



# BURDENS, BADGERING AND BURNOUT: FEEDBACK AS EMOTIONAL LABOUR



WARWICK

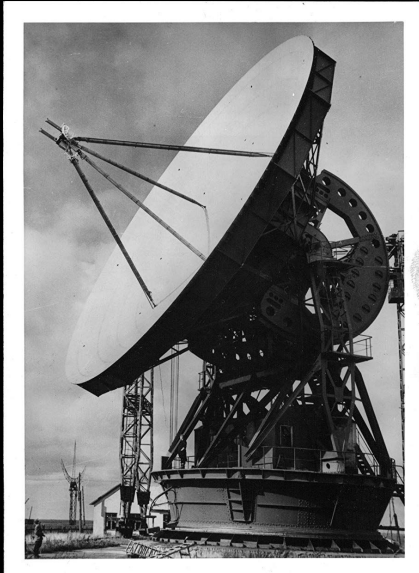
Warwick Education Conference 2019 / 14.05.19 / Dr. Peter Fossey / [p.j.fossey@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:p.j.fossey@warwick.ac.uk)

## Introduction:

“[I]n addition to dealing with the [criticism] itself, people must also contend with the implications... for their self-esteem, and sometimes these two responses are in conflict... For example, people can dismiss the validity of negative feedback by rejecting it as inaccurate or biased”

(Nussbaum and Dweck 2008, p.599)

## Introduction:



“[W]hen messages are transmitted from a sender to a receiver, the receiver’s role is as crucial as the sender’s, and involves decoding, interpreting, and responding to the message”

(Winstone et al 2017, p.2026)

## Introduction:

“Academic work, in a culture of growing focus on evaluation and presentation, is itself very much focused on emotion-work”

(Rietti 2009, p.57)

“[T]eaching staff, in higher education, are expected to perform emotional labour in order to achieve the dual outcomes of customer (i.e., student) satisfaction, and profit for the management”

(Constanti and Gibbs 2004, p.243)

Question:

If feedback is less effective than we hope  
because criticism is hard to take,  
then why does formative assessment help?

## Why emotion work?

Opens up questions like:

- Who ought to bear the burden of doing that work?
- What factors make the work more difficult?
- What can we do to minimise the work required, or make it easier?
- What happens if we don't?

# 1. The emotion-work framework

“Why is the emotional experience of adults in daily life as orderly as it is? Why, generally speaking, do people feel gay at parties, sad at funerals, happy at weddings?”  
(Hochschild 1978, p.552)



