Paper Review Revolution: Screencasting Feedback for Developmental Writers

Joni Boone
Kaplan University

Susan Carlson
Kaplan University

Researchers from Kaplan University present findings from a media-rich feedback pilot program that targets students from developmental writing courses. One study of student reactions reveals how screencasting feedback encouraged more formative, holistic feedback and students' awareness of writing process, audience, and revision. A second study comparing grades shows how media-rich feedback had a positive effect on student performance.

Overview of Study

In this study, professional tutors within the writing center of Kaplan University provided media-rich feedback (a combination of screencasting and written comments) to students in several sections of the university's developmental writing course. Screencasting is a method of capturing and recording the screen as the reader scrolls through the student paper and comments on major elements of the writing, thus creating a video and audio examination of the student's writing. The writing center director and a professional tutor within the staff studied the effects of this feedback method using student surveys. They also monitored student grades for the term and compared those to the grades of students receiving written-only feedback as well as students receiving no writing center feedback. The aim of this research was to determine if the process of providing screencasting feedback encourages the center's professional tutors to produce more formative, holistic feedback, and also, if this type of multi-modal, media-rich feedback encourages students to more fully engage in the writing process rather than simply make quick fixes to lower-level writing errors. Finally, researchers wanted to determine

if students who received and used screencasting feedback performed better in the developmental writing course than those who did not receive this type of feedback.

Related Literature

Though not much is written on the use of audio or media-rich feedback in writing centers, a body of research on audio feedback provided by classroom instructors exists and the results are consistent with the results of this writing center's study on the effects of media-rich feedback on developmental writers. One example is Susan Sipple's 2007 study using audio feedback in a developmental writing course where students were given handwritten comments in margins for two assignments and audio feedback for two assignments. In this experiment, 70% of students preferred audio feedback, 20% chose written comments, and 9% preferred both. Some of the reasons students gave for preferring audio comments were that it "increased their self confidence as writers . . . helped them internalize feedback . . . provided more detailed view for revision . . . reduced misinterpretation of feedback, [and] strengthened their perceived bond with the professor whereas handwritten commentary sometimes damaged the bond" (Sipple, 2007, p. 24). Huang (2000) found similar results of audio feedback in English as a Foreign Language studies in a Taiwan university study, which showed student comprehension and motivation were positively affected by audio feedback from instructors.

Kerr and McLaughlin (2008) found similar trends when video feedback was provided by classroom instructors. Markers at the University of Edinburgh volunteered to provide screencasting feedback to students using a video created with Camtasia. Researchers were interested to know if "students might be less likely to misconstrue and to engage with the [video] feedback better" (Kerr & McLaughlin). Around 75% of students noted they preferred the video summary. Students claimed they paid more attention to the video feedback and merely scanned the written feedback. Many noted that more feedback was actually given through the video summary. A study by Ice, Curtis, Phillips, and Wells (2007) compared student response to text only and to multimedia

instructor feedback. According to the results of this study, video summaries provide several benefits to student writers including "1) increased ability to understand nuances that might be lost in written communication, 2) feeling more involved in the course, 3) improved retention of content and 4) a belief that the instructor cared more about the student's learning" (p.13). Ice (2009) also found students were three times more likely to reach the top levels of Bloom's taxonomy in the content of their essays after receiving audio feedback than those receiving text-only feedback. Ice also concluded that audio and video feedback from classroom instructors help students better understand instructor comments, encourages students to think critically, and help students engage with their instructors.

Online Writing Center Background

After considering the current research on audio and screencasting feedback for classroom assignments, the writing center staff at Kaplan University thought screencasting feedback provided by tutors could have a positive impact on the writing process, basic skill level, and confidence of students. The online writing center initially launched with a small staff that created tutorials and offered synchronous online tutoring, but the primary focus was paper review. Major changes in the writing center occurred in 2009-2010 with the implementation of a writing across the curriculum (WAC) program. Under WAC, the paper-review service remained a service focusing on skill development and improving *process* versus *product,* and tutors continually worked to find ways to provide authentic outreach to students in an online environment. In an effort to provide individualized and robust student feedback and avoid the "proofreading service" reputation, the writing center staff implemented a media-rich feedback pilot project.

