Voice-first feedback: a case study from MA Advertising (LCC)

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14th May 2019

Background and context

MA Advertising has 28 students from 15 different countries. As part of broader initiatives designed to support international students as well as those with ISAs, the Course Leader requested permission to pilot audio feedback on assignments for the Autumn term submissions. With the agreement of the PD, feedback on one Unit was provided in MP3 format as a file that could be listened to online or downloaded via the normal OAT feedback sheet.

This pilot initiative picks up on a number of studies conducted into audio and other non-traditional feedback formats for both formative and summative assessments. Lunt and Curran (2010) for instance found that students are up to 10 times more likely to open audio files compared to collecting written feedback in person. And, as Anna Armstrong (2017) reports a range of studies have pointed out the real qualitative value of audio feedback:

> *"In some cases, audio feedback can be more effective than written feedback (Morris and Chikwa, 2016) for conveying nuance, increasing feelings of involvement, increasing perception that the instructor cares more about the students (Ice et al., 2007) and maintaining the nurturing attitude fostered by the teacher in the classroom (Still, 2006)."*

The pilot initiative was part of wider pedagogical practice-research across the postgraduate and undergraduate Advertising degrees. These include developments around studio 'crits' and tutorials as well as new knowledge exchange industry projects and forms of assessment.

The MA in Advertising is based on practice-research and as such students submit practice-based work for assessment. Furthermore they take part in verbal formative crits almost every week. As such they are used to discursive and dialectical feedback.

Following the pilot, the Course Leader met with colleagues from Quality, Digital Learning and Learning and Teaching to discuss how the pilot could be extended and managed in line with broader university and data (such as GDPR) requirements and practices.

Aims

- To provide non-native speakers with accessible and usable feedback
- To enable all students to have mobile-friendly, engaging and discursive/dialectical feedback that mirrors their experience in class
- To empower tutors to deliver detailed and flexible practice-based critical feedback
- To develop a more conversational assessment culture with the students.

Mechanics

Two MA assessments - a portfolio of advertising work and an industry 'magazine' (blog) - were assessed as normal using existing learning outcomes and assessment criteria, assessment and moderation practices. The marking teams then recorded their feedback referring back to those learning outcomes signalled on OAT.

In the case of the pilot initiative, all work was team-marked and the two tutors shared the feedback.

Specifically:
1. Work was accessed via Moodle/Turnitin
2. Marking team met to read, discuss and assess the work
3. The two markers recorded around 3-3.5 mins of audio feedback using a digital voice recorder in the following format:
   a. Introduce the feedback with the student/group's name(s). This not only set the right tone but ensured that the CL could check the correct feedback before adding the URL to OAT.
   b. Assessor #1: 'Positive' commentary and feedback; specific critical feedback; supportive conclusion referring to the learning outcomes and how the student could progress to the next grade.
   c. Assessor #2… repeats format. Often the second marker would comment on, build on the first assessor's comments.
4. CL downloaded all MP3 files to his computer, checked the audio and the name at step 1 and renamed the files according to the student/group e.g. "Creative_Industries_E1_Smith.mp3"
5. CL uploads them to his University OneDrive directory into directory titled with name of Unit and assessment e.g. "Creative_Industries_2018-19_E1"
6. CL fills in individual OAT sheets as normal
7. CL creates an individual (view not edit) shareable link for each audio file on OneDrive and copies that into the feedback box on OAT
8. CL publishes as normal.

Feedback and evaluation

Student feedback

The students' response was overwhelmingly positive. Student reps reported back to the CCM that the group had found the format useful, engaging and helpful. Comments included:

- "Feels more personal and in-depth than written feedback. Tone matters"
- "It's more relatable."
- "It is easy to understand, more personal and concentrates more info than a written feedback due to its compact form."

External Examiner feedback

As part of his interim visit, the EE discussed the initiative with both the students and the CL. He made a special point of praising it in his report:

> "The assessment process for MA Advertising is very professional and well considered by the staff offering comprehensive feedback that exceeds other institutions with new techniques using audio to give students clear guidance for reflection and enhancement which is in-depth and delivered in a timely manner."

Tutor feedback

Both AL and f/t members of the team reported that the initiative had been not only easy to manage and indeed enjoyable but also freed them up to provide more detailed and nuanced feedback:

- "It's a lot more personable than written feedback."

CL evaluation

Management:
The process demanded a certain amount of careful thought in terms of how to name and arrange the files but once that was clear, the system was no more difficult, complicated or time-consuming to manage that traditional feedback.

Teaching and learning:
The ability to be able to provide nuanced and discursive feedback was a great advantage and opportunity to integrate the assessment and feedback more directly into the course, the learning and the student-teacher relationships.

Staff team:
AS well as offering staff (including ALs) the opportunity to be more expressive and detailed in their feedback, the team marking took on a new power and opened up new possibilities for staff to explore engaging in dialectical conversations and discussions that, while sticking to the LO and marking criteria, staff can have different takes on a students' work. This frees up staff to

offer more in-depth analysis as well as engaging students with the sort of multi-faceted feedback that they will encounter in industry.

Impact on the course:

The initiative has served to reposition summative feedback within the broader tone and focus of the course. By continuing the sort of conversational, crit-style feedback that works in class into assessment and feedback has served to emphasise for the students what is expected and how the course works.

References

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