



FEEDBACK VIA GRADEMARK AUDIOFILES IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

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OVERVIEW

In September 2015 Cindy Becker started to trial the use of the audio feedback function within GradeMark. This innovative approach did present some initial challenges but, overall, it proved to be a great success for both Cindy and her students.

OBJECTIVES

GradeMark was introduced to the University in the Summer of 2015. I wanted to use this new marking tool to explore different ways of providing feedback for students. In particular, I wanted to adopt a more personal approach and provide more in-depth feedback without significantly increasing the time I spend marking each essay.

CONTEXT

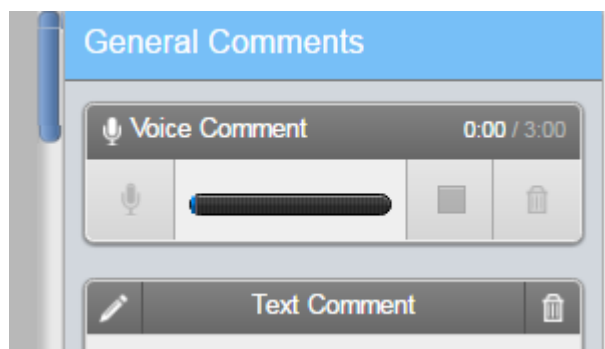
GradeMark allows you to produce typewritten feedback for assessment work and this is what most of us are used to. However, it will also let you click on an icon that allows you to create an audio file of up to three minutes of spoken feedback instead.

IMPLEMENTATION

I started off by making notes as I marked the essay and then talking through them on the audio file. It did not work very well because my feedback became stilted, took longer than three minutes and was time consuming to prepare. I think I lacked confidence at the outset.

Now I take a more relaxed approach. I make no more than a couple of notes (and often not even that) and then I simply press the record button. As I talk to the student I scroll down the assignments on the split screen and this is enough to jog my memory as to what I want to say. Taking a methodical approach has helped me. I always begin with an overview, then work on specific challenges or praiseworthy elements, then end with a brief comment summing up my thoughts. If it goes wrong, I simply scrap the recording and begin again. I save myself

time with the uploading by setting it to upload and then begin to work on the next assignments. This saves the frustration of staring at an upload symbol for ages when you want to get on with it.



IMPACT

It is worth the effort.

For now, students love it. I asked students to let me know whether they would prefer written or audio file feedback and those who responded voted for audio file. The novelty factor might wear off, but I think at the moment it is a useful way to engage students in our assessment criteria and module learning aims, in class and beyond.

For now, I love it. It is a pleasant change; it is quicker and fuller than written feedback. It seems to allow me to range more widely and be more personally responsive to students through their assignments. Because I am 'talking to them' I have found myself more ready to suggest other modules they might like, or some further reading that they might enjoy.

REFLECTIONS

It can take a few attempts to ensure that your headphones are working within the system. This is most usually a problem with GradeMark or Blackboard more generally – restarting Blackboard or even your computer will fix it. You might not have headphones already to hand, and that sounds like another investment of time and money, but it's good idea to buy cheap headphones – they cost around £20 from a supermarket and are perfectly adequate for the job. You feel like a twit talking to your computer. Of course you do – who wouldn't? After your first few audio files it will feel perfectly natural.

For the future, I can see it having an impact on assignment tutorials. I believe I can have an equal impact via a tutorial or a three minute audio file, and everyone actually listens to their audio file. I am going to have to decide what to do with the extra 'spare' contact time this might give me...

