Chapter 22
Effective Assignment Feedback through Timely and Personal Digital Audio Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Audio feedback is a method that can provide rich, personal and detailed feedback that can convey more than the written word. This is particularly achieved through the capturing of the expressive quality of the speaker’s voice. Audio feedback has the potential to promote student engagement in the feedback process, as it is not associated with the negative connotations of written feedback. This chapter will draw upon the growing literature base and recent research. It will indicate how different approaches to using audio technology can enhance the learning experience and the feedback process through its personal and timely qualities. The chapter will conclude with guidelines for best practice for implementation of audio feedback.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains why well-designed audio feedback offers an effective tool for promoting student reflection in supporting their ongoing development. It describes and considers various methods of implementation and the factors that determine the approaches that can be taken. Drawing upon a growing literature base and evidence from recent research, the main focus is on how audio can be designed to enhance a meaningful feedback process through its ability to support personal and timely intervention. The chapter also provides further analysis of the students’ perceptions of audio feedback, how they value it, and its impact on their learning. It pulls together findings from several pieces of work by the authors including previously unpublished research.

We begin by introducing some important themes that underpin understandings of effective audio feedback implementation. We then introduce and examine five approaches to providing audio feedback: broadcast feedback; personal tutor monologue; peer review; peer conversation; and personal feedback.
conversations. We draw upon a range of data, using various research methods, to analyse each approach in more detail.

**The Purpose of Feedback and Important Themes in the Design of Effective Feedback**

Effective feedback creates a learning opportunity enabling and motivating students to identify what they need to do (Sadler, 1989). Students at Sheffield Hallam University appear to share this view,

*If you do a task and you don’t get feedback after, it’s like you’ve just written something and you have submitted it, but it’s not really important. But if you get that feedback, you know that you were lacking this and that.*

This comment indicates how students who receive useful feedback are able to use the assessment as a formative opportunity. A similar comment by a Sheffield Hallam University student emphasises how feedback can encourage ongoing engagement with the work,

*You can actually go back to the assignment, read it and just see exactly what the feedback was talking about. If you don’t get the feedback obviously there’s no point in going back and looking at the assignment you’ve done.*

In this digital age it is useful to consider, therefore, how technology can be used to encourage greater engagement with feedback, especially where it can support the feed forward of advice, enabling a quick focus on aspects of work in need of improvement (Chickering & Ehrmann 1996). Previous educational research demonstrates how audio technology can enhance learning through the provision of feedback. Moore’s (1977) studies of analogue audio feedback indicated that the students preferred audio feedback to written feedback and this has been echoed over the years by Sipple (2007) and others. Johanson (1999) noted that analogue audio feedback promoted self-reflection and the students’ ability to improve subsequent assignments through encouragement to feed forward.

Rotheram (2007) emphasises that audio can be used to introduce a personal, pastoral dimension to tutor feedback, a quality that can enhance the student learning experience, whilst at the same time satisfying administrative demands, including those of the external examiner.

**Timeliness of Feedback**

The students benefit from receiving feedback when it is given in a timely fashion, although Orrell (2006) found that students studying teaching and nursing education courses believe that the majority of feedback is inadequate and not timely. Hartley & Chesworth (2000) noted that 59% of their respondents felt feedback was too late to be of any use, i.e. they were not able to apply the specifics of the feedback into their ongoing learning. Gibbs & Simpson (2004) stress that the timeliness of feedback is a key component of good assessment feedback, reinforcing the earlier recommendations from Brown & Knight (1994) that feedback should be returned when it is still relevant in order to impact student learning. Where timely and informative feedback has been given, students become better problem solvers and are more able to assess their own work (Grant, 2006).

However, ‘timeliness’ needs to be clarified in the context of the digital age: it is not simply about feedback that is turned around quickly; it is about feedback that is highly accessible and available for whenever it is needed. Rather than seeing the student as recipient, it may be useful to understand the student as the person in control, deciding for himself or herself when it is best to listen back to the feedback and affect their own learning. This may be hours, days, weeks or months later (Middleton & Nortcliffe, 2008). This need