

Losing the Red Pen: Video Grading Feedback in Distance and Blended Learning Writing Courses

Lisa Ann Jones
Director of Educational Technology
Berea College
100 Campus Way, CPO 2208
Berea, Kentucky 40403
859-985-3209
Lisa_Jones@berea.edu

Abstract

This paper will give a step-by-step demonstration on how to create MP4 files to video-grade undergraduate writing assignments. The process of using prepared rubrics to guide video and audio feedback will be presented and examples shown. This assessment method provides students with personalized video-feedback as a re-usable learning object.

The hands-on session and instructions will guide participants on how to use free Web 2.0 tools to provide students with highly effective feedback on writing assignments using a novel and easy-to-learn process of screen-casting student feedback. The video grading process recreates the face-to-face consultation that usually occurs only in tutoring or office consultations. Video-grading allows students to see and hear feedback on written assignments and to store and reuse video learning objects as a future resource. All video sources can be played and stored on all digital and mobile devices in use by students. This original process has been used for more than 3 years in undergraduate community college writing courses with great success.

Introduction

In distance and blended learning classrooms, the issue of student feedback is an important one. Even in the traditional face-to-face classroom, timely feedback that is appropriate and constructive for all students often consists of pop quizzes or other rote memorization assessments. Online and blended learning classrooms are more challenging with many subjective formative assessments such as writing samples and drafts that have to be manually graded. Online students often perceive instructors as being distant and even unapproachable due to the asynchronous nature of the experience. For these reasons, first year online writing classes require quality feedback. This paper describes a novel way of grading writing assignments using video feedback for students in blended and distance learning environments.

Video feedback in writing assessments should be seen as part of an effective feedback loop for students, especially when the instructor is known only at a distance. Student persistence relies on the principle that assigned work is understood and that feedback is constructively directing the student towards a successful outcome. Feedback loops involving interactive and visually constructive assessment support student persistence in an online or blended learning environment (“Instructional Interaction,” 2004). Goetz (2011) describes the feedback loop in education as consisting of, “Provid[ing] people with information about their actions in real time (or something close to it), then give them an oppor-

tunity to change those actions, pushing them toward better behaviors. Action, information, reaction” (p. 1). Providing students with video feedback on writing assignments in an asynchronous class is a positive solution for this real time action.

According to Goetz (2011), feedback loops require four aspects: Evidence, Relevance, Consequence and Action (p. 3). Evidence for an English 101 community college writing course consists of the paper assignment itself, as an object for assessment. Relevance is guided for the paper according to the curriculum and the goals and objectives for the class. Consequence is demonstrated through quality feedback and most important for students in a writing class. Looking at the feedback model that describes consequence as “information that ties [to a] larger goal or purpose” it is evident that instructor comments on a first draft writing assignment and revisions are essential to providing quality information for students in order to provide them with feedback information for the next step (Goetz, 2011).

The last step in the formal framework of feedback loops is Action. Action can be described as the closing of a loop involving the person’s reaction to the previous feedback. In a writing course, this reaction comes about when the student realizes through personalized feedback what areas need corrective action to bring the assessment object up to the required level. Using video feedback on student writing assignments improves this level of real time constructivist scaffolding and provides personalized information to the student while acting as a guide towards appropriate action, thus resulting in a quality learning experience.

Further, using video grading for writing assignments supports a main tenet of Vygotsky’s constructivist model through scaffolding and facilitating with the instructor actively involved as a guide and coach (Vygotsky, 1978; Murphy, 1997; Wiggins, 2004; Honebein, 1996).

Grounded in the principles of constructivism and feedback loops with an effort towards closing the loop for writing assessment, video grading has been effectively used in a community college environment for the past 3 years. This idea was born out of the need for better communication and support for struggling writing students in a first year college distance learning writing course. It has also been introduced to faculty of Berea College as part of a blended learning classroom support for writing and teacher certification programs.

Video Grading Methods

The free Web 2.0 tool, Screencast-O-Matic has been used for the last 3 years to provide this visual feedback on writing assignments. Screencast-O-Matic is available as a downloaded program or online through a web browser and compatible with PC or Mac and found at: <http://screencast-o-matic.com/>. Screencast-O-Matic is based on point and click technology and does not require extensive technology expertise.

2014 ASCUE Proceedings

Once Screencast-O-Matic is open the “Start Recording” button should be clicked.

