

Show me! Enhanced Feedback Through Screencasting Technology

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Technology is an ever-increasing part of how teachers and learners work on language and texts. Indeed, computers, the Internet, and Web 2.0 applications are revolutionizing how texts are consumed, discussed, and produced in classrooms. This article focuses on a specific technological innovation emerging from this digital revolution: the use of screencasts and their potential to transform how feedback can be offered to language-learners on written assignments. Drawing on a brief review of the literature and the author's own experiences as a second-language writing teacher, this article presents an overview of screencasting technology and examines how freely available software can be used by teachers and students to produce and share asynchronously online video recordings of themselves as they edit and comment on documents viewed on a computer screen. It is argued that at a time when teaching and learning is increasingly migrating to online digital contexts, screencasting represents a low-cost, intuitive, and time-saving interface the multimodal nature of which can counter limitations typically associated with more traditional feedback approaches.

La technologie joue un rôle croissant dans le travail des enseignants et des étudiants portant sur la langue et les textes. En fait, les ordinateurs, l'Internet et les applications Web 2.0 transforment la façon dont les textes sont employés, discutés et produits dans les salles de classe. Cet article évoque une innovation technologique spécifique qui découle de cette révolution numérique : l'emploi de la vidéographie et son potentiel pour transformer la façon dont les apprenants de langue reçoivent de la rétroaction sur leurs travaux écrits. Puisant dans une brève analyse documentaire et dans les expériences personnelles de l'auteur comme enseignant d'écriture en langue seconde, cet article présente un aperçu de la technologie de la vidéographie et examine l'emploi que peuvent faire les enseignants et les étudiants de logiciels gratuits pour produire et partager en mode asynchrone des enregistrements vidéo en ligne d'eux-mêmes pendant qu'ils révisent et commentent des documents affichés sur un écran d'ordinateur. On fait valoir que pendant cette période où l'enseignement et l'apprentissage se déplacent de plus en plus vers des contextes numériques en ligne, la vidéographie représente une interface économique et intuitive qui permet d'économiser du temps et dont le caractère multimodal peut éliminer les contraintes souvent associées aux approches plus traditionnelles à la rétroaction.

Recent years have seen a growing recognition of the effect of technology on the pedagogic processes through which teachers and students can work on language and texts. The increasing prevalence of computers, the Internet, and Web 2.0 applications and the gradual adoption of computer-mediated tasks have transformed how texts and their production can be approached, discussed, and scaffolded in classrooms (Chao & Lo, 2011; Stapleton, 2010). For teachers, the challenge has been to try to keep up with the rapid pace of technological change and the wide array of possible uses identified for digital tools in educational contexts. Seeking to address a call for greater attention to technological innovations and their applications in writing classrooms (Buck, 2008; Walker et al., 2011), I share below my own experiences with a digital resource that has allowed me to enrich my feedback on students' written assignments. I argue that at a time when effective feedback practices for second-language (L2) writers more often remains an ideal than a reality, screencasting technology represents a low-cost, intuitive, and time-saving interface the multimodal nature of which can counter limitations typically associated with more traditional feedback approaches.

Feedback, Technology, and L2 Writing Development

In the field of L2 writing, interest in the role played by feedback practices in writing development is part of an extensive and at times controversial body of work that seeks to determine how best to provide students with comments, corrections, and advice on their written assignments (Ferris, 2003, 2010; Hyland, 2010). Much of this work is rooted in evidence of the beneficial effect of feedback on students' achievement as a unique opportunity for one-on-one interaction between instructors and students about their strengths or weaknesses as writers (Séror, 2011).

Yet despite the recognized potential of feedback, research has also consistently documented the challenge that this common pedagogic practice represents for both instructors and students. Butler (2011) observes, for example, that instructors' struggles with heavy schedules, limited resources, and large classes are a contributing factor to the gap between ideal realizations of feedback and reality. Similarly, Carless et al. (2011) emphasize how difficult it is for teachers to produce feedback that is clear and precise for students to interpret while remaining brief and efficient enough to remain practical in offering such feedback.

