Edinburgh Napier UNIVERSITY

DLTE Department of Learning and Teaching Enhancement

ENhance QUICK GUIDE

Streamlining feedback on summative tasks

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What's the problem?

Nowadays it is widely recognised that giving developmental and formative feedback on student assignments is among the most important of the many ways in which we interact with learners, but doing so takes a great deal of academic time, effort and resource, particularly when cohort sizes increase more rapidly than staff-time deployment on assessment.

Why is it important?

Students need to be able to see what needs to improve in their work in subsequent assessments if they are to achieve more highly (Brown, 2015), and this is very successfully achieved through giving them developmental feedback (Sadler, 2013) but speed is of the essence if we are to be able to get commentary to them fast (Race, 2015).

What can we do?

Here we offer six ways in which you can give feedback effectively and efficiently, but since each of the feedback approaches suggested has merits and disadvantages, we suggest that you vary methods over a programme, choosing on each occasion ones that best suits the assignment, the level, the subject and the student body.

1. **Collective oral reports**. In these, instead of writing detailed feedback comments on individual assignments by hand or electronically, minimal in-script comments are made and grades/marks are given as normal on the work. The assessor then uses collective time (potentially at the start of a lecture or in a seminar but also perhaps by podcast or virtual meeting) to give an oral report to the group. In the face-to-face context, the tutor provides an overview of class performance and, for example, highlights common mistakes, orally remediates errors, clarifies misunderstandings and praises and shows examples of good practice. This can save a great deal of time, especially with large cohorts. Moreover, oral feedback can allow the use of tone of voice, differential emphasis and body language to get key points across and set a supportive mood around feedback. Students thereby can learn from this generic feedback about their own and each other's strengths and weaknesses and can ask questions about details they've not understood. Tutors can also ask students to judge, for example, which of two introductions was considered best, and why. This makes feedback a shared rather than a solitary experience and gives higher status to the commentary and critique.
2. **Collective written reports,** whereby you use a similar approach but in text form rather than orally. As with oral reports, this approach enables students to know how they are doing by comparison with the rest of the course, possibly illustrated graphically, and offers chances to illustrate good practice. A written report can provide a greater variety of examples of good practice and can offer additional reading suggestions. Of course,

it is possible to combine the two methods, providing a written report by email or online, and supplementing this with a live slot so students can interact face-to-face with the assessor. It's important to let the students know your rationale for using a collective approach, emphasising the benefits of a shared feedback experience.

3. **Model answers with 'exploded' text.** Just as handbooks for electrical appliances provide labelled diagrams so customers can identify how to use them and how they work, model answers can be designed with illustrative commentary appended to the text in hard copy or on the VLE to show how solutions have been reached and demonstrate good practice as well as illustrating problems and errors. They give students a good idea of what can be expected of them and it is sometimes easier to *show* students than *tell* them what is required. They can be very helpful to students, particularly in the early stages of a programme as the commentary can indicate why an answer is good, rather than just providing solutions as is commonly the case with traditional model answers. Staff preparing an assignment can draft several models, potentially using anonymised extracts from several student's answers (with their permission). However, caution should be exercised to avoid students thinking that model answers provide a recipe for success if copied, or that only one approach is acceptable.

4. **Statement banks.** These comprise an extended list of comments that can be appended or referred to relating to key points in a student's work. Many of us already have a substantial repertoire of frequently-used comments and this approach harnesses a resource you already use. It avoids you writing the same comments repeatedly; allows you to give individual comments additionally to the students who really need them; and can be automated with use of technology in the form of rubrics within assessment management. The Tutor identifies a range of regularly used comments written on students' work; these are collated and numbered; the tutor marks work and writes numbers on the text of the assignment where specific comments apply, or provides a written (or emailed) detailed commentary which pulls together and adapts the appropriate items into a more personalised form of continuous prose.

5. **Assignment return proformas.** Proformas are widely used because they save assessors writing the same thing repeatedly; help to keep assessors' comments on track; show how criteria match up to performance and how marks are derived; help students to see what is valued; and provide a useful written record. Criteria presented in an assignment brief can be utilised in a proforma; variations in weighting can be clearly identified; a Likert scale or boxes can be used to speed tutor's responses and space can be provided for individual comments.

6. **Computer-Assisted Assessment to improve the efficiency of assessment.** Using relevant and appropriate technologies can remove the necessity to get involved in activities involving routine checking against correct answers. In these contexts, it makes a lot more sense to use some form of e-assessment than for us to do this manually. Time saving computer-assisted assessment can include *inter alia* Multiple-Choice Questions (MCQs) which enable assessment to be undertaken regularly and incrementally and can save tutor time for large cohorts and repeated classes (although they are not so valuable for very small cohorts or where curriculum content changes rapidly). MCQs enable students to click on what they believe to be correct answers

and receive almost instantaneous feedback on whether or not they are right. In the best systems, they are informed why particular answers are right or wrong, and given further opportunities to check their understanding. If used formatively this facilitates the integration of assessment with learning and offers personalised learning, with students able to navigate through pathways directed by their responses to prior questions, with multiple opportunities for self-review. Students seem to really like having the chance to find out how they are doing, and attempt tests several times in an environment where no one else is watching how they do. For tentative students this can offer a neutral and non-exposing environment to practise and learn. E-assessment questions don't have to be just MCQs comprising a 'stem' statement or question that has one or more 'correct' responses. Other formats include:

- Drag-and-drop questions where students click and drag images or words into position on a diagram, map, table, photograph, etc.;
- Cloze questions where students fill-in (or select) blank sections, for example, missing key words (possibly selected from pull-down lists);
- Hotspots, where students click on a picture, graph or diagram to indicate the selected answer they believe to be correct;
- Knowledge matrices where several related MCQs are grouped together with interdependent answers, reducing the potential for students just to guess correct answers;
- Matching pairs where students match items in a list of words or statements with items in a second list;
- Pull-down list where students match a set of statements with items in a pull-down list, or label diagrams with items and so on.

Key takeaways

Although we might prefer to give detailed individual comments to students, this proves impossible when we are trying to do so with large numbers of students and required fast turn-around times for marks and feedback. We need to use the range of quick feedback methods available to us so that our feedback can be transformative, that is change the behaviours of students in relation to assignments in time for them to improve on their next assessed task.

References

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Notes

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