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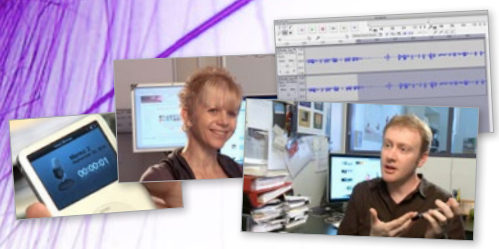

LEARNING TO TEACH ONLINE

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CASE STUDY

Using audio feedback

Featuring: Simon McIntyre, The University of New South Wales

Context	*- 20 to 30 students in core course within a fully online Master of Cross-Disciplinary Art and Design degree*
Description	*- All students are off-campus and never meet each other or the teacher face-to-face* *- Audio feedback given on major assessable works including reports, essays, and art and design work*
Technology	*- Audio recording software such as Quicktime Pro, Garageband and Audacity*

Written by Simon McIntyre

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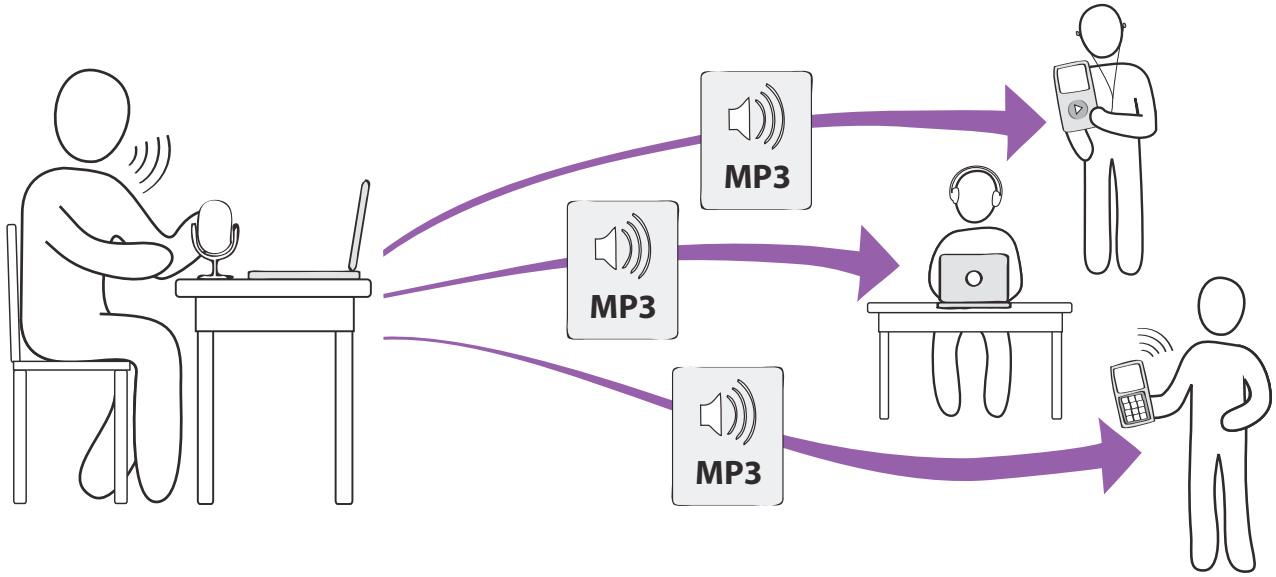
Aims and overview

This case study aims to show how simple and powerful using audio feedback can be. While the context of this case study is in art and design, the use of audio files for giving students feedback is applicable to any discipline or almost any type of student work, even in 100% face-to-face classes. This case study will examine some of the motivations for adopting the use of audio feedback, the benefits for students and teachers, and some key considerations to keep in mind.

What is a audio feedback?

Quite simply, audio feedback is about sending a student a digital recording of your voice. It allows you to offer students that you may never physically meet, the same type of verbal feedback you would give in a face-to-face situation. Audio feedback given in online learning contexts is usually an audio file, a popular format being mp3. It is a very flexible way of commenting on students' learning, as the file can be listened to as many times as desired, anywhere, anytime on a computer, or any number of portable audio devices such as phones or iPods. Audio feedback can be equally as useful for face-to-face and distance students.



