## Assessment and Feedback for the Curriculum Innovation Project Part 2: Learning Technologies

This is the second of two videos that are intended to inform your thinking about the assessment and feedback activities that will form an important part of your CIP modules. This one focuses on the learning technologies that are available while the other outlines educational issues.

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I expect that every assignment will be submitted online by your students, probably using the new institutional e-Assignment system. This has been thoroughly tested by Medicine and Health Sciences this year and will be more widely available in 2012. It can be used for individual and group assignments and is designed to improve the feedback provided to students.

When you set up an assignment you can specify one or more questions which students must answer in addition to submitting their files. For example you could encourage self-assessment by asking them what they think the greatest strengths and weaknesses of their work are, and if there are any areas on which they would specifically like feedback.

The students upload one or more files of the types specified – for example a PowerPoint presentation and a Word essay – and check that they have been uploaded correctly before final submission. Documents can also be checked for academic integrity using Turnitin if required.

You can distribute the marking load between several people if you wish, and assign specific students to individual markers. Marking can be done on-screen or on paper – if you print out the assignments – but the marks and typed feedback for each criteria will need to be entered online. You can also upload an additional feedback file, such as an audio MP3 file, if you wish.

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You can easily record your comments as you read through an assignment, using either a special dictaphone or maybe the recording feature built in to some phones. Alternatively, you can use a microphone or headset with free software on your PC. The recording must be saved as an MP3 file so that the student will be able to listen to it using any type of computer or player.

You click record when you have a comment to make and pause the recording while you read on. Research clearly indicates that students really like this type of feedback – for them it is the next best thing to a personal one-to-one session. It is also a very easy and natural technique for you to use, once you have mastered the technology.

There are obviously good practice guidelines you need to follow – for example describing the positive aspects of the work before more critical comments – and avoiding recording late at night when tired since your tone of voice will be affected. It helps to imagine the student sitting there in the room with you.

You could also skim read a sample of the assignments and quickly record and release some generic feedback in advance of the more detailed individual marking.

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For some subjects, online tests and exams may be a useful option; these are usually known as computer-assisted assessment or CAA. It is especially useful for testing knowledge of facts or ability to perform a calculation, although it can also be used to test higher-order learning by using sets of questions based around a case study or scenario. In general, questions are either variations on multiple-choice or short text entry – and the latter require perfect spelling, which is not good for dyslexic students.

Tutors like it because it automatically marks the questions, effectively eliminating any marking burden. The downside is that the preparation of the questions takes a good deal of time, and the overall effect is usually to shift the effort required rather than actually saving time – at least in the first year it is used.

Students like it because they can get detailed feedback on the answers they chose, provided that feedback has been created by the question author. This usually only applies to formative tests, although it can also be used in exams.

CAA is most efficient when used with large cohorts of students, but that can also lead to problems when trying to book sufficient workstations for an exam. You will need to work closely with the University’s CAA Officer if you adopt this approach to assessment.

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There are two CAA systems available at Southampton; Questionmark Perception and the Blackboard Quiz feature.

Both of them offer a wide range of question types and features such as the use of images in the question or answer choices. The key difference is that Perception is a dedicated system that is secure and reliable. This is obviously important for summative exams where you don’t want students being able to look up answers on the internet or use online communication systems. You will still need to invigilate the exam rooms since old-fashioned methods of cheating still work!

Blackboard is easier to use than Perception, and offers a simple way to create and deliver online formative tests, where the emphasis is on self-assessment and feedback that aids learning. Tutors can look at the results for the whole cohort to identify topics that need further instruction or guidance. You would normally expect students to access these tests in their own time, subject to any deadlines you may have set. You can allow them to take tests more than once as they work towards the score they wish to achieve, and this process can be supported by selecting questions from a larger pool of possible questions, so the test is different each time they take it.

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Blogs are like an online notebook which individual students or groups can use for learning activities. They might use it as a reflective journal to record their thoughts about research papers or articles that they have found, or to help plan a project. The key idea is that because they are online, other people can read and comment on the posts.

As a tutor you can gain an insight into the student’s thinking, and perhaps suggest ideas they might wish to follow up. Or you can see how a group project is progressing and take prompt action if things are not moving forward.

Access to the blog can be controlled, so you can allow groups or individuals to look at each other’s blogs if it seems appropriate. You might use this to support peer learning, so students are expected to read and comment on each other’s posts.

Assessment of blogs can be difficult – or at least time consuming. You can create a rubric that will be used to evaluate their posts and determine a grade – so for example there might be a requirement to post at least one substantive post and three comments every week. Another option is to get the students to submit an assignment based on their three best posts, so their posts act as a resource for the final analytical essay.

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Wikis are collaborative websites, and are usually used by a group of students to assemble and organise information. For example, you may require students to collaborate to research a topic and write a final report that will be submitted and assessed in the usual way. They can use the wiki to collate and share the sources they find and also work together on the draft report. Other wiki pages can be used to plan and record their project work. Alternatively, the wiki itself may be the assessed product, and you will have developed a set of criteria to ensure that both you and the students know what is required .

Every change made to a wiki is recorded electronically, so in theory each student’s precise contribution can be determined – but in practice this is too much effort and it would be better to use other methods of evaluating teamwork. That said, each student can have a wiki page that they use as a work log to record their main contributions to the work.

Since students are unused to using wikis, it is a good idea to carefully structure their engagement with it by defining a series of learning activities that they are expected to complete each week. You will also need to provide them with individual feedback at least a couple of times during the course.

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The first video discusses the strong educational value of peer and self assessment, and the University has two systems which can support these.

Blackboard 9 has a new peer and self assessment tool. Students upload one or more files by a submission deadline, then use criteria defined by the tutor to assign points to other student’s submissions. They can also type comments to add richness and detail to the feedback. Typically you would ask each student to provide feedback on two or three submissions, so they in turn will receive two or three sets of feedback on their work.

The Turnitin system, normally used to deter and detect plagiarism, can also facilitate peer and self assessment. The process is broadly similar to Blackboard’s, but it offers greater control over the assignment of reviewers and does not assign points – it just provides detailed formative feedback. It also allows tutors to grade peer review activity and award students marks for their work – which I feel is more useful than Blackboard, in which students grade the submissions.

Either of these systems would enable you to automate the process of self and peer assessment, perhaps to ensure that students get effective feedback on the draft of their main assignment or project plan. You will of course need to ensure that students understand the objective is to build their critical skills and expose them to multiple viewpoints, and not simply save to the tutor’s time.

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The final technology I want to discuss in this video are the in-class handheld electronic voting system from Turning Point, often called zappers. The software integrates with PowerPoint and enables you to include question slides in your presentations. Students use their zappers to vote on these questions and the results can be viewed on screen straight away.

They can be used to check students understanding of a topic by asking objective questions, to survey their opinions about an issue to promote debate or even elicit anonymous feedback on a student presentation.

As a tutor, you can use the questions to check whether students have understood key learning points before you progress. They can also be used to facilitate a successful educational approach called Peer Instruction.

If you would like to explore any of these learning technologies in more detail, please contact me.

Thanks for watching.

<https://uhra.herts.ac.uk/dspace/bitstream/2299/4890/1/904298.pdf>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lBYrKPoVFwg>