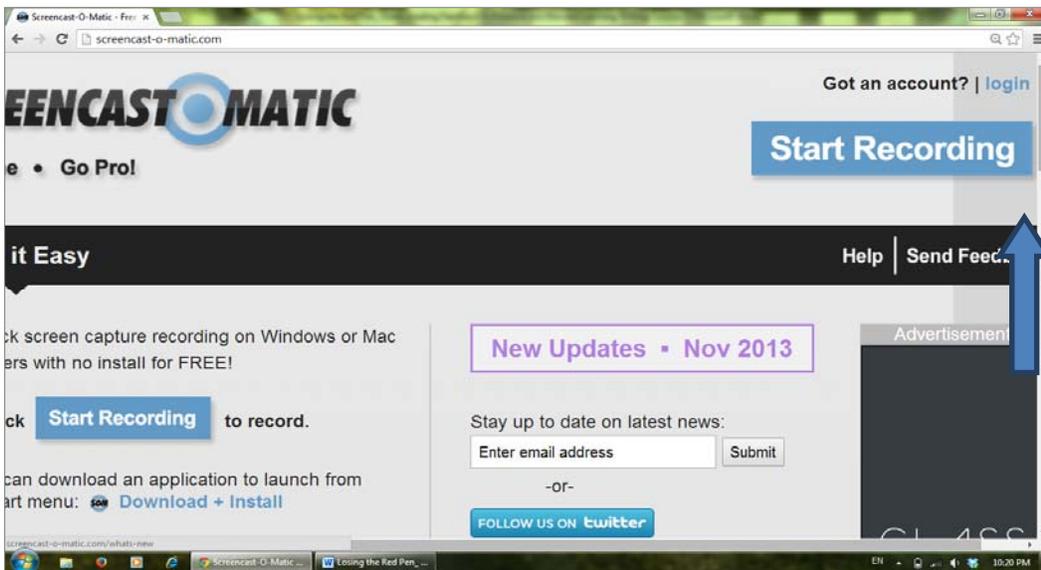


Figure Begin a recording

Instructors should simultaneously open the college’s Learning Management System to the appropriate section where student papers are uploaded. Ideally, students should be using Word to submit their writing assignments. However, the video grading does allow for various attached methods such as Google docs or other alternative document processors.

Once a student paper is downloaded and displayed on your screen, adjust the dotted window highlighter on Screencast-O-Matic to cover the student’s paper submission.



Figure

Resize dotted line to cover desired area

Switch your screen to the opened student paper and drag the dotted record screen to cover the paper and the Word tool bar.

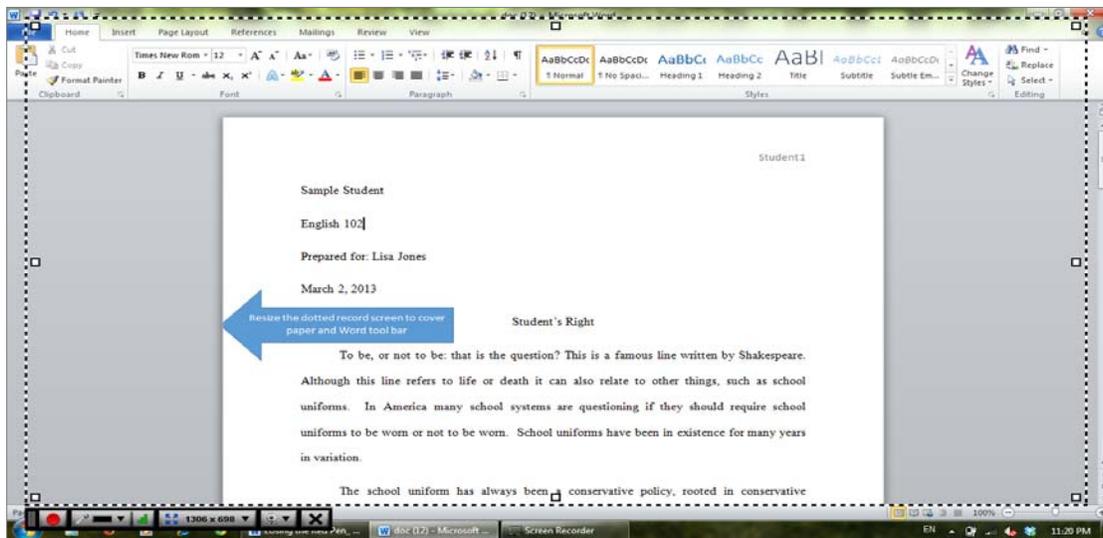


Figure Resize dotted screen for screen capture

It is good practice to scan the student submission first to see or highlight any major errors in advance of the recording. Using a prepared rubric is also recommended. The rubric should be included on the original assignment's paper requirements and then copied and pasted over to the end of the student submission assignment.

Next, click the red recording button and begin grading the paper. In the experience of the last three years, it has been noted that instructors should grade the paper as if the student is sitting in a face-to-face office consultation. Speak normally and positively as the paper is graded using the real time highlighter on Screencast-O-Matic to highlight problem areas and make voice comments. Highlight the prepared rubric pasted and speak to the student on the rationale for the grade finally given.