The inspiration for this pilot came from a need to make paper reviews more engaging, active experiences for students. For online institutions, effective, relevant technology is crucial in the efforts to create a robust learning environment for students. For several months, writing center staff members had already been using TechSmith's screencasting software Jing (www.

jingproject.com), which allows users to simultaneously capture what is occurring on their screen with accompanying audio, for tutor training. Writing center tutors who work with students one-on-one began using Jing to provide instruction and to prompt discussion with adult learners who found it difficult to commit to a live tutoring appointment by phone, instant messaging, or other synchronous methods. Students could download and view a Jing demonstration, listen to their tutor's encouraging words, and view examples when they had time to do so. Recognizing students' positive responses to communication using Jing, staff wondered if providing screencasting feedback to students in paper review would be as effective. The tutors who review papers also considered whether or not they had the resources to provide this level of media-rich feedback given their high volume of paper submissions but through training and practice sessions found that providing screencasting feedback was no more time-intensive than the written feedback they were accustomed to providing. Tutors typically average around three paper reviews per hour using either method.

Method

The pilot involved four tutors who provided screencasting feedback to 157 students in the developmental writing courses who submitted their papers to the writing center for review during three 10-week terms. Some students submitted additional revised drafts for review as well, so the total number of submissions was 181. The tutors provided several written comments in the margins of the papers using the track changes feature in Microsoft Word (the method used in traditional paper review in this particular center). A screencast was also created for each review using Jing. Along with the reviews, tutors provided students with a feedback form that links to writing center tutorials. The link to the screencast was provided in the paper in an end note to the student and in the email used to return the feedback.

SurveyMonkey was used to create and distribute an anonymous student survey. Out of the 157 students who received screencasting feedback, 68 responded to the survey (a 43% response rate). A majority of students in the response group,

67%, rated themselves as average writers. When asked about the quality of the feedback experience, 89% (60 respondents) rated the experience excellent or good, with 65% of students selecting excellent. When asked to rate screencasting compared to written feedback, 62% rated screencasting as more helpful (41 respondents), and 33 % rated screencasting and written feedback equally helpful, yet 78% (52 respondents) preferred having both written and screencasting feedback.

From the survey responses, researchers concluded that a majority of students found the feedback helpful and preferred having both written and screencasting feedback. Researchers also wondered whether or not the screencast feedback alone is just as effective, so one consideration for future study is to provide screencasting-only feedback to determine if this method is as effective as media-rich feedback.

The following qualitative, open-ended questions were also included on the survey:

• What type of help were you hoping to receive from the paper review?

• What did you learn about your writing from the written feedback in the margins?

• Did you learn anything new in the screencasting feedback that you didn't learn from the written feedback in the margins (please explain)?

• Did you incorporate the feedback into your next draft or your next writing project (yes or no)? If yes, please explain what/how you incorporated the feedback.

• Please include any additional comments about written or screencasting feedback.

Results from these survey questions showed media-rich, screencasting feedback encourages students to think more critically about the writing process and their writing overall. The most common type of help students initially expected from paper review dealt with grammar or mechanics and references to a specific assignment rather than their overall writing skills or refining their writing process as illustrated here:

• "I am looking for grammar and spelling corrections."

• "mainly grammatical for me"

• "anything that would aid in revising and editing my paper"

But when asked if and how they would incorporate feedback into their writing, about the same number of students commented on specific, targeted revision or editing changes as the number of students who commented on using the feedback to improve their writing in general or global writing issues. Students claimed:

• "I added more details in my body paragraphs to better incorporate them to my main idea."

• "I made the draft more interesting for the reader."

• "When making revisions, I know what to do to make my paper more readable."

These responses seem promising as this writing center continues to encourage students to use paper review as a means of improving their writing overall rather than simply improving an isolated writing product.

More students responded that they learned about global writing issues like content, clarity, and organization (29) than granular issues such as grammar and mechanics (19) in the written feedback as well. Below are some examples of student responses:

• "I learned that I have to create a decent thesis statement and to make my sentences clear for my readers to understand."

• "I need to take time with drafting."

• "Good transitions between paragraphs [are] essential."

Tutors who provided the feedback remarked that the process of creating screencasting feedback helped them focus their efforts on holistic feedback in both written and verbal comments. This suggests the screencasting process itself encourages tutoring methods that more closely align with the mission of the writing center, a mission that does not promote tutor editing or proofreading, but instruction and demonstration.