This feedback challenge is one that I have experienced myself as a language teacher working with both novice and advanced L2 writers in university settings. For almost a decade I have struggled to offer feedback that focuses on issues including specific grammar points, the ideas presented, and/or the overall organization of the submitted text. Like many of my colleagues in the field, to achieve this goal I have explored various systems in attempts to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of this

time-consuming and demanding task. Most recently, this exploration has led me adopt in my classes a particular type of electronic feedback: the use of screencasting technology to produce and exchange with students by e-mail video-recordings of myself editing and commenting on digital versions of their assignments.

What is Screencasting?

Screencasting is a relatively new term used to describe the broadcast through the World Wide Web of digital video-recordings of a computer's on-screen activities. These videos can be accompanied by a narration recorded while the video is created or added at a later date once the recording has been completed (Carr & Ly, 2009). Video tutorials posted on YouTube to teach users how to navigate a specific computer program are a good example of screencasting technology. Increasingly popular with software developers, gamers, and information technology specialists, this technology has been explored by educators together with the potential that lies in producing audiovisual records of students' and/or instructors' actions and processes as they complete various language-related tasks on computers (Hamel & Caws, 2010; Mathisen, 2012; Park & Kinginger, 2010).

In the area of L2 writing pedagogy, Stannard (2006, 2007) was among the first to explore how this technology could be used to produce feedback by creating video-recordings of both his spoken comments and his on-screen actions as he responded to students' texts. Stannard's Web page (<http://www.teachertrainingvideos.com/luFeedback/index.html>) offers samples of himself offering video feedback to a student. This mode of feedback stood out for its ability to combine both visual and auditory input, thus advancing earlier explorations of the use of audio-recorded feedback and podcasting as an alternative to handwritten marginal notes (Anson, 1997; Butler, 2011; McFarlane & Wakeman, 2011). Characterized by Stannard (2007) as "a halfway house between handing back a student a written piece of work with comments on it and actually meeting the student to mark their work" (para. 5), this work is rooted in the belief that multimodal feedback allows for a wider range of individual learning styles and preferences (Mayer, 2003) and is more likely to provide a learning experience that students will find memorable (Brick & Holmes, 2008).

Screencasting for Teachers

Of interest for this article is that despite its promise, screen-capture technology for feedback has typically been limited by the technical challenge of producing, encoding, and transferring large media files to students (Brick & Holmes, 2008). Although it is possible to exchange such files with students through DVDs or USB keys, e-mail servers' attachment size restrictions have

frequently been identified as an obstacle for teachers interested in adopting screen-capture technology (Silva, 2012; Stannard, 2007).

Lately, however, innovations such as cloud computing and online data storage (i.e., YouTube) have simplified the process of screencasting, and software has emerged that is designed to make screencasting available to everyday people seeking to integrate in their online interactions a “look over my shoulder” effect similar to one-on-one instruction” (Carr & Ly, 2009, p. 411).

One particular software package, Jing (<http://jingproject.com>), a freely available software download available for both Mac and Windows, has emerged in the literature as a promising tool for teachers interested in providing feedback with screen-capture technology (Carr & Ly, 2009; Mathisen, 2012; Stannard, 2012). Whereas other free screencasting software options exist (e.g., Screencastomatic and Wink), Jing stands out for its accessibility and ease of use. (A detailed list of “12 screencasting tools for creating video tutorials” can be found at <http://mashable.com/2008/02/21/screencasting-video-tutorials/>.) Designed to capture and share images or short videos of one’s computer screen of up to five minutes in length, Jing has been described as “a good alternative for those who want to experiment with video creation, but don’t want to invest a lot of money upfront and/or spend many hours learning a new piece of software” (Graham, 2010, p. 6). Similarly, Fish and Lumadue (2010) note that Jing represents an innovative, user-friendly, and effective means of conveying “quality feedback.”

