Screencast Feedback for Essays on a Distance Learning MA in Professional Communication: An Action Research Project

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Abstract

This action research explored the potential of audio-visual screencasting for assignment feedback on a distance learning (DL) course. A screencast is a combination of voice recording and screen capture, which can be played in any browser, like a video. Here it is used to capture a tutor's editing and highlighting activities in a document, whilst simultaneously recording spoken feedback. Research suggests that audio-visual feedback may resolve some of the current problems with written feedback. A pilot study is reported which trialled screencasting for essay feedback on a master's level DL module at Sheffield Hallam University. Fourteen students participated and were randomly divided between two groups to receive either written or screencast feedback first. After receiving the first feedback type, students completed a short questionnaire online. The second type of feedback was then distributed to the students, who completed the same questionnaire for the second type of feedback. The results suggest that feedback is received more positively in the richer media of audio-visual screencasting and that this may encourage emotions more conducive to receiving and processing feedback and help to socialise students within the learning context by giving them a sense of belonging to the community. Simultaneous visual cues and explanations appear to help with understanding, and it is quicker to capture screencasts than it is to write feedback. However, preferences for written feedback were related to the holistic overview of a document, which could be scanned and revisited, and which was not confined to a linear delivery, nor time-limited. Audio-visual screencasting will therefore only be adopted for formative feedback during modules, and will be structured with spoken overviews.

Introduction

Student satisfaction with feedback has improved over recent years, although 'assessment and feedback' still scored second to lowest out of nine categories in the 2012 National Student Survey (Higher Education Funding Council for England HEFCE 2012a). Problems identified in the literature have included 'reduction in the frequency of assignments, in the quantity and quality of feedback and in the timeliness of […] feedback' (Gibbs and Simpson 2004: 9). These problems may be aggravated by recent changes and forecast reductions in HEFCE funding for teaching (HEFCE 2012b and 2012c: 9). Additionally, widening participation in UK universities (Great Britain Department for Education and Skills 2003) increases the diversity both in levels of knowledge and study skills of students (Gibbs and

Simpson 2004). Thus, while resources are diminishing, student needs are increasing. Writing comments on assignments as 'assessment *for* learning', that is to support learning (Wiliam 2009: 8), is a large part of the teacher's workload. Methods which help to save time and meet the diverse needs of students, while still providing quality feedback to students could have value for professional practice.

Written comments in formative or summative assessment in the distance learning (DL) context at Sheffield Hallam University are intended to support learning for feed forward into future assignments on students' current or future modules[1]. The context of this action research was a Communication Ethics module, and feedback on all aspects of assignments (e.g. understanding of theory, analytical writing etc: see Appendix A) is expected to be fed forward into future assignments, whether or not an assignment is formative or summative in the module. Feedback on assignments is a large part of the tutor-student interaction in the DL context at Sheffield Hallam University.

Literature related to assessment and feedback's usefulness to feed forward indicates that it should be timely, motivational and sensitive, and provide clear specific explanations which students can understand. These characteristics relate specifically to meeting the Quality Assurance Agency for HE (QAA 2006) principle 9, which specifies that assessment should be timely and promote learning, without increasing the burden of assessment for tutors. The action research reported here aims to improve the speed, and therefore timeliness, with which tutors can return work to students whilst also ensuring feedback is understandable and motivational.

The research trialled audio-visual screencasting using Jing® for feedback of essays. Screencasting tools such as Jing® can capture a tutor's editing and highlighting activities in a document, whilst simultaneously recording spoken feedback. The screencast files can be returned to students by email or through a Virtual Learning Environment and opened in a browser. Students can then hear the tutor's feedback and view the tutor's actions in the document. See Edwards (2012a) for an example screencast.

