Aims and objectives

The department is encouraging innovative approaches to delivering student centred feedback to address NSS results and improve the student learning experience. This approach aimed to be able to provide individual and personalised feedback for group work; minimising the time required to produce this compared to written approaches and increasing the quality of feedback. Recording spoken feedback was intended to be more engaging for the students than written feedback and would be able to convey the intonation and emphasis of the speaker’s voice.

Providing audio feedback was also intended to test recent research which suggests that students react very positively towards spoken feedback, regarding it as richer, more personalised and clear evidence that markers had carefully considered their work.

Overview

Rob provided students with spoken audio feedback through the VLE on their formative group projects to produce flyers for 16 year olds considering studying A level Psychology. The 32 groups were each able to access short, specific recordings (35 seconds - 1.18 mins) about their project along with 2mins 39 seconds of generic feedback on the project as a whole. Recorded at the academics usual speaking rate it was possible to deliver about 160 words per minute of rich, personalised feedback.

Methodology

Audio was recorded using available software (Audio Hijack Pro on a Mac, free equivalents are available for Mac and PC) and hardware (standard headphone and mic set ~ £7) and saved as mp3 files for online delivery. All files were loaded into the VLE’s content collection and then all students were given access to both the overall feedback and the entire folder of individual group feedback with direction to find the file that related to their group. It was not felt necessary to restrict feedback to specific groups; this would have greatly increased the staff time required to deliver files and would have brought no significant benefit as feedback was formative and not sensitive.

After testing the software’s recording levels Rob read through about half a dozen pieces of work and wrote down a check list of areas to comment on and had that in front of him. This made sure he covered all the aspects without the need for a script. After looking through a few he had a feel for the range of quality and what he might like to express.

Rob then ordered the prices of work (the software automatically appends a number to the recording which tallied with the group id) and went for it, although the first few recordings were patchy and needed a second go. To maintain a spontaneous feel and brevity all audio feedback was recorded in one take without using the pause function.
Rob was able to easily upload all files to the VLE in one go using the “WebDav” feature and make them available to students by linking directly to the folder in the Content Collection. No formal training was required for any stage of this process.

Reflections and student feedback

"I feel that this approach to delivering feedback was highly appropriate for this type of creative, formative assignment. This approach allowed me to provide rich, personalised, high quality feedback in a far shorter amount of time than written techniques would have taken. I also found it easier to express abstract concepts such as the impact of students’ creative designs, and provide supportive feedback for students who had not performed too well when speaking as opposed to providing written feedback. Having a check list meant I made sure each group got comments on the same overall areas but allowed me to retain an informal feel, which would have been lost had the feedback been scripted. Each group’s feedback was recorded live and took less than a minute on average to complete. Overall I think it took just over an hour (maybe 70mins) to set up and record 32 pieces of group feedback and 1 piece of generic feedback.

I am planning on continuing this approach to providing feedback for assignments of this nature and perhaps seeing how transferrable it might be to more formal, perhaps even summative assignments.” - Rob Stone

"I thought it was a very effective way to provide feedback. Being able to save it also meant that it could be listened back to at a later date and used for referencing for improvements" - student feedback

"The audio feedback was very personal, I felt that a lot of time and attention had been given to assess the work we had done. It was also easy to understand and easy to access.” - student feedback

83% of respondants agree or strongly agree that audio feedback was appropriate for this type of creative group assignment.

Transferable lessons learned

- Students respond positively to audio feedback when used for formative creative work though there were misgivings about using it for formal summative assessments
- Students were not concerned that group feedback was available to other members of the cohort through the VLE
- Creating audio feedback can be quicker than written feedback
- Creating a rubric (checklist) of areas to comment on supported the delivery of audio feedback
- Delivering audio feedback in one take made it seem more natural, increased the personal nature of it and sped up the process
- The more audio feedback you deliver, the quicker and easier it becomes.

Next steps

- Contact Rob Stone via email at rob.stone@york.ac.uk
- Contact the E-Learning Development Team via email at vle-support@york.ac.uk
- Audio editing training available - sign up through the Yorkshare Training tab
- External Website: JISC Sounds Good project: Quicker, better assessment using audio feedback