# 1. The emotion-work framework

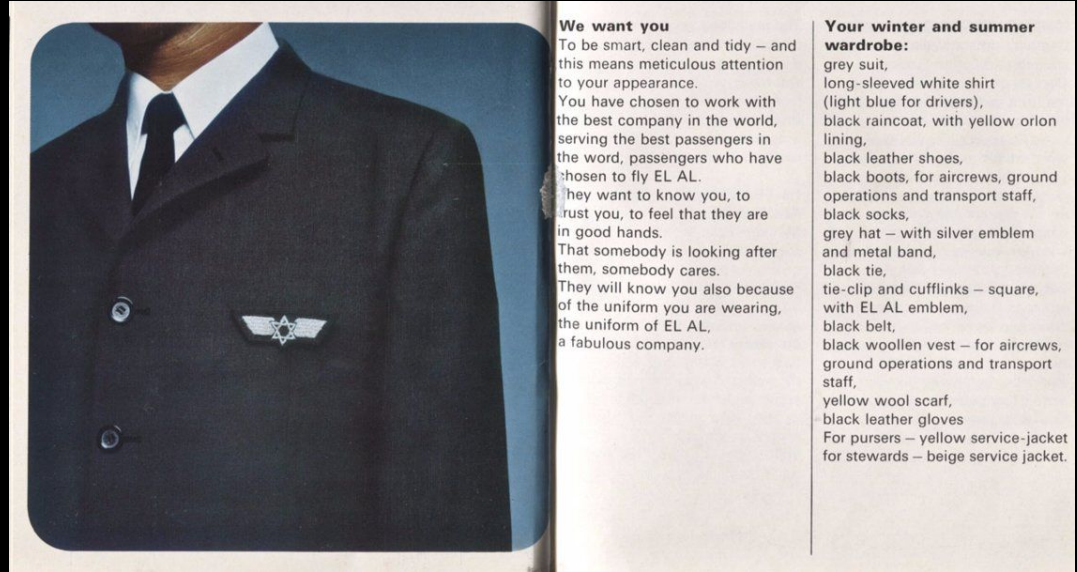




# 1. The emotion-work framework

“They want to know you, to trust you, to feel that they are in good hands. Somebody is looking after them; somebody cares.”