Feedbacks on essays in a distance learning HE context were written and also captured in screencasts by the lecturer, who had taught the module and set the essay assignment. The quality of the two feedback types were compared. The quality of feedback was measured through an analysis of factors such as whether the students perceived the feedback as positive or negative, or helpful for future essays, etc. Whether spoken or written feedback is more useful to students has been debated (Coffin *et al.* 2003: 103). However, there are several reasons why screencasting may have advantages over written feedback:

- Understanding: integrated viewing and hearing removes the need for cross-referencing between the written feedback (either in a separate document or in a comment to the side) and the point in the essay to which it relates, which may help students to better understand tutor feedback. Additionally, less formal, conversational academic feedback may be more easily understood than formal, written academic feedback.
- Emotions and socialisation: the richer media (carrying the personal voice and intonation) create a high social presence for tutors and an opportunity for conveying positive encouragement through intonation.
- Timesaving: previous informal piloting showed that after reviewing a 1,500 word essay, key points can be captured in a screencast in five minutes. The method therefore has potential to reduce the time required for evaluating essays and improve timeliness of feedback return to students.

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[1] Supporting the transfer of learning from one online module to another (through feedback on assignments in a single online space) is also currently being researched at Glyndŵr University (Sheen 2012).

The following sections first discuss literature related to these three potential advantages of screencast feedback over written feedback, and then review research on audio and audio-visual (screencast) feedback.

Literature Review

Understanding

Students often fail to understand the feedback they receive (Bailey 2009, Chanock 2000, Gibbs and Simpson 2004 and Weaver 2006). There may be two ways in which audio-visual feedback can support understanding: through less formal academic language and through real time linking rather than cross-referencing, as further explained in the following paragraphs.

Some research suggests that feedback may not be read (Gibbs and Simpson 2004) or not understood (Bailey 2009, Chanock 2000, and Lea and Street 1998). Weaver's (2006) research has shown that students need help with feedback before they can understand it. Content analysis of feedback examples and student responses identified that comments were too vague, focussed on negative issues or were unrelated to assessment criteria. Key recommendations from this work, therefore, were timeliness, clarity and explicit application of assessment criteria (Weaver 2006). Audio-visual feedback may help to improve two of these issues: it may be quicker to create and return (see under *Timing* below), and hearing explanations while viewing the relevant part of an assignment may make feedback more concrete for the student and thus support understanding.

Bailey's (2009) research has shown that students do not understand their feedback and that using quality assurance measures such as standardised forms and feedback instruments reduces the assignment-specific comments and hinders quality of feedback and student understanding, e.g. with tutors missing whole sections of boxes which needed ticking or comment (Bailey 2009: 9). 'The forms assume a transmission model of teaching, arguably widening rather than narrowing the comprehension gap for many, especially non-traditional students' (Bailey 2009: 12). Students need feedback they can understand and which tells them how to improve future assignments (Dylan 2009). Again, students simultaneously hearing explanations and viewing the relevant part of their assignment may help them to understand feedback and how to use the feedback to improve their work.

Screencast feedback removes the need for students to search through an independent artefact (their essay) either on paper or on screen, to find the point to which a tutor is referring in the written feedback. Annotated feedback provided by the tutor in a copy of the student's essay (e.g. with the commenting feature in Word) lessens the load for spatial linking, but still requires the mental and sequential processing and linking of two texts. The cognitive load may be lessened using screencasting, which with the simultaneous viewing and listening, rather than sequential viewing of the feedback and viewing of the related text in the essay, may help the student to assimilate the guidance more easily.

Audio-visual feedback may also help students to overcome their lack of familiarity with academic discourse. Students are often frustrated by cursory and oblique feedback or feedback which they describe as 'not their language' (Bailey 2009: 11). The lack of fit between a student's level of academic discourse competence and what is required in their academic learning community creates a barrier to understanding (Hughes 2009). Again, this is an issue which grows in significance in UK higher education where participation is widening and the number of international students is increasing. Because audio-visual screencasting captures the tutor's voice, it has the capacity to convey meaning in a less formal academic language and allows the tutor the opportunity to elaborate on issues in a more conversational way, helping students to understand. This type of tutorial support may therefore overcome an initial barrier, providing students with an entry point from which they can develop their academic discourse competencies in the future. Such support may be particularly useful for international students whose first language is not English may who may therefore find it easier to understand less formal conversational language.