2014 ASCUE Proceedings

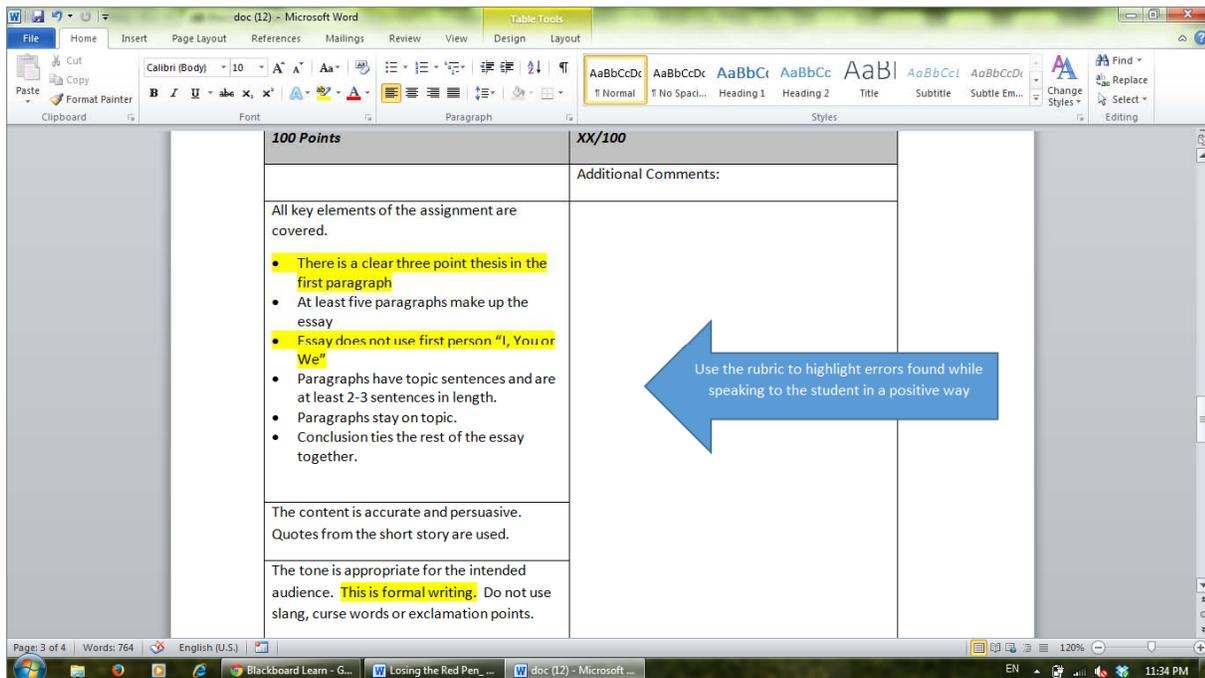


Fig-

Figure Paste rubric to end of submission

In most cases, do not be concerned about errors in speaking. Treat the video grading as if the student is sitting at an office session where the atmosphere is informal and open to regular conversation. No script is needed.

Finally, once the recording is finished and does not exceed the 15 minute free amount, click the done button.