El Al Israel instructions for flight crew, c.1970



# 1. The emotion-work framework



Difficult passenger



Feelings of annoyance



Display of courtesy

# 1. The emotion-work framework

Situation

Emotional  
Experience

Emotional  
Display

Difficult passenger

Feelings of annoyance

Display of courtesy

# 1. The emotion-work framework

## FRAMING RULES

Situation

Difficult passenger

## FEELING RULES

Emotional  
Experience

Feelings of annoyance

## DISPLAY RULES

Emotional  
Display

Display of courtesy

# 1. The emotion-work framework



Emotional Response

Discrepancy  
Emotion-work



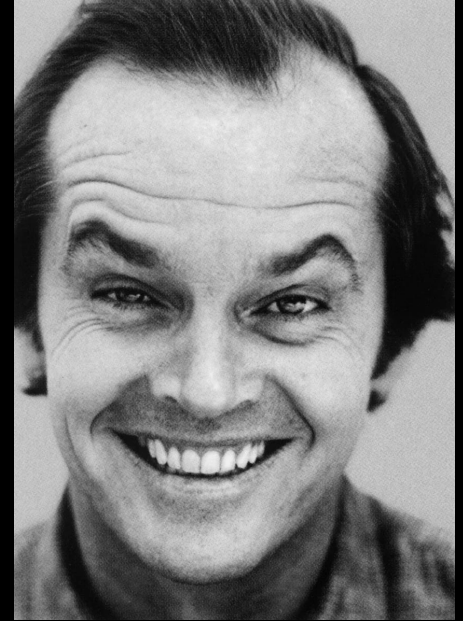
Expression

# 1. The emotion-work framework



**Surface acting:**  
suppress felt emotions,  
