

Giving feedback by MP3 recorder

by Bob Rotheram

As a teacher in higher education, you will have, or be evolving, your own style for giving feedback on written student assignments. My practice has developed over the years. Here is what I currently do when commenting on a typical essay or report via an MP3 recording.

- Have the assignment details and assessment criteria with me.
- Read the assignment, making written comments on it as I go along. If it's on paper, I jot things in the margin. If it's in an electronic format (e.g. Word), I use the 'Track changes' facility to annotate the document.
- Read it again, more quickly this time, perhaps making a few more comments along the way.
- Jot down (on scrap paper) the main summary points I wish to make. (See below for a general structure.)
- Start the MP3 recorder.
- Build the feedback in chunks, making frequent use of the pause button.
- Don't bother to erase and re-record 'misspeaks'; just correct them immediately, as in conversation.
- When complete, review the recording. I want mine to be clear and easy to follow. Also, I'm aiming to come across as approachable, definitely not pompous or overbearing. I'd like to avoid appearing somewhere as an example of 'the lecturer from hell', but I trust students not to do that to me.
- Deal with minor errors and omissions in a separate recording. I don't waste time re-recording the whole thing unless I really must.

The general structure is usually along the lines of:

- Introduce myself to the student in a friendly manner.
- Say which assignment I'm giving feedback on.
- Outline the main elements of the comments which I'll be giving (see below).
- Work steadily through the assignment, amplifying and explaining notes I've put in the margins and, especially at the end, making more general points.
- Refer to the assessment criteria.
- Explain my thought processes as I move towards allocating a mark.
- Give the mark.
- Offer a few (reasonably attainable) suggestions for improvement, even if the work is excellent.
- Invite comments back from the student, including on the method of giving feedback.
- Round things off in a friendly way.

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