

Research Paper Feedback and Outcomes

By Don Sutherland

Each semester, I assign my BBA 407 Strategic Management students a research paper in which they are asked to analyze a company's environment, industry, competitive position, and resources; develop and evaluate two strategic options aimed at improving its long-term competitive position; and, recommend one of the options and explain that decision. The paper offers an opportunity for students to apply course concepts and analytical frameworks to the challenges and opportunities of an actual company. Students may work individually or in small groups (2-3 students).

The rubric used to grade the papers incorporates such attributes as the problem (or opportunity) definition, students' ability to determine the extent of necessary information, their use of information to accomplish the purposes of the paper, the robustness of their strategic options, and the strength of their recommendation.

Students receive initial feedback based on their outlines. Afterward, students are encouraged to submit working drafts of their papers for additional feedback aimed at helping them develop an effective paper and to assure that they address all of the paper's required elements.

In theory, students' taking advantage of the opportunity to receive feedback should produce better overall papers. To test that assumption, I compared the outcomes for papers for which earlier drafts had been submitted for feedback (35% of all papers) with those that did not receive feedback.

The results were as follows:

	Individual Paper	Group Paper
Mean difference from papers that were not submitted for feedback (25-point scale)	+3.4 points	+8.0 points
% of papers receiving feedback with scores above the mean figure for those that were not submitted for feedback	75%	100%

The research papers that had previously been submitted for feedback were qualitatively better than those that had not received prior review. Feedback resulted in higher scores for students who worked individually on papers and for those who worked in small groups. The "benefit" of feedback was larger for the small group efforts, possibly hinting that group synergies may have amplified the benefits of feedback.

These outcomes will be shared with the students in my fall 2015 class. This data may encourage additional students to submit early drafts of their papers for review.

Nevertheless, many students may still opt not to take advantage of the opportunity for feedback. Therefore, I will develop a research paper template over the summer and provide my fall 2015 students with that template. This template would be designed to provide students with a framework that would better structure their research, analysis, and writing. All students will be required to complete and submit their templates with their papers.

If the template is effective, the scoring advantage for papers receiving feedback should narrow. In addition, the average score on papers for which no feedback was received should increase from the spring 2015 averages, even when adjusting for the strength of the incoming class.