Emotions and socialisation

While feedback is essential for learning (Black and Wiliam 1998 and Hattie 2003: 9), feedback as criticism of an author's writing may be problematical emotionally and giving such feedback introduces the risk of reducing self-efficacy in students for three reasons. Firstly, based on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987), individuals want to be respected, to claim a 'public self-image', a 'face'. The two fundamental components of this notion of face are the freedom to act as we choose ('negative face'), and the desire to be respected by others ('positive face'). The desire to maintain 'face' drives mutual respect; we leave others to act freely and avoid disapproving of them. Students may already feel vulnerable in the learning context, due to lack of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Bandura 1986 cited in Pajares 1996). For example, they may fear the tutor's disapproval if they fail to meet the criteria required for an assignment. Secondly, writers put much intellectual and emotional effort into their writing, leading to a sense of ownership and difficulty in accepting critical review in a positive way (Mackiewicz and Riley 2003). Feedback is often perceived by students as being a judgement of them (thus constituting a face-threatening act) rather than an appraisal of the writing (Boud 1995). Thirdly, already with this sensitivity to receiving document review, there is also a risk of miscommunication through written feedback, which misses the non-verbal element possible with richer media, such as during face-to-face tutorials. The lack of non-verbal language may prevent socialisation processes, distancing students.

Socialisation of students, however, is an important role of online tutors along with pedagogical aims, (Värlander 2008). In the face-to-face environment, social interactions are supported by traditional paralinguistic cues (body language, intonation etc.). These are missing from the leaner media of the online environment (Daft and Lengel 1984, Sproull and Kiesler 1986, Walther 1992, 1995, and Walther and Parks 2002). This deficit, potentially leading to less socialisation within the learning context, may magnify what Värlander (2008) already describes as the tutor-student power asymmetry, invoking feelings of anxiety and low self-esteem.

Värlander (2008) emphasizes the role of emotions in reasoning and learning. Linking pride and self-esteem to confidence and learning, she highlights how students' emotions influence how students process feedback. If students feel threatened, insecure or anxious, they are less likely to learn (Värlander 2008). The 'concept of care underlines the role of empathy and trust as important components in the learning environment' (Värlander 2008: 149). The richer media of audio-visual screencasting can convey a tutor's concern and positive encouragement through intonation of voice. Audio-visual screencasting, therefore, may offer the potential to convey a more caring involved relationship between the tutor and student, to dispel the feelings of social distance and power asymmetry, to overcome students' feelings of anxiety and to help to encourage learning and build self-efficacy.

Timing

Another problem with feedback identified from research is its timeliness (Lunt and Curran 2010 and Weaver 2006). Current resource constraints in UK Universities are further affecting the timeliness of feedback (Gibbs and Simpson 2004: 9). Screencast feedback, based on the research described below, may have the potential to help speed up the return of work.

Audio feedback research

A case study at Leicester University (JISC 2010: 41) has demonstrated that audio feedback is richer and more personal and can build rapport, save time and open 'the door to an ongoing dialogue between student and tutor' on distance learning programmes. More recent research, also at Leicester University, has demonstrated the 'high value of the human voice, captured and delivered in digital format […and…] clear perception of reduced isolation and a sense of belonging' amongst six students on a distance learning course (Rogerson-Revell *et al.*, 2012: 114). Further, preliminary results from 'A Personal Voice' project (Beard 2012) suggest that feedback is understood better when delivered by audio rather than written feedback. Similar experiences of audio feedback being more personal and understandable are reported from STAF project at Keele University, although this is not specifically focusing on distance learning provision (Bostock and Street 2010).

Research by Ice and colleagues (2007) in the US has also demonstrated a preference by students in online courses for audio feedback as opposed to asynchronous text-only feedback. Interview data indicated that the feedback was more effective at conveying nuances, increased feelings of involvement, increased retention and students felt that the tutor cared more about them. While this part of the research collected subjective feedback on student perceptions, the study also collected data on what the students actually did, making the findings more robust. Document analysis in the same research revealed that students were three times more likely to apply content learnt from audio feedback and also more likely to apply higher orders of thinking and problem solving (based on Bloom's taxonomy) to feed forward revisions. The researchers experienced a 75% reduction in time required to provide feedback and yet a 255% increase in the quantity of feedback provided. (Average words per feedback type were 57 for text and 331 for audio; Ice *et al.*, 2007).

