Using inline marking (via Crocodoc) to annotate student work

**Trialling inline marking as part of the introduction of online management of assessment in Politics to provide a seamless experience for staff and students**

### The aim

The tutor introduced online submission, marking and feedback within the Politics Subject Group in January 2014.

The aim was to enhance the student assessment experience of Politics students but to provide time-efficiencies for staff, by trialling the use of inline marking and the Crocodoc software provided by Blackboard.

### Benefits

- Improvement in the student experience around assessment and feedback
- Improvement of staff working conditions and time efficiencies around assessment and feedback

### The approach

The Politics subject group team have been trialling online submission, marking and feedback since January 2014. The Subject Group Leader has taken the lead in piloting online assessment for a small cohort of approximately 120 students over all three undergraduate Levels, taught by nine members of staff.

The idea was to trial the new Crocodoc (inline marking) software provided through Blackboard as a way to try and improve (and standardise to a certain degree) both (a) the quality of the feedback experience for the students and (b) the marking experience from a staff perspective (to help with high marking loads, to help with coordination on moderation).

As a part of this trial, the Subject Group Leader requested via the department some support in terms of hardware; in order that the marking trial could be extended to the whole Group, we had to somehow ensure that all Group members had access to wide screen monitors (WSM) - WSMs are essentially to marking large numbers of scripts online, and essentially to utilising fully the many benefits of the Crocodoc software. As a result, all nine members of the Group were issued with 19” wide screen laptops for 12 months as part of the trial to ensure all had access to a WSM at home or wherever they were carrying out their marking.

The team have approached online assessment in the following way:

- **Submission**: all students were told required to submit their assignments electronically in Microsoft Word format via the Blackboard submission tool by a specified deadline. Student work was stored in the Blackboard Grade Centre for flexible access.
- **Marking**: tutors accessed and marked the students' assignments inline online using Crocodoc, which is the Blackboard inline grading tool. Annotated comments were added throughout the document to provide targeted feedback. The Crocodoc software saves all annotations in real time, and then provides a panel listing in easily accessible form, all comments and notes made. The tutor then provides discursive, written feedback in the feedback box, based in part on the list of comments made. The grade is then entered and saved, and the student then has access to annotated work, discursive comments, and marks, once the marks are returned (see Fig 1 over).
- **Moderation**: the tutor then provides the internal (and later, external) moderator a list of names of a sample for moderation. The moderate than accesses the work for each name, sees what the first marker has given and said about the script, and then adds comments/suggestions into the 'Grader Notes' box, which remains permanently invisible to the student.
- **External Examiner**: the external is issued with the sample list from each module as part of the moderation process and can access and see each student’s work and the admin trial around internal moderation.
The approach (continued)

Figure 1: Example of an inline marked script

Profile

**Tutor names:**
Andy Price

**Faculty:**
Development and Society

**Size of cohort:**
Medium (40-60 students)

**Technologies used:**
Online submission via Blackboard, Inline grading via Crocodoc, Blakboard Grade Centre, Microsoft Word

The outcome

The key outcomes from using online management of assessment on this module for students were:

- Ease of access to marked scripts from distance
- Improved feedback and annotation
- Increase in amount of feedback provided

The key outcomes from using online management of assessment on this module for staff were:

- Because of the nature of the software in allowing real time annotations and providing full summary panel of comments made, the software allows tutors to produce more, and more target feedback, in the same time, or even less time, than before. The instant usability of the software allows quick, real time engagement with each script without the need for saving and uploading/downloading file.
- Across the Subject Group, the quality and quantity of feedback has increased significantly during the trial period
- When marking large numbers of scripts, the time saved by not having to handle the scripts, and not having to produce and save a separate feedback sheet is significant

The only area of concern for the Subject Group was the amount of time spent in front of a screen.

A case study reporting on the outcome of the successful pilot follows on the next page.

Recommendations

Due attention needs to be given to hardware provision: the need for a decent size screen is crucial, as the software is hampered significantly when using smaller screens. Also, there is a real need to try and instil a standard approach to the use of the software, so that the Subject Group as a whole is using the software in the same way and to the same extent. This is more difficult to achieve, but our experience is the standardisation comes (slowly) through the fact that all internal moderation is carried out using the software, and as such, staff in the Group get to see how all other members of the Group are using the software and to what extent. The kind of comment about the quantity of feedback varying that we see from the student comments will hopefully be something that is self-correcting as the Subject Group become more accustomed to the software and the open moderation process.
Successful pilot of online submission, marking and feedback for Politics

Increased student satisfaction following the trial of inline grading (via Crocodoc) to provide feedback to students in the Politics Subject Group

The aim

The tutor introduced online submission, marking and feedback within the Politics Subject Group in January 2014. The aim was to enhance the student assessment experience of Politics students.

Benefits

• Improvement in the student experience around assessment and feedback
• Scores for both feedback and assessment and overall satisfaction for the subject group have increased significantly in the 2015 NSS results

Pilot outcome

Following the introduction of online submission, marking and feedback (as reported in the preceding case study), the Politics Subject Group has seen a significant increase in both assessment and feedback NSS scores and overall satisfaction scores.

In January 2014, the subject group introduced Crocodoc, inline grading software provided by Blackboard, as a way to improve and standardise the quality of the feedback experience for students and the marking experience for staff. Dr Andy Price, Head of Politics, told us that “Crocodoc has made it easier to access, mark and moderate scripts and has allowed good quality, targeted feedback for students through annotations”.

Andy went on to say “The success of the Politics online pilot is clear. 2015 NSS results show the scores for feedback and assessment have jumped from 67% to 88% and overall satisfaction scores for the subject group have increased from 79% to 96% in the same time period”. Andy puts this down to “close collaboration, team effort and good planning in the use of Crocodoc, a software that makes it much easier to produce meaningful, tailored feedback”.

Other significant increases in student satisfaction for the subject group include:

Students have also commented on the new online approach saying, “more extensive feedback such as annotations are really helpful because students can see exactly which parts of the assignment are strong and what needs a bit of work.”

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

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