

Learning Bytes: Session 25: Wednesday 25 July 12, 13:15-14:15

Audio Feedback

The session was facilitated by:

- Cath Ellis, University and National Teaching Fellow, School of Music, Humanities and Media
- Rob Allan, Course Leader, School of Applied Sciences

Cath Ellis – School of Music, Humanities and Media

Introduction

Cath had recently attended a one day workshop on audio feedback at the University of Leicester and wanted to share what she had found out, along with some of her own thoughts.

She always advises colleagues to consider the pedagogical questions and then address the technical issues.

Research from the University of Leicester found that students' new to audio feedback preferred a hybrid approach with personalised and engaging audio feedback on their submission (evaluation against assessment criteria) complemented by written feed forward detailing improvements to make. A balance needs to be struck between efficacy (effectiveness in producing the result that you intended) and efficiency, avoid doubling workload but make sure the quality of the feedback isn't impacted.

Three key reasons were given to use a personal voice and provide dialogic feedback within a conversational framework:

1. Easier to be encouraging to students if using voice, the personal aspect is valued.
2. Explanation – easier to give more detail if speaking than typing.
3. Evidence that it is easier to break bad news via speaking than via writing, softened by speaking.

Time can be saved speaking (providing audio feedback) as it is faster than writing, one can explain in more detail in the time it takes to speak than to write. However returning student work in audio form can take longer, and transcription errors can be a problem. The feedback must be stored in a safe and secure manner and given to the correct student. In terms of double marking /moderation, a hybrid approach – would mean that there is something for an alternative marker to read. Use GradeMark and then attach audio or video file.

Cath offered the following advice on best practice for colleagues considering using audio feedback with their students:

- Address the students by name because it should be a conversation. This obviously is only possible in personal marking as opposed to anonymous marking.
- When to explain the grade given: at outset (especially if it's bad) – feedback is then contextualised to the mark received. No evidence that giving mark first stops students from listening to the feedback. When students press play they want to listen to the whole thing. Engaging with feedback must be rewarding to students.
- Provide an overview of the feedback being offered, this gives structure and indicates what the recipient is to expect.
- Identify the strengths and weaknesses of the submission against the assessment criteria and explain them. Take the time and trouble to put into context.
- Encourage engagement with and action against, feed forward. Set a task that will be of benefit in the future. End the feedback by inviting the student to do something that they can come and show you.

In terms of the practicalities of recording the feedback:

- Have a pad of sticky notes and jot down three things that are the most important areas for the feedback, this should be enough to provide some structure.
- Use the pause button, to gather your thoughts.
- Authenticity and engagement is what really matters. Ambient background noise is desirable, paper shuffling noises, means you are looking at their work etc. Don't worry about 'umms' and 'ahhs', you are not expected to speak in complete sentences as this is a 'conversation'.

Rob Allan – School of Applied Sciences

As part of a Teaching and Learning Innovation funded project, Rob has been investigating how to get students engaged with audio feedback and using it in practice. Rob teaches on a module with around 140+ students, so is looking for efficiency within the marking process whilst maintaining useful, quality feedback to his students. Electronic marking was undertaken using a mixture of GradeMark and 'Audacity' (free audio editing software). Students were given access to the assessment rubric in their feedback so they could see where they had gained and lost marks. This form of marking was used for relatively high value assignments, Rob emphasised the need to be designing assessment that rewards improvement via feed forward to the next assignment.

The students were surveyed on how they felt about the marking /feedback system. Providing quality feed forward is very important to the students, and they preferred this in a written format where the context was clear. Is it effective? Rob's research showed that this form of feedback was not necessarily improving students' understanding; often they were not improving on simple things such as reading and following instructions.

Rob found that audio was much more fluid and quicker for providing an overview; most people can speak faster than they can type. However although audio is faster to produce, upload time needs to be taken into account. Rob recommends having a script, not one that will be followed verbatim but linked to the rubric. Providing the feedback in chronological order, repeat section sub-headings, use short punchy sentences, good/bad (be honest), clear diction, tone of voice – can be difficult to be positive if disappointed, delivery, breathing and posture can all have an impact.

In terms of producing the audio feedback, it does take time and practice, the same rules of good feedback applies whether it is audio or written. In addition be aware that accents can be an issue for some people. People on the autistic spectrum can struggle with audio feedback and prefer written. Students who have English as a second language prefer typed feedback. Dyslexic students tend to prefer audio.

Technical issues were around compatibility and integration. File size can be large 1-6Mb.