Godalming 6th Form College

Simple Solutions to Providing Effective Assessment Feedback Using Audio

Summary

Sixth Form College teachers face increasing class sizes and more classes to teach. There is also an increasing focus on the quality of assessment feedback. After attending JISC training it was felt that audio feedback could be a solution to issues that a number of departments have about maintaining and improving the quality of assessment feedback while reducing the marking workload for teaching staff. The result has been a process that has received excellent feedback from students, and has seen the process adopted by other departments and students. The college are about to enter an assessment trial to see if the audio feedback improves student learning, and improves grades.

About Godalming 6th Form College

“Godalming College is a great place to study. We achieve exceptional exam results, offer first class modern facilities, and offer a wide range of courses to choose from. The atmosphere is vibrant and friendly with a genuine sense of community. Students really enjoy during their time here.

There is a major emphasis on an all-round education at Godalming with a wide variety of extra-curricular activities and events. Students can gain recognition for the full range of their achievements with the new Sixth Form Baccalaureate award being pioneered at the College.”

David Adelman
Principal

The challenge

The focus of the project was to trial and refine a process that would enable staff to record meaningful assessment feedback and distribute the feedback to students. Two teachers took on the role to find a process that would work for them
and their students. Both negotiated with at least one class to trial this form of feedback and assess how successful the trial had been.

The activity

Starting with no real budget for the project Ruth Nixon, Tutor commented? “We felt the initial challenge would be to try and identify a single system to use, so that every student could easily play the files. “

Adam Lyon also a tutor continued “What we found was that unless you invest in a lot of equipment of a similar type you don’t get consistency, and that could potentially be a big investment. It turned out to be much better to allow teachers to use the device and format they had to hand and preferred. Students have not found any difficulty in accessing the feedback? “

Ruth added “We decided to use a computer based recorder, Adam has been using a Dictaphone, and we both upload our files onto Godalming Online (our Moodle based VLE) to deliver the audio files to students, though we can just as easily email them with the audio file attached. After an initial start a further teacher used a mobile phone to upload feedback to YouTube, and shared this again via the VLE. During the project all teachers successfully provided feedback to their classes and encouraging opinions from students were received.”

Ruth continued “Whilst the feedback from the students has been excellent, perhaps our biggest challenge going forward is to determine if audio feedback actually improves the students’ performance. We are about to embark on a trial with two classes studying the same subject with the same tutor, one with traditional written feedback and one with audio. We will publish the results and add them to this case study at a later date.”

The outcomes

The project has been keenly watched by the colleges ‘Teaching and Learning Group’ and the trials are being specifically mentioned in an ‘Internal Quality Review’ that is examining how the whole college approaches assessment.

Ruth outlined “Providing audio feedback has started to go viral within the college with other teachers being keen to try it. Spontaneous training sessions have occurred well before any planned dissemination and several other departments are planning to trial audio feedback with their students imminently."

Adam added “It is felt that the time is right for this development to thrive: with the technology being in place and affordable, teaching staff ICT skills being at an appropriate level, and students readily having the technology to listen to web based audio files. We are fully expecting providing feedback to students through audio files will become one of the standard ways teachers operate.”
Ruth was asked to present this project at the Summer meeting of History Departments, and both Adam and Ruth have been asked to give workshops.

The impact

Ruth commented “We both realise that the quality and breadth of the feedback has improved significantly, opinions that are reinforced by student feedback. Unfortunately, since it was one of the reasons we began, neither of us thinks that the process is quicker for teachers to administer, but the process is a more satisfying one and with familiarity, doesn’t take any longer than written feedback.”

Ruth also says, she is optimistic that when she gets better and more familiar with the techniques, it might yet save time. Adding in a requirement for students to summarise the feedback in the form of targets allows teachers to be confident that the feedback has been listened to and understood. Students are also showing that they are excited by this form of feedback and are willing to participate in its refinement. Whilst the initial trials were conducted with essay based assessment, both coursework and BTEC assignments are being considered for future trials. The project was submitted to JISC Regional Support centre Southeast Hi5 awards in 2012.

They were their category winner and the judges’ comments are below.

Judges’ feedback:

“This was an excellent example of a solution for providing meaningful and individualised feedback for students at Godalming College. The application demonstrated how the provision of personalised audio feedback increased learners’ understanding of the subject and helped them identify their strengths and weaknesses. In order to ensure the learners had listened to and understood their feedback, the nominees included a requirement for students to summarise the feedback in the form of targets.”

The application included videos of the process that staff went through to provide feedback on written work, as well as examples of audio recordings given to students as feedback. An evaluation survey was carried out to gauge the views of students who had received feedback in this way. Feedback from students was extremely positive. The results will form part of an Internal Quality Review of assessment within the college, thus ensuring that the audio feedback forms part of the wider assessment strategy.

The lessons learned

The adoption of the project has been straight forward and enabling teachers to use their own preferred method and kit, has increased take up and kept costs down.
Ruth commented “The key skill, of giving the audio feedback is one that improves with practice. Breaking down your feedback, analysing the work paragraph by paragraph, stopping and starting the tape, makes the process easier, and helps keep your comments short and precise.

Anybody starting this journey for the first time, just needs to appreciate that you will improve with practice. The good news is that with practice verbal feedback does not take any longer than written, and certainly seems very popular with the students – It may also give them more detailed and therefore more helpful assessment enabling the student to improve. That is what we hope to see in the future.”

Useful links

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