Working with Jing

Once installed on a computer, Jing allows users to bring up a series of crosshairs that are used to select a region of one’s computer screen (the whole screen or only a specific area can be selected). Once an area has been designated, one can either capture screen shots of that area or record a video of everything that occurs in it. Users also have the option of adding an audio track of their voice to the screen capture being produced. Once a recording or screenshot has been completed, one may either save or copy the resulting screen recording or image. A third option enables the user to upload the screen recording to a password-protected server from where the video can be screencast. An account for up to 2GB of storage on a designated host server (Screencast.com) is offered free by Techsmith (more space is available for a cost).

A strength of the program is that the conversion and uploading of the screen-capture video file can be achieved through the click of a single button. It should be noted, however, that one must wait for the upload to be completed before another video can be produced and that the duration of this upload process will vary according to the speed of one’s Internet connection and the length and size of the video being uploaded. It should be stressed that Jing will probably not be a practical solution for teachers

whose access to the Internet is limited or restricted to dial-up services. Once the uploading process has been completed, Jing provides the user with a unique URL address that can be shared by e-mail with others or embedded in a Web site or other documents. Anyone who clicks on this link can then view online the screen recording produced by Jing (training videos that show teachers how they can use Jing are available at <http://www.teachertrainingvideos.com/Jing/index.html>).

Offering Feedback with Jing

My own experiments with Jing began in fall 2008. As a writing teacher, I was drawn to the combined oral and visual modes that Jing made possible for feedback interactions. With Jing I could use my voice to create a more conversational and personal form of feedback while concurrently highlighting and manipulating on screen various elements of the text to which I was responding (e.g., selecting and changing on screen the color of specific words). A brief sample of the type of feedback produced for my students through Jing can be seen and heard at <http://www.screencast.com/t/uGh31Nh7fq>.

Integrating screencasting into my teaching required adjustments to my regular feedback practices. First, I had to learn to work with digital versions of students' assignments. In most cases, this entailed asking students to submit assignments as an electronic file sent by e-mail or posted on an online course management site. In situations where students could submit only hard copies of their assignments, I discovered that I could digitize their texts by scanning them and saving them as PDF files that could be edited and marked, making it possible to use Jing even when working with handwritten assignments. A brief example of the type of feedback that can result from this can be seen at <http://www.screencast.com/t/IDoU8pEOmzTb>.

When using Jing to provide feedback, my typical work flow begins with opening the file that contains a student's assignment and then setting Jing to record the full screen of my computer. Using a headset microphone, I then begin to read and comment on the text orally and visually. All oral comments are recorded in synch with my mouse movements as I highlight and/or edit various sections of text. Although it is easier to edit and manipulate Microsoft Word documents, when working with scanned PDF copies of assignments I use the free PDF reader FOXIT to insert lines, boxes, and written comments on students' assignments (http://www.foxitsoftware.com/Secure_PDF_Reader/).

As with most computer-mediated pedagogic practice, an initial investment of time and effort is required before screencasting can be used with confidence and ease. Indeed, my initial recording attempts with Jing contained frequent hesitations or misstarts, and I had to experiment with various means of editing students' drafts before developing a sense of which tools worked best for specific types of comments (e.g., over time I have increas-

ingly chosen to use the TEXT HIGHLIGHT tool when reading Word documents to draw students' attention to textual elements in their texts).

Learning to coordinate my voiced comments smoothly with visual scaffolding also required some practice. It should be stressed that at present, Jing does not permit one to edit or make changes to a video-recording or to produce a separate voice-over after the video is completed. In the worst case scenario, one has to delete and restart a recording that has gone wrong. It is, however, possible to reduce the chances of this happening by marking a text in advance, thus preparing what one wants to say (i.e., before starting the video, identifying in green all sections on which one wishes to comment). Producing smooth feedback is also facilitated by the fact that Jing allows users to start and pause a screen capture recording with the push of a button. As a result, I typically start a recording with a few brief words about what I will be focusing on and how the feedback will proceed before immediately pausing the recording. During this pause, I read through the text and only begin to record again when I have identified an aspect on which I wish to comment (I can also choose to edit or modify a section in advance before starting to record my comments). After each comment, I can pause once more, leaving time to read the text further until I decide to make another comment.