A teacher can easily and quickly record their voice on their computer using existing or free to download audio recording software. This can also be achieved using portable devices such as phones, iPods or dictaphones. The digital audio files can then be sent to students via email or an online learning environment. Students can also download and archive the feedback, and listen to it at any time.

Examples of audio recording software

Most modern computers have simple built in audio recording software, however there are also several free to download versions available for Mac and PC online, such as:

- *Audacity www.audcity.sourceforge.net (for Mac, Windows or Linux)*
- *Wavepad www.nch.com.au/wavepad (Mac)*

Case study outcomes quick summary

Key benefits

- *Students have reported feeling a stronger sense of personal connection with the teacher, particularly in a fully online class. This can help contribute to building trust between teacher and student which can result in more meaningful learning interactions*
- *Enables a more 'human' communication between online students and a teacher. Emotion, inflection and tone can be easily communicated, offering a much richer level of feedback and clarity*
- *Recording and uploading audio files is relatively easy to do and saves a lot of time for the teacher, eliminating the need for having to type feedback which can be time consuming*
- *A great amount of depth in feedback can be given in a short period of time, meaning students can receive feedback sooner, making it more relevant and helpful in their learning process*
- *Students can download and listen to feedback repeatedly on portable devices. This flexibility means student can continue their learning at any time and at any location*
- *Can be used in fully online, blended or even fully face-to-face teaching*
- *Can be used for large or small groups*
- *Teachers can complete feedback at any convenient time or location where it is quiet enough to record*
- *Any manner of recording devices can be used, such as iPods, phones, dictaphones or your computer*
- *Software is either already on most computers or can be downloaded for free*

Key issues to consider

- *Audio recordings do not have to be perfect to be effective. Be yourself and be genuine when recording*
- *It is worth considering keeping feedback to students private where appropriate. Use email or a private upload area in an online learning environment to deliver the files if this is an issue*
- *In some cases more openly accessible audio feedback may be more appropriate, as with group work or where you want students to learn from your feedback to others*
- *It can take some time to get over 'stage fright' or feeling a sense of awkwardness when starting out*
- *Keep feedback direct and to the point for it to be most effective. Always directly address assessable criteria*
- *Consider file size and students' Internet speed. Mp3 format is good for keeping the file size down*

Motivation for adopting an online teaching strategy

Simon McIntyre has been teaching fully online classes for over eight years, in a number of design based subjects. He never meets his online students face-to-face, as they are geographically dispersed. Learning about design is a formative process - therefore giving students timely feedback is vital in helping them understand and improve their project development. Simon chose to adopt audio feedback because:

- *He often found that in order to type the appropriate depth of feedback for each student, an inordinate amount of time would be spent typing, especially when teaching several classes at once*
- *By the time all of the feedback was written and delivered back to the students, up to 2 weeks may have*

passed, which meant that students could not reflect on the feedback while the project was immediately fresh in their minds

- *Tone and intent in the written word can often be misinterpreted because the written word lacks the subtleties of tone and inflection that can convey a great deal of meaning*

Planning

Using audio feedback is quite simple, and as such not a great deal of planning is involved. However some key things to consider include:

- *Determine when using audio feedback is appropriate. When would students benefit most from in-depth feedback delivered this way? Simon uses it for major assessment submissions, and not the everyday discussions that take place on a message board*
- *It is hard to remember what is said in an audio file some time later without having to play it back. Sometimes written feedback during student discussions or developmental work is more appropriate because it is more immediately accessible. Refer back to your class structure and determine where audio feedback will have the most value and meaning to students*
- *Don't over-plan the feedback. Of course think about what should be said, but be yourself and natural when saying it. If the audio sounds too polished or edited it can appear awkward and false. A more 'human' piece of feedback with a few imperfections can help build a more personal connection and trust between a teacher and their students, so authenticity is important*
- *Experiment with the software you are using and determine an effective workflow of recording, exporting, naming and managing files so each student gets the right feedback and the process is most efficient for you*
- *Consider whether an opportunity exists for the students or special guests to use audio feedback. This can be a powerful tool that can encourage greater levels of peer review and reflection*