focus on conforming  
behaviour to display rules

**Deep acting:**  
work to conform felt  
emotions to feeling rules;  
allow display to follow  
without effort



# 1. The emotion-work framework

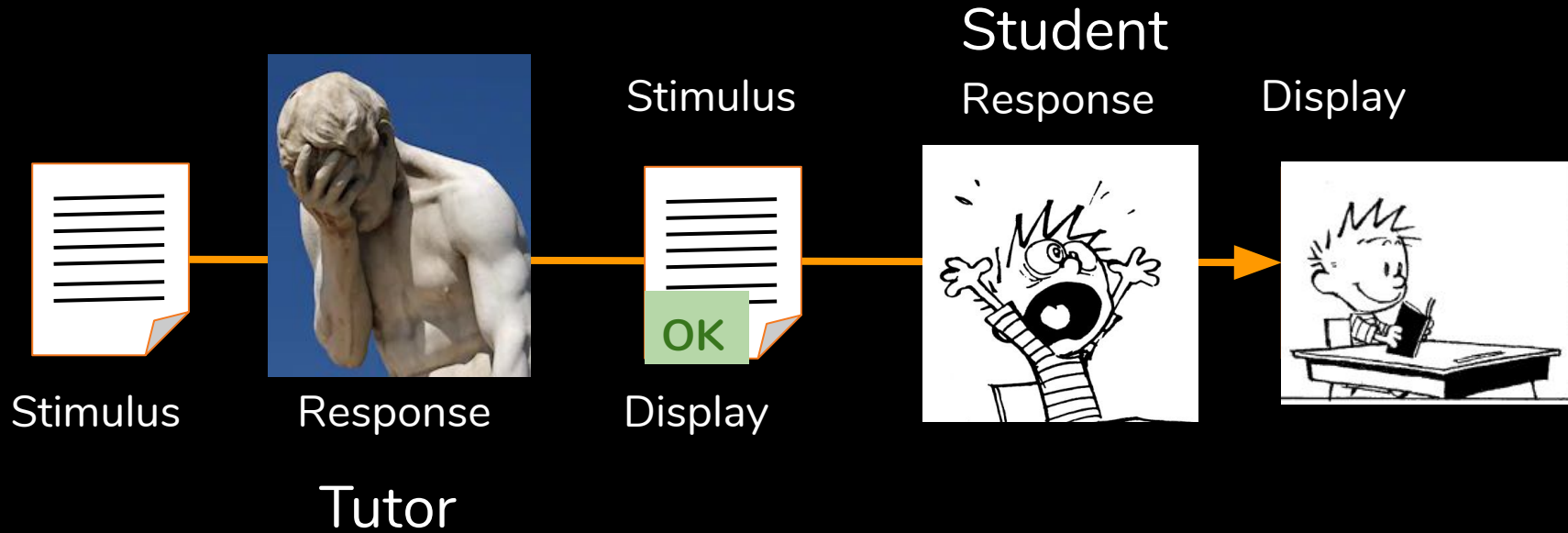
“[Surface acting] is related to lower job satisfaction, lower general well-being, and an enhanced risk of burnout and other indicators of strain”

(Semmer et al 2015, p.47)

“[I]f people construct a social reality that exceeds their emotional capacity to sustain it, they will either breach the reality (and experience emotional deviance) or try to escape it”

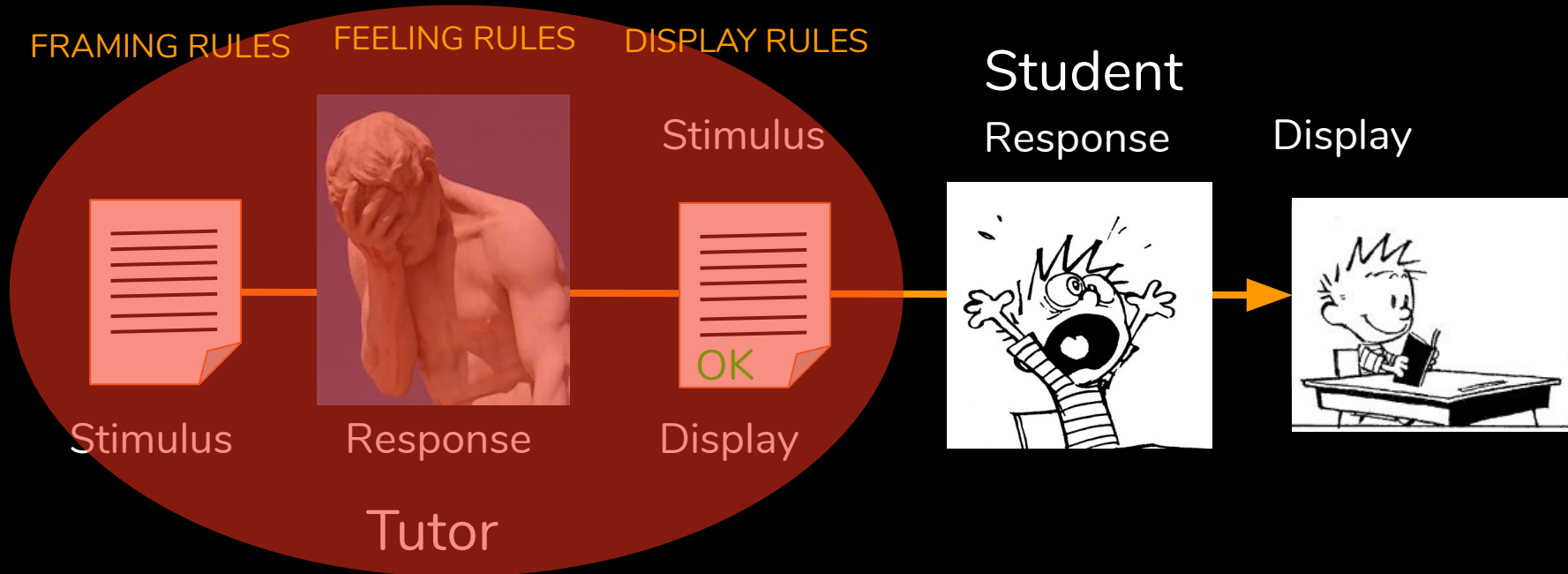
(Carr 1998, p.325)

