

Providing effective feedback through voice recognition software

Using voice recognition software to provide effective feedback to students whilst providing time savings for tutor

The aim

The tutor has used voice recognition software to provide feedback to students at all levels, both undergraduate and postgraduate.

The aim was to utilise an online tool that could provide individualised and consistent student feedback in addition to providing time-savings for the tutor.

Benefits

- Provides more personal feedback, which is more akin to audio feedback
- Allows control of the computer through your voice
- Staff can create written feedback for students verbally
- Feedback is edited by listening to a computer voice reading back the text
- Can be used by all staff
- No internet connection required during the creation of feedback

The approach

The tutor moved away from the previous practice of annotating assignments and writing up or typing feedback. It was taking the tutor a lot of time to produce relatively little specific and generic feedback for each student using this approach.

Having been recommended voice recognition software by an audience member after a keynote in the British Library, the tutor decided to try it to speed up the generation of detailed written feedback to his students. The tutor installed the voice recognition software onto his laptop, allowing the software to be used anywhere. Although in this instance the tutor used Dragon Naturally Speaking voice recognition software, Speech Recognition is alternative voice recognition software which is available on all university managed desktop PCs.

To get started with the software, the tutor spent five minutes creating a personal voice file by reading a short paragraph to test the microphone. This taught the system to recognise his voice and facilitated accurate conversion of his speech into written text. Once configured, the speech recognition software enabled the tutor to speak reproducing the words as text on the computer screen. It recognised voice input, including accents, and commands could be used to dictate to, edit and control applications like Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, Microsoft PowerPoint, as well as creating and replying to email, and accessing the Internet.

Students created and submitted their assignments in Microsoft Word format through Blackboard for the tutor to access via the Blackboard Grade Centre. Once the tutor accessed the student work, he used voice commands to start the microphone and begin speaking about the student work in to the computer, which automatically converted the dictation to text. At the end of each submission, a single, separate Microsoft Word file containing the feedback text was created. The tutor then listened back to the recording and made any corrections prior to uploading the feedback along with the student mark to the Blackboard Grade Centre.

“We always get a lot more detailed feedback from this tutor.”

- **Level 4 student**

The Outcome

The tutor found this an effective and efficient way of marking student submissions.

This form of targeted feedback felt quite personal as the marker was commenting as they read through the student work. It was more akin to audio feedback, providing a much richer form of feedback whilst saving the tutor's time as no typing up of notes was necessary. The tutor saw many benefits of using the software, in particular being able to pinpoint specific feedback on each page rather than providing a generic form of feedback at the end of the assignment. Issues around referencing, wider reading and layout was made whilst moving through the assignment. Students appreciated the detailed feedback that was provided.

The tutor found the software to be user-friendly citing that once the voice file is set up, “It is extremely easy to use and the more you use it, the more the software adapts to your accent”. The tutor commented, “this technology recognises your voice and is much quicker than typing in most cases”.

In addition to generating student feedback, the tutor has used the software for answering emails, writing papers and keeping notes. He has also used it to create and capture student thinking to produce live hand-outs and course materials. It is not just for marking.

Profile

Tutor name:
Professor Colin Beard

Faculty:
Sheffield Business School

Size of cohort:
Small to Large

Technologies used:
Blackboard, Microsoft Word, Voice recognition software

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Future Development

The tutor plans to develop his online practice further by:

- using voice recognition software to capture intellectual property from students in seminars
- exploring the use of social media, e.g. blogs, wikis and discussion boards as a form of relationship management to enhance teaching and communication between tutor and student

Recommendations

The tutor feels voice recognition software could be of benefit to all staff as speaking can often be faster than typing. The tutor recommends the following for others using voice recognition software in their practice:

- Speech recognition software is available on all University managed desktop PCs (to find it, type 'speech recognition' in the search box from the Start menu)
- Spend time learning basic software commands (e.g. 'wake up', 'go to sleep')
- Find a quiet space, free from distractions and where you won't disturb others
- Invest in a good microphone (e.g. Sennheiser) as this can make a big difference to the clarity and accuracy of output. The university can also provide headsets (contact IT Help and ask for a 'Skype set')
- Contact your faculty TEL team if you need support getting started