Audio/Grid Feedback: finding the right blend
David Webster

1. Introduction

In conversation with a colleague, Dr William Large, I decided to trial audio feedback as part of getting to grips with how to use the new process for electronic submission of work, and how then best to mark work. My anxiety, though, was that the loss of marginal comments, and the lone voice, would seem too informal and too fleeting to contribute to student improvement. So we decided to take what we had seen in other areas, and use that too: a feedback grid.

2. Practice/innovation detail

Before I mark a batch of essays, I make a grid with the assessment criteria down the left hand side and the 'poor/fair/good/' etc. categories along the top, to match grade boundaries.

When I mark an essay, I read it (always a good start), and then look through again to see the extent to which it matches the criteria. I then put a tick in the appropriate part of the grid. The grid allows me to put the tick to the left or right of the box chosen, so I can indicate whether the work just attained that box, or was close to a higher or lower one.

I then start recording (I use a simple bit of free voice recording software on a laptop) and normally speak for one-and-a-half to two minutes. I address the student by name, and talk through the strengths and weaknesses of the piece, scope for improvement and often advise that I can say more if they visit me for a feedback tutorial. I tend to address the structure as a key element, and the overall extent to which the essay was a strong or poor response to the overall task. This is a more holistic response than the precise, criteria-focused grid.

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I then upload the .doc file and the .mp3 file to the feedback area of the EMA system.

3. Evaluation

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Students have been very positive. What I think they like is that they can see what their overall grade is based on – the grid gives them a sense of the grade emerging from a clear rationale – but this is paired with a more qualitative, personal tone, where the tutor directly engages with what the students have had to say. In a discursive topic area, this sense of staff engagement seems to be valued by the students.

I thought there was a danger of this being a very time-consuming approach, but it actually takes no more time than my previous marking practice. My anxiety over abandoning marginal scrawlings seems unnecessary, as students have remarked that they didn't actually go back and bring out old assessments when writing new ones.

4. Conclusions

The blend of formal grid and less formal audio feedback seems to offer an effective blend of elements. Either alone would be too cold and mechanical, or insufficiently transparent.

I have used this for all my modules this academic year and over the summer will be surveying practice in other institutions to assess whether there are lessons I can learn about the grid itself - what I might add or remove - and taking a more summative set of responses from students as to their views.

5. Further information

Module/Course/Department:	School of Humanities
Subject Area	Religion, Philosophy & Ethics
Level	
Number of students	
Academic Year (if appropriate):	
Keywords:	assessment, feedback