## 2. Emotion-work in feedback exchanges

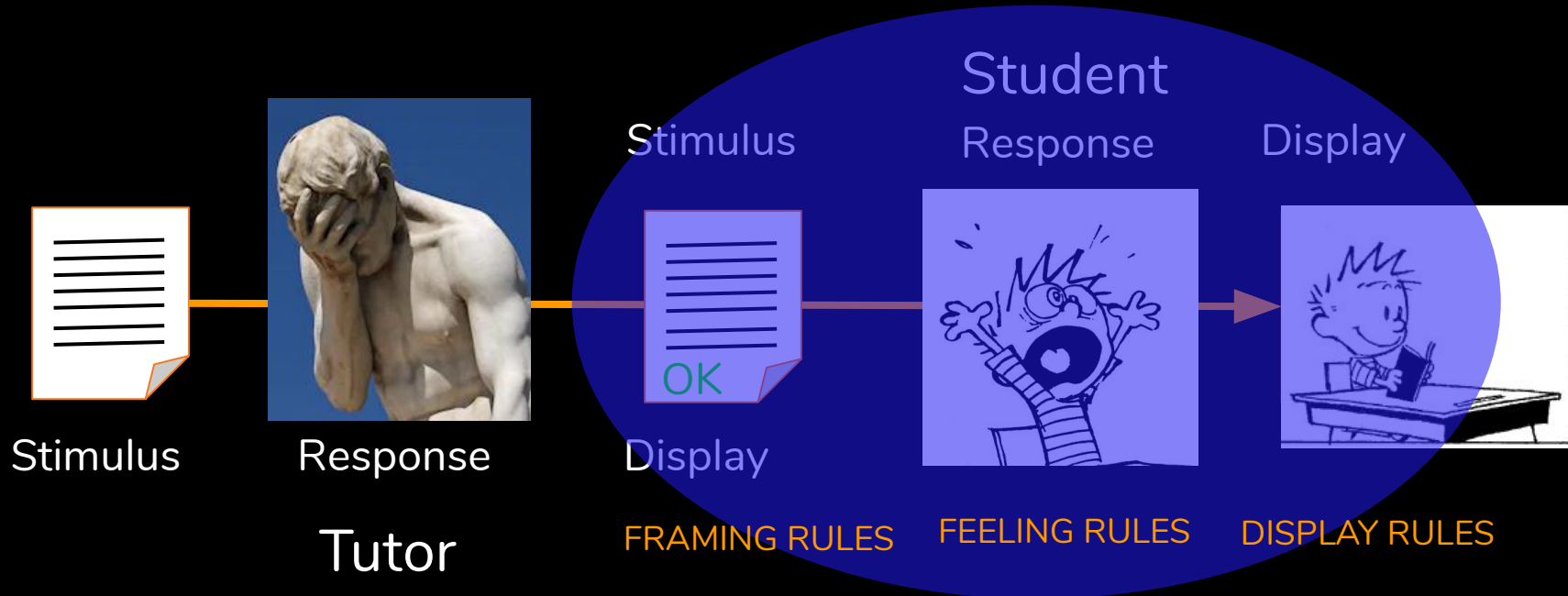




## 2. Emotion-work in feedback exchanges



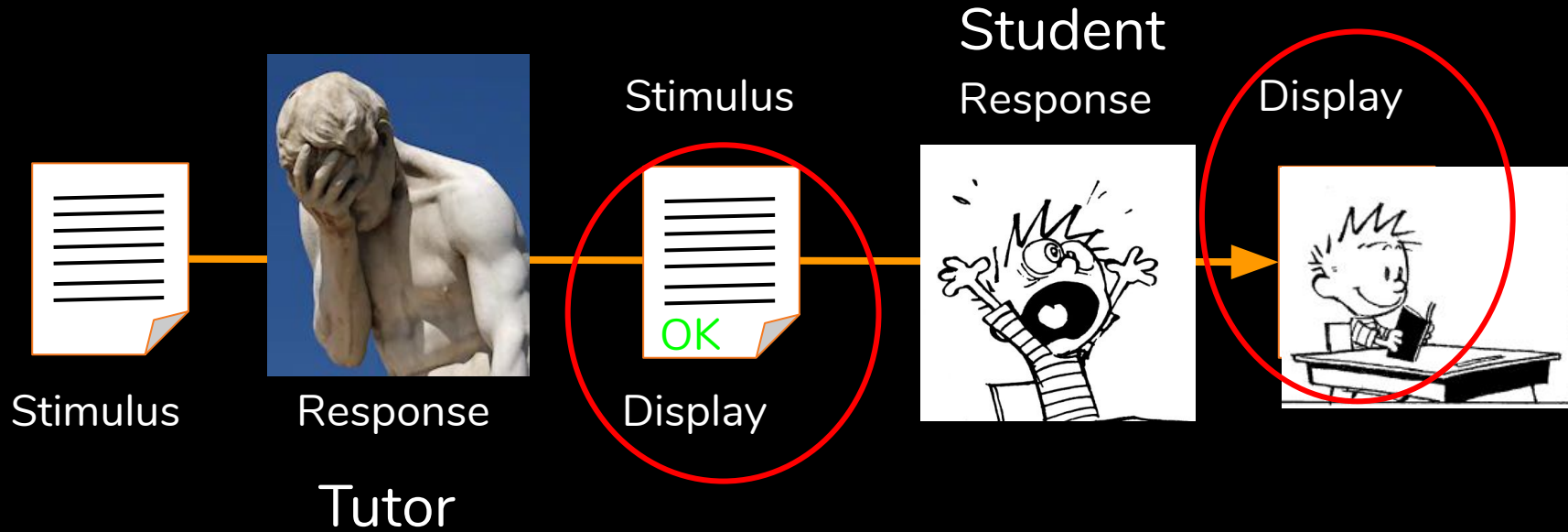
## 2. Emotion-work in feedback exchanges



### 3. Reducing the burden of emotion-work

What can we do to reduce the quantity and difficulty of emotion work?

### 3. Reducing the quantity of emotion-work



### 3. Reducing the burden of emotion-work

What can we do to reduce the quantity and difficulty of emotion work?

- Don't want to focus on display
- Could reduce the sheer quantity of feedback
- Could look earlier in the sequence, at the framing rules

### 3. Reducing the burden of emotion-work

“[A]s the level of feedback went from “none” to “low” to “high”, students’ perceptions of the feedback became more negative.

[...]

That is, students perceived that the instructor’s impression of them was more negative [and] students made less attribution to personal/student effort.”

(Ackerman et al 2017, p.22)

### 3. Reducing the burden of emotion-work

How do we reduce the amount of feedback?

- Selective feedback practices
- Less assessment
- ...So less formative assessment?

### 3. Reducing the burden of emotion-work

So what does formative assessment achieve?

Perhaps it alters the framing rules...

