by inspection, agree the evidence that would help rather than repeating positions.

Your next action is to rewrite one vague note into a specific diagnosis, an intended outcome and a strength to preserve. Then check whether the recipient can tell you what they will investigate.

READING / PRACTICE / CONTEXT

Where the thinking starts

The methods, teaching scenarios, exercises and worksheets here are original synthesis. The books below inform particular decisions; their authors do not endorse this guide. Page references locate the supplied PDF editions and may differ from printed page numbers.

Ed Catmull with Amy Wallace / Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration

PDF pp. 63-67; contributor credit p. 3

Candour, iteration and the director's responsibility for solutions informed the review relationship. This guide adapts those concerns to everyday creative feedback; it does not reproduce Pixar's process or promise its results.

Pete Barry / The Advertising Concept Book

PDF pp. 9-11

The separation of conceptual strength from finished appearance informed reviewing the right layer and judging rough work appropriately. All feedback examples and the worksheet are original.

Make the tools your own

Read the worked example, try the exercise before its model response, then use the worksheet on a real assignment. Print the worksheet at 100% or annotate a copy digitally. Check your actual product facts, audience context and production conditions before applying the advice.

THATCOPYADDICT / AHMED MOUSTAFA ELSHERIF / 2026