A final constraint to the program is that one must also learn to fit one's comments into the five-minute time limit imposed by the program for each screencast. Although this forces one continually to be aware of the time left in a recording, this time restriction does have the advantage of ensuring that the videos sent to students remain of a manageable length (i.e., the feedback can easily be viewed and listened to in one sitting). In fact, I make a point of clarifying for my students that in most cases, especially when working with shorter writing assignments, they can expect my screencasts to last no more than five minutes. On occasions when a recording of more than five minutes is deemed necessary due to a large number of issues to address or when working on longer assignments, a simple solution is to produce several five-minute recordings. In such cases, one can end the first screencast by asking students to move on to part 2 of the feedback by clicking on the second of two URLs provided.

Overall, in the past four years while using the above techniques, my ability to record comments while minimizing hesitations, awkward pauses, and misstarts has improved. This learning curve parallels in many ways the process that has allowed me to gain (again, with time and experience) the confidence and skill to comment effectively on students' assignments with an indelible red pen.

Always after finishing a recording, Jing allows users to preview and check the quality of the screencast. If the recording is satisfactory, the screencast is uploaded and a URL can then be e-mailed to students. Thus my students quickly learn to expect e-mails such as that shown in Figure 1 with an eval-

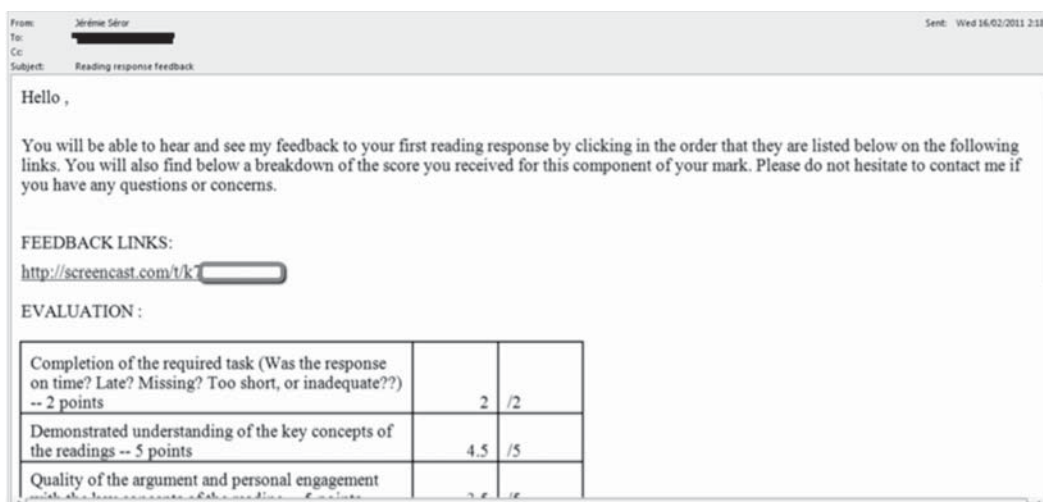


Figure 1. Sample of an e-mail sent to students.

uation grid and score assigned to their written work as well as a URL link to my specific comments and feedback.

With the screencast link, students can access their feedback on the device and in the location of their choice. They can also review the feedback as often as they wish when revising their text in the case of a multiple-draft assignment. This ability to rewind and stop their teacher at will is an advantage that screencasting offers over face-to-face conferences. Indeed, with screencasting, students can access live comments without the affective stress typically associated with having their teacher present.

It is important to note that unlike online video services such as YouTube, Jing users retain the rights of the content that they upload. Moreover, users can easily deactivate and/or delete a link to a screencast that they have created. It is also possible to track how often a screencast has been watched, as well as to save an archival copy to a hard drive.

Reflections on My Use of Screencasting

Since starting to use Jing to provide feedback to my students, I have greatly appreciated the new feedback options that it has opened up to me as a teacher. No longer forced to write out everything I wish to say to my students, I am able communicate more with greater flexibility with the addition of a valuable dynamic visual dimension to my explanations. The degree to which one chooses to replace written comments with audio-recorded comments varies according to the assignment and the students receiving the feedback. Low-proficiency listeners, for example, will require extra visual scaffolding and more written text and/or visual codes to accompany the oral comments made in a screencast.