Recent research by Lunt and Curran (2010: 761) demonstrated that audio feedback could be recorded in five minutes for a 2,000 word essay with traditional commenting taking an average of 30 minutes. Tutors in this trial also reported being able to provide more detailed feedback to students, and over 80% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that audio feedback helped them to see what they had missed and would help them to improve in their next assignment (Lunt and Curran 2010: 764). Recommendations from these authors, which are also relevant to audio-visual screencasts, were to comment against standard criteria and only give grades at the end of the feedback (Lunt and Curran 2010: 766).

Audio-visual feedback research

Although there is little research to date, some case studies (e.g. Cunningham 2011, Middleton 2011, and Stannard 2007) suggest audio-visual screencasting has the potential to overcome some of the problems of written feedback. Middleton (2011) identifies screencasting as effective because it is 'personal, timely and meaningful'. The feedback is personal because the tutor's cognitive engagement with the work is captured, providing a rare opportunity for emotional bonding. The feedback becomes concrete, with the tutor talking about 'my work' for the student. Additionally the voice adds focus and can provide the nuances of kindness and support, whilst also demonstrating 'critical thinking in situ […] in a trustful way' (Middleton 2011).

In summary, although there is little research available, studies suggest that audio-visual feedback has the potential to support learners through conversational language and by explaining issues as they are viewed. Its rich media may reduce anxiety and the fear of formal, face-threatening critique, by conveying positive and encouraging intonation. This in turn may reduce social distance, helping to build tutor-student relations and positively influence how students process feedback for learning, whilst also improving timeliness of feedback.

Methods

Overview

The research context was the distance learning MA in Professional Communication at Sheffield Hallam University. Students on the Communication Ethics module were invited to participate as a typical example of our distance learning students. The research aimed to explore the potential of audio-visual screencasting to improve timeliness of feedback, student understanding and positive socialization on a distance learning course.

Assignment feedback

Eighteen essays submitted for summative assessment of a module were evaluated. The feedback was intended to be formative and fed forward into future assignments on subsequent modules of the course. In addition to evaluating the students' achievement of the module's learning outcomes related to theories of ethics and their application to professional communication contexts, the assignment aimed to evaluate students' academic skills such as analytical writing and integration of the literature. (See Appendix A). Based on the learning outcomes and using the rubric in Appendix A, we reviewed the essays and annotated them electronically with comments. We then prepared (and timed) written

and screencast feedbacks based on the annotations for each essay. Screencast feedback was captured using Jing® and adhered to guidelines for screencasting feedback, which had been developed in earlier research (Edwards 2011). These guidelines were based on the Quality Assurance Agency for HE (QAA) assessment standards (QAA 2006) and interviews with screencasting users (found through the discussion forum of the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing). For an extract from an example feedback, please see Edwards (2012b); the corresponding written feedback is presented in Appendix B.

Protocol

Fourteen students agreed to participate and were allocated to one of two groups, to receive screencast or written feedback first. After receiving the first feedback type, students completed a short questionnaire online (Appendix C). The second type of feedback was then distributed to the students, who completed the same questionnaire for the second type of feedback (please see Table 1). Question 1 in the questionnaire identified which type of feedback the student was reporting on and whether this was their first or second feedback. Students were requested to 'only answer the questions in reference to the last type of feedback received' (See Appendix C). Completed rubrics (see example in Appendix A) and marks were only returned after the end of the trial. Respondents are referred to by number with the prefix 'R' in the results and appendices.

Table 1: Protocol

	First feedback		Second Feedback	
Group 1	screencast	questionnaire	written	questionnaire
Group 2	written		screencast	

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed (and piloted) based on an earlier analysis (Edwards 2011) of the QAA (2006) guidelines, interviews with screencasting users and available literature on screencasting. To partially compensate for the lack of mixed methods and triangulation in our approach to this research, and to allow some cross-checking between quantitative and qualitative data, questions were designed to gather students' perceptions of the positives and negatives of the feedback (qualitative), and also to rate their agreement on certain aspects of quality (quantitative; see Appendix C). For example, questions 2 and 3 were open questions to collect qualitative data on positives and negatives of the feedback (Denscombe 1998: 99). Qualitative data was copied into tables and reduced iteratively and inductively to derive (and code in) categories, thus premised to a certain extent on 'grounded theory' (Strauss and Corbin 1998; see Appendices D and E). Questions 5 and 7 collected quantitative data. These questions presented statements with which respondents could rate their agreement to gather some quantitative data on student perceptions of the quality of feedback. Quantitative analysis based on data such as this, however, assumes that the levels of agreement have equal intervals. Frequencies for each of the five levels of agreement were factored appropriately according to valence from -2 to +2, e.g. 2 students strongly disagreeing with 'understandable feedback' would equate to an average score of (2 x -2)/2 = -2. Ordering and valences were varied randomly in questions to avoid biasing respondents, e.g. negative feedback was first invited, and 'critiqued in a negative way' listed as the first possible response for question 6. Question 10 asked the students to indicate their preferred learning style, if known.

