



USING QUICKMARKS TO ENHANCE ESSAY FEEDBACK IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

Dr Mary Morrissey

OVERVIEW

In 2015 Dr Mary Morrissey experimented with the 'Quickmarks' function newly available in Grademark. By following links to the Department's style guide in the Quickmarks, students could access more detailed feedback on their written work. The 'feedback loop' (from essay advice to essay feedback) was therefore completed.

OBJECTIVES

A number of modules within the Department of English Literature began using GradeMark as a new marking tool in the Autumn of 2015. I wanted to explore the use of the new QuickMarks function as a way of enhancing the quality of the feedback provided to our students and ensuring the 'feedback loop' from general advice on essay writing to the feedback on particular pieces of assessed work was completed.

CONTEXT

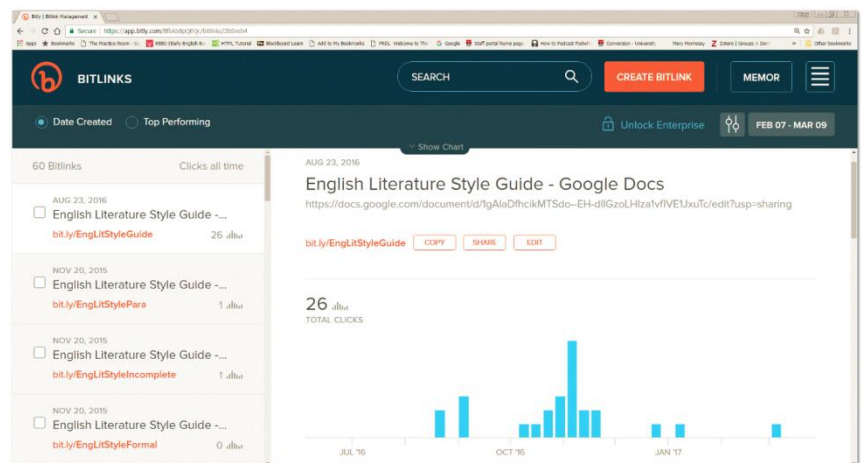
The Department developed extensive guidance on writing skills to support student assessment: this includes advice on structuring an argument as well as guidance on grammar and citations. This guide was housed on departmental handbooks and in the assignments folder in Blackboard. There was considerable concern that this resource was underused by students. We did know that the QuickMarks function was being used as part of our online feedback provision and that it was possible to personalise the comments we were using and to add links to those comments as a way of providing additional explanation to students.

IMPLEMENTATION

In order to allow relevant sections of the essay writing style guide to be accessed via QuickMarks I copied the document into a Google Doc, divided each section by using Google Doc bookmarks and assigned each bookmark an individual URL link. I then used Bitly.com to shorten the URL link assigned to each section by the Google Doc to make it more useable. I then created a set of Quickmarks that included these links to the Style Guide. In this way, students had direct access to the relevant section of the Guide while reading their feedback. So if a student hadn't adopted the correct referencing format (the Modern Humanities Research Association style in the case of English Literature) the marker would pull a QuickMark across to the relevant point of the essay. When the student hovered over this comment bubble, they would see the text within it but were also able to click on the URL taking them directly to page 7 of the departmental writing style guide on MHRA citation and referencing. If other colleagues wanted to start adopting the same approach, I simply exported the QuickMark set to them which they incorporated into their own QuickMarks bank within seconds.

IMPACT

The Bitly.com tool, used to shorten the URL link, monitored the usage of each link included in our QuickMarks. This showed us how many times and on which date each individual link was used.



To complement this data I also ran a survey on the student response to online marking and feedback. 35 undergraduate students responded. This showed that students found feedback most useful when it came in forms that were familiar from paper marking, like general comments on the essay and marginal comments throughout the essay. Less familiar types of feedback (links to web-resources included in bubble comments accessed by hovering the cursor) were often missed. In the survey, 28 out of 35 students said that they did not receive any links to the writing style guide within their QuickMark comments even though more than this did receive them. 3 students did not click on the links. Of the 5 remaining students who did make use of the links, 3 responded positively, mentioning their value in terms of improving their writing skills:

"It was good to refer to alongside my work"

"They helped me to strengthen my writing overall"

"Yes motivational to actually look at them-whereas on a paper copy you might read the comment and forget but here you can click straight through so much easier!"

REFLECTIONS

Some of the new functions available to us on GradeMark allow us to improve our feedback. We shouldn't just be using online marking tools to replicate existing off line marking processes. We can go much further! But if this is going to be successful it is really important to inform students about the range of options that online marking makes available so that they make the most of the systems we use.

Once we do this effectively, we can then explore other options. In English Literature, we are keen to ensure that our Department style guide is used effectively. But there are many other web resources to which we could link through Quickmarks: screencast essay writing guides in Politics and IWLP, as well as the new Academic Integrity toolkit by Study Advice, for example.

By including links within QuickMark comments we help to move students towards greater levels of assessment literacy.

LINKS

Academic Integrity Toolkit

<http://libguides.reading.ac.uk/academicintegrity>

Examples of assessment support screencasts created by colleagues

<https://blogs.reading.ac.uk/grass/screencast-bank/>

Study Support Screencast Suite

<https://www.reading.ac.uk/library/study-advice/guides/lib-sa-videos.aspx>

Bitly URL shortener and link management platform

<https://bitly.com/>