I also value being able to produce feedback that is more conversational in nature and that allows for a greater degree of personalization and subtlety than traditional written feedback. This includes, for example, adding emotional color to my feedback so that students can “hear” in my tone of voice true sincerity when praise is offered or genuine confusion as I react to a section that is difficult to understand. This helps create for learners a more authentic sense of audience and the complex reactions that a text can generate.

Freed from the physical limits of a margin on a page, I also find that I can address a wider range of issues in students’ texts. This includes, for example, taking a few extra seconds in a recording to comment on the overall organization of a text or taking advantage of the digital environment in which the recording is being produced to jump on screen from a student’s assignment to outside resources such as a Web page or course documents relevant to the feedback being offered.

This ability to go further with screencasting is illustrated in the following transcribed excerpt of a screencast sent to one of my students. In this case, the student had been asked to compose a short response to a reading assigned in class. In the excerpt I note that the wording of a key element of the response may not be capturing accurately an idea presented in the reading. Whereas with a pen-and-paper approach I might have simply underlined the problematic section and added a brief comment in the margin such as “not well summarized” or “I think your phrasing misrepresents the author of the reading,” with the screencast I can take the student back on screen to the reading being summarized to retrace in detail what was said. I can thus review live not only the student’s choice of words, but also specific sentences and logical connectors in the original source text.

<i>Voice commentary</i>	<i>On-screen events</i>
I will be using the following interface to give you some live feedback on the first of your reading responses making some comments on the ideas and maybe the formatting as well as I go through this.	I HIGHLIGHT A SECTION OF THE TEXT WHICH READS: “ <i>It emphasized that the quality of what is being taught is just as good as the amount of instruction given</i> ”
My first big comment is with regards to the way you are summarizing this: [QUOTING THE PASSAGE THAT I HAVE HIGHLIGHTED ON THE SCREEN] “ <i>It emphasized that the quality of what is being taught is just as good as the amount of instruction given.</i> ”	

Voice commentary	On-screen events
I am not quite sure I think that's the way it's been expressed in the reading, in the, in the uh, the reading actually.	THE SCREEN CHANGES FROM THE STUDENT'S TEXT TO A WINDOW CONTAINING A PDF VERSION OF THE TEXT THE STUDENT WAS RESPONDING TO
If we go back to it, I think ...	I SCROLL TO THE PARAGRAPH I WANT TO QUOTE
like one of the ways they are putting it here, like <i>"the amounts of instruction and study, however, should be given equal weight since they are crucial ingredients"</i>	WHILE I READ THE PASSAGE ALOUD, I SELECT AND HIGHLIGHT THIS SECTION IN THE ORIGINAL TEXT
I really do think that they are trying to put a lot of importance ... of course there is a concern for the quality or principles	<i>"concern the quality or principles of teaching"</i> IS SELECTED AND HIGHLIGHTED ON THE SCREEN
<i>"rather than on the amount of instruction"</i>	THE SELECTED TEXT IS EXTENDED TO HIGHLIGHT <i>"rather than on the amount of instruction"</i>
but they also remind people ...	THE NEXT LINE IS SELECTED AND BRIEFLY HIGHLIGHTED: <i>"The amounts of instruction and study, however, should be given"</i>
(there is a big <i>"however"</i> here)...	THE WORD <i>"however"</i> IS SELECTED AND HIGHLIGHTED]
that <i>"equal weight"</i> has to be <i>"given"</i>	THE PHRASE <i>"should be given equal weight"</i> IS SELECTED AND HIGHLIGHTED
to <i>"the amounts of instruction and study"</i>	THE PHRASE <i>"to the amounts of instruction and study"</i> IS SELECTED AND HIGHLIGHTED
which is another way of saying <i>"time"</i> . So I really don't think they are simply saying that one is <i>"just as good as the other."</i> If anything they are trying to remind people that time is important, maybe not more important, but equally important to think about when we look at these things.	THE SCREEN SWITCHES BACK TO THE STUDENT'S TEXT WHICH STILL HAS THE PHRASE: <i>"It is emphasized that the quality of what is being taught is just as good as the amount of instruction given"</i> HIGHLIGHTED

So ... in terms of the ideas being summarized here, this is one concern that I have.