The most often cited reason for students preferring screencasting feedback was that it made their tutor's written comments easier to understand. Students said, "I loved the video feedback. It was really helpful to me in figuring out what I need to do differently." "Hearing it helps a lot." "It was not so much learning something new as it was a better understanding." "The video feedback just made the feedback in the margins clearer."

Comments also indicated students recognized audience, referring to the reader, instructor, tutor, or *the voice* as they revised their writing. For example, one student noted, "The video feedback shows the person who read your essay. It's personal and [not] just something written on paper." Through students' recognition of audience, writing center staff hopes to motivate students to achieve higher levels of thinking, and considering Bloom's taxonomy, perhaps screencasting feedback can help students move beyond *recall* to *understanding* and *analysis* of their writing. If students become more aware of the need to appeal to a specific audience in their writing, many issues that developmental writers have (clarity, development, organization,) may be more thoroughly understood and addressed.

Second Study – Grade Point Average Comparison

In addition to the student survey containing largely qualitative data, we compared grades for students who received screencasting feedback, students who received written feedback, and students who received no feedback in two terms of the same course. Researchers initially intended to provide media-rich feedback to all students who submitted; however, a number of students inadvertently submitted their papers incorrectly to the main written feedback queue and others failed to submit their papers to the writing center at all. The results of this component of the study suggest that those students who received screencasting feedback earned higher grades in their writing course. The average final grade on a four-point scale for students who received screencasting feedback was 3.62, the average final grade for students receiving written feedback was 3.13, and the average final grade for students who did not receive any writing center feedback was 1.4. We recognize that students who did not follow the submission guidelines may not have followed additional directions within the assignment which may have negatively affected their

grades as well. However, we did exclude students who were not engaged in the course—completing fewer than 4 assignments tied to course-level assessments—so as to not skew the data.

We must note that one graded assignment required students to submit their writing center feedback with a plan for revisions to their project; therefore, students who did not submit papers to the writing center could not receive any of the 20 points allotted for the assignment. There are 1,000 points total in the course, but the incentive was so small as to not affect course grade (2%). The failure to earn those points does not explain the discrepancy between grades of students who received writing center feedback and those who did not receive any. Overall, the grade differences showed the positive impact of writing center feedback—especially screencasting feedback—on student performance in the developmental writing course.

Summary and Conclusions

Through this study, researchers recognize the effectiveness of media-rich screencasting feedback for developmental writers in various ways. Screencasting feedback encourages students' higher-level thinking as they begin to recognize and acknowledge audience and the need to holistically improve their writing. Students claim that screencasts help them understand written comments provided by tutors and use media-rich feedback to holistically improve their writing. Even more encouraging, researchers see a positive effect on student grades. While recognizing that students claim to prefer the combination of screencasting and written feedback, quantitative evidence suggests screencasting-only feedback has potential as well, so our strategy is to explore this hypothesis with continued research. The student responses and improved student performance, in addition to enhanced tutor approaches to feedback in this study, help validate the importance of media-rich experiences in the online writing center environment.

References

Huang, S. (2000). A quantitative analysis of audiotaped and written feedback produced for students' writing and students' perceptions of the two feedback methods. *Tunghai Journal, 4,* 199-232.

Ice, P. (2009). Applying research on audio feedback. Podcast retrieved from http://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/a-word-in-your-ear-conference/id341057648

Ice, P., Curtis, R., Phillips, P., & Wells, J. (2007). Using asynchronous audio feedback to enhance teaching presence and students' sense of community. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 11*(2), 3-25.

Kerr, W., & McLaughlin, P., (2008). The benefit of screen recorded summaries in feedback for work submitted electronically. Paper presented at the Twelfth International Computer Assisted Assessment (CAA) Conference, Loughborough, UK. Retrieved from http://www.caaconference.com/pastConferences/2008/proceedings/Kerr_W_McLaughlin_P_formatted_b1.pdf

Pearce, C., & Ackley, R. (1995). Audiotaped feedback in business writing: An exploratory study. *Business Communication Quarterly, 58*(3), 31-34.

Sipple, S. (Spring 2007). Ideas in practice: Developmental writers' attitudes toward audio and written feedback. *Journal of Developmental Education, 30*(3), 22-31.

Joni Boone is a writing consultant at Kaplan University.