Teaching

Simon reported that his teaching style didn't really change very much by introducing audio feedback, but his amount of contact with his online students did improve because of the extra time gained by not having to type large volumes of text at assessment time. Simon also suggested the following considerations:

- *Have a list of assessable criteria from the assignment next to you while recording so that you an make sure to address them in the audio feedback*
- *Always begin the feedback with the student's name and the name of the project. This makes it easy to identify audio files afterwards*
- *Try to get feedback to students as quickly as possible, this greatly enhances the effectiveness and relevance of the feedback, as students can begin applying it to their work right away. If feedback comes too late it's worth can be greatly diminished*
- *Keep the feedback as brief as possible and on topic. Simon's feedback ranges from 2 to 5 minutes on average*

- *Be sure to name each digital file with the project and student name, or some other meaningful system. It helps to keep all the files organised so you have them to hand if needed later*

Issues to consider and suggestions for dealing with them

Although making audio feedback files is a relatively simple process, there are a few common issues to be mindful of:

- ***Issue***
  Awkwardness or stumbling in the recording

  Suggested strategy
  Practice a few times by recording yourself giving feedback to a real project - it really helps you to become familiar and comfortable with the process. Also remember that students don't mind a few stumbles here and there as it shows that the teacher on the other side of the computer screen is human too!

- ***Issue***
  It takes a long time trying to record the feedback because of editing out mistakes

  Suggested strategy
  Recording your feedback in one take is the best way to maximise efficiency of the process. However this is not always easy to do. To give yourself the best chance, have everything to hand that you need to complete the feedback such as the project brief, assessable criteria, the entirety of student work, and any references or examples you wish to direct the student to. A recording device or software that you can pause while recording is also incredibly valuable.

- ***Issue***
  The audio recording software is too complicated

  Suggested strategy
  There are a few easy to use software options available as previously mentioned. Try different versions and find one that works best for you. Links to some examples can be found in the 'Additional information' section below.

Conclusion

Audio feedback is incredibly versatile, and can be used in almost any teaching situation in any discipline, whether online or face-to-face. Finding a recording process that suits you, with simple software you are comfortable in using is key. We hope this case study has encouraged you to try audio feedback in your own teaching. For further help with using simple audio recording software, please see the related technical glossary episodes.

Additional information

Quicktime Pro, upgrade Quicktime on your computer to record audio for Mac and Windows
www.apple.com/quicktime/extending

Garageband, easy audio recording and exporting for Mac www.apple.com/au/ilife/garageband

Audacity, easy to use software for recording and exporting audio for Mac and Windows
audacity.sourceforge.net

Additional reading*

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. **Paper also available for download on iTunes U**

Lunt, T. & Curran, J. (2009). 'Are you listening please?' The advantages of electronic audio feedback compared to written feedback. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, doi:10.1080/02602930902977772

Nortcliffe, A. L., & Middleton, A. (2007). Audio feedback for the iPod Generation. Paper presented at the International Conference on Engineering Education, Coimbra, Portugal.

Oomen-Early, J., Bold, M., Wiginton, K. L., Gallien, T., & Anderson, N. (2008). Using Asynchronous Audio Communication (AAC) in the Online Classroom: A Comparative Study. Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 4(3).

***Note:** Some readings are held in subscription only databases. In most cases accessing the link from your institution's network will enable access*

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To find out more about the Learning to Teach Online project, or to view the video component of this episode, please visit the COFA Online Gateway.

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About the project

The Learning to Teach Online project is a free professional development resource designed to help teachers from any discipline, whether experienced in online teaching or not, to gain a working understanding of successful online teaching pedagogies that they can apply in their own unique teaching situations. It hopes to encourage dialogue, discussion and the sharing of ideas about online learning and teaching across disciplines and between institutions around the world.

About COFA Online

COFA Online is an academic unit at the College of Fine Arts (COFA), The University of New South Wales (UNSW), Sydney, Australia. It has been innovating online pedagogy, academic professional development and effective online learning strategies since 2003.

About The University of New South Wales

UNSW has an enrolment of approximately 40,000 students, and is the leading international university in Australia with over 10,000 international enrolments from over 130 nations. UNSW was also ranked as the top university in 2009 in the Australian Government Learning and Teaching Performance Fund for the quality of its teaching.

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