The above comment lasts 64 seconds and contains 265 words, close to a full page of typed text, with references and visual emphasis on both the text found in the student's assignment and the original source text. The length of the comment and the references made to both specific aspects of the source text and the student's text highlight the flexibility both to say and show and to include when needed fuller explanations of the logic and conventions that underlie a problem as well as the possible solutions that might help resolve it.

From a pedagogic perspective, it is noteworthy that when students use a screencast to produce a second version of an assignment, they must listen and watch carefully and make *on their own* the changes recommended in the video. Even when specific wording is offered to students, because they are working with a video file, they cannot simply blindly accept suggested changes and edits with the push of a button (in contrast to what occurs when the Track Changes feature is used with the Microsoft Word to comment on students' work). Moreover, because the suggested changes are almost always accompanied by an oral comment, unless students reduce the volume of the audio on their computers, they cannot separate the edits and insertions added to a text from the explanations and reasoning that underlie these changes. Therefore, screencasting helps students remain active and at the center of a redrafting process and reinforces the link between the suggestions made by an instructor and the conventions and expectations that motivate them.

Finally, it is worth noting that students can also be equipped with and trained to use Jing to facilitate collaborative peer feedback tasks where they are asked to read a peer's writing assignment as homework and produce a screencast containing their comments and suggestions (*"For homework, read your assigned partner's text and create a Jing screencast that will be posted in a reply to your partner's submission on the online bulletin board"*). Similarly, Jing can be integrated into self-assessment tasks where students are asked to record themselves as they verbalize and illustrate on screen their understanding of the rhetorical rules and strategies used to revise a text that they have produced (e.g., *"While you revise your first draft, express verbally what you notice about the text, changes you feel should be made, and/or any questions you have about the text. Once finished, please send me the link to your screencast by e-mail"*).

Students' Reactions to Screencasted Feedback

In my own classes, students' responses to screencasting as a feedback tool have overall been positive. With the exception of comments suggesting that they sometimes found the screencasts long to listen to, students have typically stressed the value of this form of feedback with comments such as: "Best feedback I've ever received from a prof"; "He gives very constructive feedback on presentations which most profs don't. I also like how he uses an audio website so we can hear him when he evaluates our presentations"; "Overall, it was great! I really like how you record yourself and show the exact mistakes and give an explanation"; or the emphatic e-mail response received shortly after sending a screencast to a student by e-mail: "This was by far the COOLEST and most useful way of providing feedback to an assignment that I have ever received. Thank you."

Although the limited scope of these comments is in no way intended as generalizable findings, they echo research that finds that students do generally respond positively to audiovisual feedback (Brick & Holmes, 2008; Mathisen, 2012; McLaughlin, Kerr, & Howie, 2007; Silva, 2012; Stannard, 2007) and that this tool is likely to appeal to a generation of students used to exploring texts multimodally, often through customized video clips or images that can be accessed on a digital device.

Conclusion

Although the adoption of technology in the field of second-language writing is not without its limitations and should be examined keeping in mind the specific contexts in which the technology is adopted (Ware & Warschauer, 2006), in this article I try to raise awareness of screencasting as a new, readily available technology that can facilitate the creation and distribution of more interactive and multimodal forms of feedback for L2 writers. Although this article remains an explanatory description and evaluation of this tool, further detailed descriptions of teachers' experiences with this tool will be key to developing a sense of how best to use this tool, with whom, and with what degree of support and autonomy offered to teachers by institutions.

It is important to stress that the intent of this article is not to undermine the pedagogic value of alternative feedback approaches including peer feedback, writing conferences, and self-assessment activities, among others. However, it has been my experience that when orchestrated with these other types of feedback, screencasting technology can be a powerful way to produce resource-rich feedback where voice and visual dimensions enrich and supplement more conventional feedback practices. I end thus by inviting readers interested in enriching their feedback with images, sound, and movement to explore for themselves the transformative power of being able to say and show digitally at a distance their responses to their students' texts.

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