...makes the range and intensity of permitted emotions smaller, so the same *de facto* display rules actually rule out a smaller proportion of responses, reducing the need for surface acting on the student side



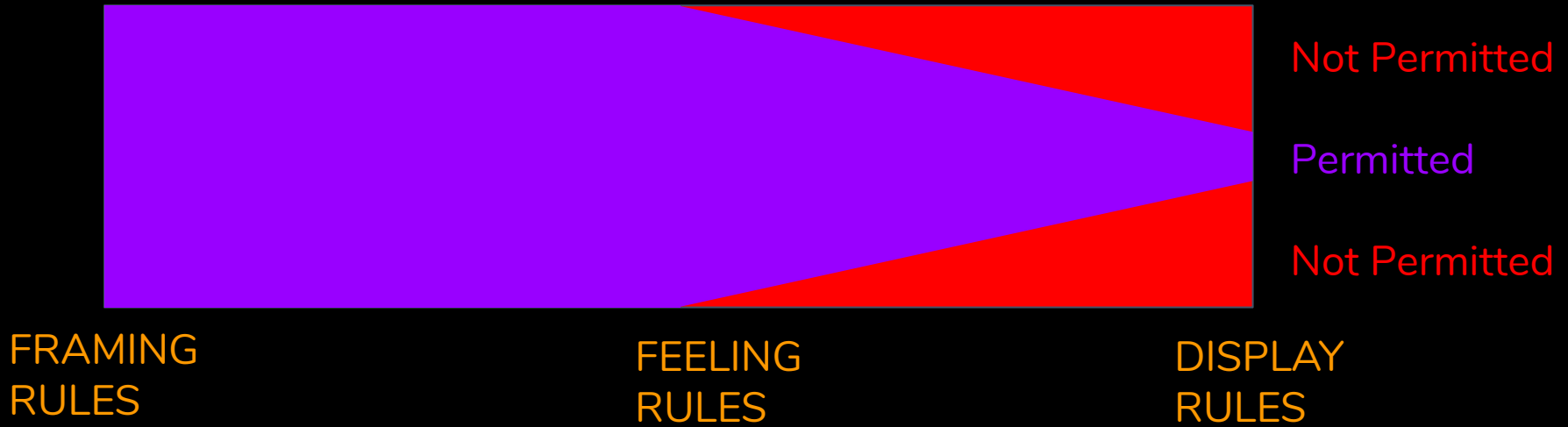
### 3. Reducing the burden of emotion-work

Formative assessment changes the **FRAMING RULES**:

- Lower stakes
- So, less prone to strong emotional responses
- So, less need for surface acting

### 3. Reducing the burden of emotion-work

Relationship between rule sets:



### 3. Reducing the burden of emotion-work

Relationship between rule sets:



## Emotion-work framework:

- helps to explain why too much feedback is a bad thing
- suggests that formative assessment is effective because of its effect on emotion as well as cognition
- suggests that feedback would be more effective if students placed less personal/emotional weight on it

## 4. Questions for you:

What might we do to change the framing rules, and reduce the emotional intensity of summative assessment?

i.e., how might we encourage students to see summative assessment as more like formative assessment?

What factors increase the amount of emotion work you (as tutor) are required to do in providing feedback?

## Works cited:

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Winstone, N. E. (2016) "'It'd be useful, but I wouldn't use it': barriers to university students' feedback seeking and recipience" in *Studies in Higher Education*, vol.42, p.2026-2041.

“Because emotions tend to be expressed and perceived nonverbally rather than verbally (Ekman et al., 1980), the relative dearth of cues in email, compared with some other channels, makes the miscommunication of emotion in emails more likely.”

(Byron 2008, p.311)





## Responding to criticism:

<b>Constructive Responses</b>	<b>Defensive Responses</b>
Persistent/renewed effort	Withdrawal of commitment
Help-seeking behaviours	Undermine credibility of feedback
Attitude change	Symbolic self-completion
Challenging social comparison	Comforting social comparison