

Providing audio summative feedback

Provide timely, high quality and efficient feedback to increase student engagement through a sense of connection between tutor and student

The aim

The tutor introduced audio feedback to Level 5 and Level 7 students in the Department of Management in Sheffield Business School.

The aim was to provide consistent, timely and high quality feedback to increase student engagement through a greater sense of connection and value between tutor and student.

Benefits

- The tutor's voice provided a personal and supportive form of feedback
- Time savings were achieved via audio feedback as opposed to written feedback
- Enhanced quality and depth of feedback is possible
- Increased student satisfaction and engagement with this form of feedback

The approach

In response to the National Student Survey 2012/13 suggesting relative discontent with the promptness, depth and clarity of feedback amongst full and part-time students, it was felt that a spoken delivery of feedback may address some of these concerns, providing a greater sense of connection and value between tutor and student.

The tutor gave two distinct student cohorts feedback via an MP3 audio file. The first cohort consisted of mature students at Level 7, who were working in addition to part-time study. The second cohort consisted of traditional full-time on-campus Level 5 students.

The module leader liaised with the faculty TEL advisor to provide training on the audio equipment for tutors, in addition to the module leader providing guidance to staff and students to ensure a consistent experience.

Audio guidance to module tutors included: use the student name/ID; introduce themselves to the students; have the students' work to hand; be mindful of the length of their recording (no more than 5 minutes) and to just 'be themselves'.

The tutors chose a quiet space to record the feedback, either at home or booked rooms at the university, and recorded the feedback using Roland R-05 recorders. Before starting the recording, tutors would read the student script and make personal notes to prevent the feedback from being repetitive and punitive. During the recording the tutors made reference back to the assessment criteria, and made reference in the recording to the page number of the student's script to assist students in understanding which part of their work the comments referred to. No marks were added to the recordings so that if there were changes due to moderation there needed to be no edits.

As the audio recorder operates like a memory stick, once feedback for all students had been recorded, files could simply be transferred, played and renamed via a web browser. To ease the process of renaming files, tutors noted the student name at the start of the recording. The resulting MP3 audio files were uploaded to the Blackboard Grade Centre, appearing to students as a link alongside their mark.

Once the marks and feedback were released, students were informed that the audio feedback was best listened to with the original work in front of them so that they could follow the feedback that was given.

“Written feedback is often generic and very unhelpful. Audio was incredibly insightful”

- *Level 7 Masters Student*

The Outcome

In comparison to written feedback taking approximately 30 minutes for 500 words, audio feedback took just 5 minutes per script. The electronically-delivered feedback could be accessed at any time or place.

Students were generally very positive about audio feedback with some highlighting that the spoken voice can offer richer, more detailed and meaningful comments that contribute to a high quality learning experience:

- Level 7 Student – *“The feedback was clear, constructive criticism and I could relate it to my work ... audio feedback has much more impact and meaning as opposed to one or two sentence summary at the bottom of an assignment”*
- Level 5 Student – *“It’s easy for me to skim text and not take it in, whereas I listen to verbal feedback better”*

However, while many students found this connection encouraging, others found audio stressful and that it impacted on their emotions and future confidence, having had a bad experience with this form of feedback. It is therefore imperative that tutors consider the emotional effect of their voice and maintain a positive and constructive tone at all times.

Students reported positively on electronic access to feedback files via Blackboard, noting that the practice was faster, more accessible and reduced the potential for loss. This allowed students to be able to personally organise and manage their long-term storage of feedback.

Students also reported that those in receipt of audio feedback re-accessed their feedback more times than those who received written feedback.

Profile

Tutor name:

Michelle Blackburn

Faculty:

Sheffield Business School

Size of cohort:

Small-Medium (15-40 students)

Technologies used:

MP3 player, Blackboard

If you would like your assessment practice captured and shared in a similar case study, please email ! Assessment Journey Programme

Future Development

The tutor intends to encourage others to use audio feedback by introducing it into modules to ensure consistency of approach across the teaching team, as well as sharing good practice around audio feedback via conference presentations/workshops.

Recommendations

The tutor suggests that anyone interested in developing this approach consider the following:

- Ask for help from your faculty TEL team to get you started
- Provide guidance for each tutor for consistency
- Brief students about how to access (i.e. which software applications they need) and how to make best use of audio feedback (i.e. listen to the recording with the work in front of them)
- Before recording, familiarise yourself with the student work to avoid repetitions in the feedback
- When recording, start with the student name/ID, introduce yourself, have work to hand, and be yourself
- Be mindful of length – longer audio feedback isn’t always the best, keep it focused
- Find a working space where you and others will not be disturbed
- Don’t worry about a slip of the tongue or the dog barking. Simply apologise and continue with the recording. There is no need to edit the recording