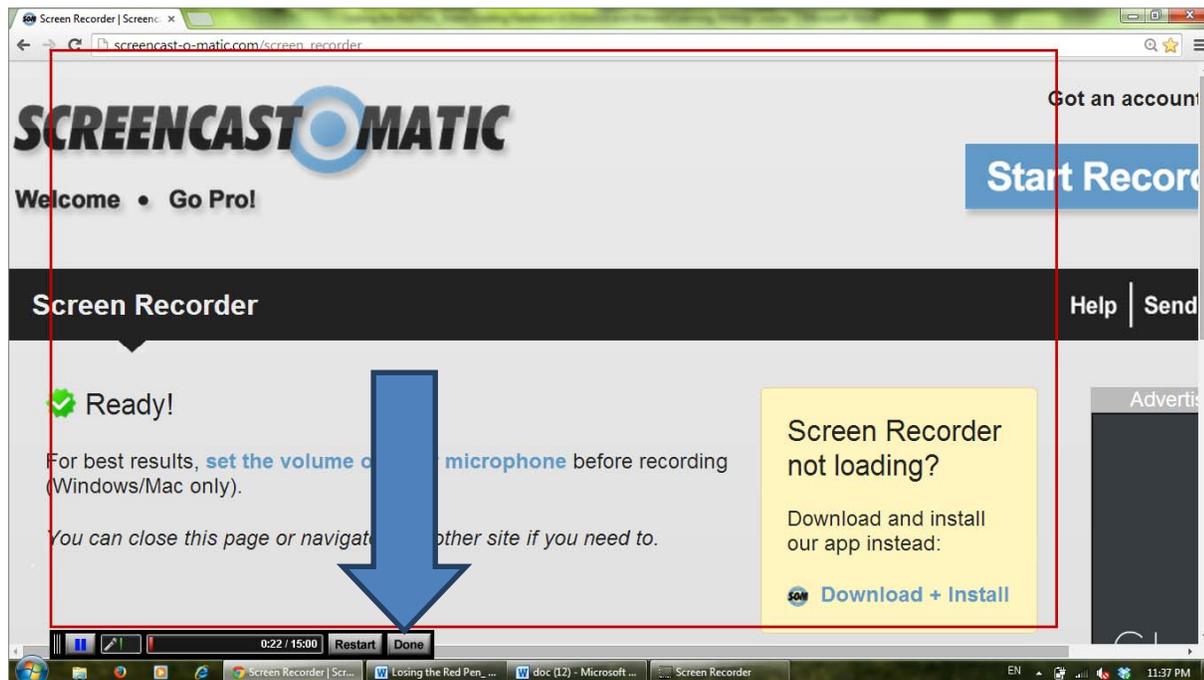


Fig-

Figure Click done to save recording

An option to save the video will appear. From three years of research and trial and error, it has been found that saving as an MP4 video works best when using an LMS system such as Blackboard. The recorded video can then be uploaded in the feedback section for the paper submission. Alternatively, videos can be automatically saved to your own private Youtube channel and private links can be sent to the student or posted to the feedback section on Blackboard, any learning management site or via email.

Lessons Learned

It is not necessary to try to be formal or perfect in the video grade. Treat the recording as if an informal face-to-face feedback session is taking place with the student sitting in your office. Students seem to find this aspect appealing and it provides an entirely different aspect to constructive criticism as opposed to the red pen or Word markups, normally seen as impersonal and harsh.

Longer papers can also be video graded, but may run over the 15 minute time limit. Pro accounts for Screencast-O-Matic can be purchased for 15.00 per year for unlimited recording. A word of caution however, is that most students will not watch videos that are too long. A good practice for longer papers may be to pre-grade the paper using Word tools to highlight specific areas so you can quickly go through the main points.

Technology access could be a problem for a minority of students who do not have high speed internet available to them to watch the videos. This is less and less likely as most students will be able to access free WiFi from alternative areas such as public libraries, public places or restaurants. Access can also be a negative experience for an instructor trying to upload videos from a slow connection at home.

2014 ASCUE Proceedings

Video grading and viewing is best done using a high speed internet connection that will easily play back streaming videos without stalling.

Conclusions

As an experienced first year college writing instructor, I have found video grading to be a superior method to providing quality and timely feedback to students in a face-to face setting and especially to students in a distance learning setting. The era of leaving short comments in red pen or Word markup highlighting may be nearing an end. In many cases, students do not comprehend what an instructor's red-penned comments actually mean in terms of supportive feedback. There is much room for misunderstanding when corrective comments are not clear. Further, students can visually see errors as they are found by the instructor and audibly hear the instructor's positive reinforcement along with the recommended revisions. Once students have the MP4 video feedback they can watch it as many times as needed, creating a virtual learning object that can be used as a resource for later papers.

In the three years since this practice has been used, student evaluations of this method have been overwhelmingly positive. A few anonymous student comments are:

- *I just wanted to take a moment and let you know that I appreciate the fact that you made a video response to my paper. It has really helped me grow as a writer.*
- *I have never learned so much in an online class. It is so helpful that you provide videos in grading and teaching. I think this makes learning so much easier. I can't believe how many teacher[sic] never tell you what to do to correct your mistakes. Without correction, I feel we leave with the same knowledge we came with.*

Many students have stated that they use the videos even after the class ends as a resource for other paper assignments. Using video grading has proven to be a positive feedback method that utilizes constructivist principles while providing three-dimensional, real-time information for struggling writing students both face-to-face and online.

References

- Goetz, T. (2011). Harnessing the power of feedback loops. Wired Magazine Online. Retrieved from: http://www.wired.com/2011/06/ff_feedbackloop/.
- Honebein, P. (1996). Seven goals for the design of constructivist learning environments. In B. Wilson, *Constructivist learning environments* (pp. 17-24). New Jersey: Educational Technology Publications.
- Murphy, E. (1997). *Constructivism: From philosophy to practice*. Retrieved from: <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED444966.pdf>
- "Instructional Interaction: Key To Student Persistence?." *Distance Education Report* 8.11 (2004): 3. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 12 Apr. 2014.
- "ScreenCast-O-Matic." Free Screencasting tool. Retrieved from: <http://screencast-o-matic.com/>
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wiggins, G. (2004). Assessment as feedback. Johns Hopkins School of Education Online. Retrieved from: <http://education.jhu.edu/PD/newhorizons/strategies/topics/Assessment%20Alternatives/wiggins.htm>