Limitations

Interview research may have been less leading without the preconceived concepts which were imposed onto respondents through the responses offered by the questionnaire. However, the students are located all over the world, in different time zones, and were impatient to receive their essay feedback. (Feedback grades were deliberately withheld to encourage engagement with the qualitative part of the feedback.) Apart from interviews in themselves being time-consuming (Bell 1993: 98), the time required for coordinating the interviews and feedback was not considered practical in this case. In addition to time and cost savings, Mann and Stewart (2000) also point out that transcription errors are eliminated through internet research in which respondents record words themselves, as with the online questionnaire used in this research.

A remaining weakness in this research, however, is that it records student perceptions of the quality of feedback and fails to measure the understanding of feedback or application to future essay assignments. Understanding and retention can be researched experimentally through provision of feedback and testing for retention and understanding, and application to future essay assignments can be measured through longitudinal studies analysing application of specific feedback comments within essays (document analysis). However, neither of these types of research were possible within the scope of this study.

A technical limitation was that time taken to post links to Jing[®] files for sharing with the students was not recorded. However, nor was the time taken to upload the written feedbacks to the Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)[2]. It is possible, therefore, that the time taken for making the feedbacks available to students was equivalent for both feedback types.

Additionally not all students completed the questionnaire twice. Out of the 14 students, all completed the questionnaire after the audio-visual feedback, but only 11 students completed the questionnaire after they had received the written feedback.

Ethics

This research was approved by Sheffield Hallam's Ethics Committee and students were invited to participate voluntarily. Only one potential harm for students was anticipated. If their names were included in the screencasts, breach of confidentiality might be risked. Mentioning the student's name was therefore deliberately avoided. Audio tagging at the start of audio-visual screencasts, however, has been recently recommended, but student ID numbers rather than names could be used (Mensah 2011). The student whose feedback is partially presented in this paper has given consent, and the screencast has been edited with Camtasia Studio[®] to remove the student's name from the essay.

Results

Timing

Reviewing and annotating the 1,500 word essays varied between one and one and a half hours. Capturing the Jing[®] screencasts took 5 minutes each. Written feedbacks took an average of 35 minutes.

Quality of feedback

Agreements with statements on quality of feedback (question 5) were fairly positive for both types of feedback. (See Fig. 1.) Three points are highlighted in the charts, however. Firstly, after receiving a screencast as their first feedback, two students strongly disagreed that it was understandable (R17 and R23: Fig. 1, circle A). The Average Ratings (Fig. 1, circle D) suggest that written feedback was more understandable. Secondly, there was a tendency towards disagreement about the appropriateness of the screencast length (Fig. 1, circle B and Average Rating E). Thirdly, there was a tendency to agree that tone was appropriate in the screencast compared with written feedback (Fig. 1, circle C and Average Rating F).

Students answered the questionnaire specifically for the last feedback type they had received. Question 7 explored students' perceptions about sufficient and appropriate emphases on the most important issues in their feedback, including whether important issues were clearly identified, explained in detail, supported with examples and prioritised appropriately. Figure 2 shows the average ratings. Ratings were higher for screencast feedback for identifying which issues were important, prioritising them and supporting explanations with examples. However, ratings for covering important issues in detail were higher for written feedback than the screencast feedback. (See Fig. 2.)

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[2] Grademark® does not require uploading of feedback, which is created within the online environment.

Understandable

Constructive

Appropriate Length

Appropriate Detail

Appropriate Tone

Useful for Future Essays

Useful Regarding Subject Matter

Average Ratings

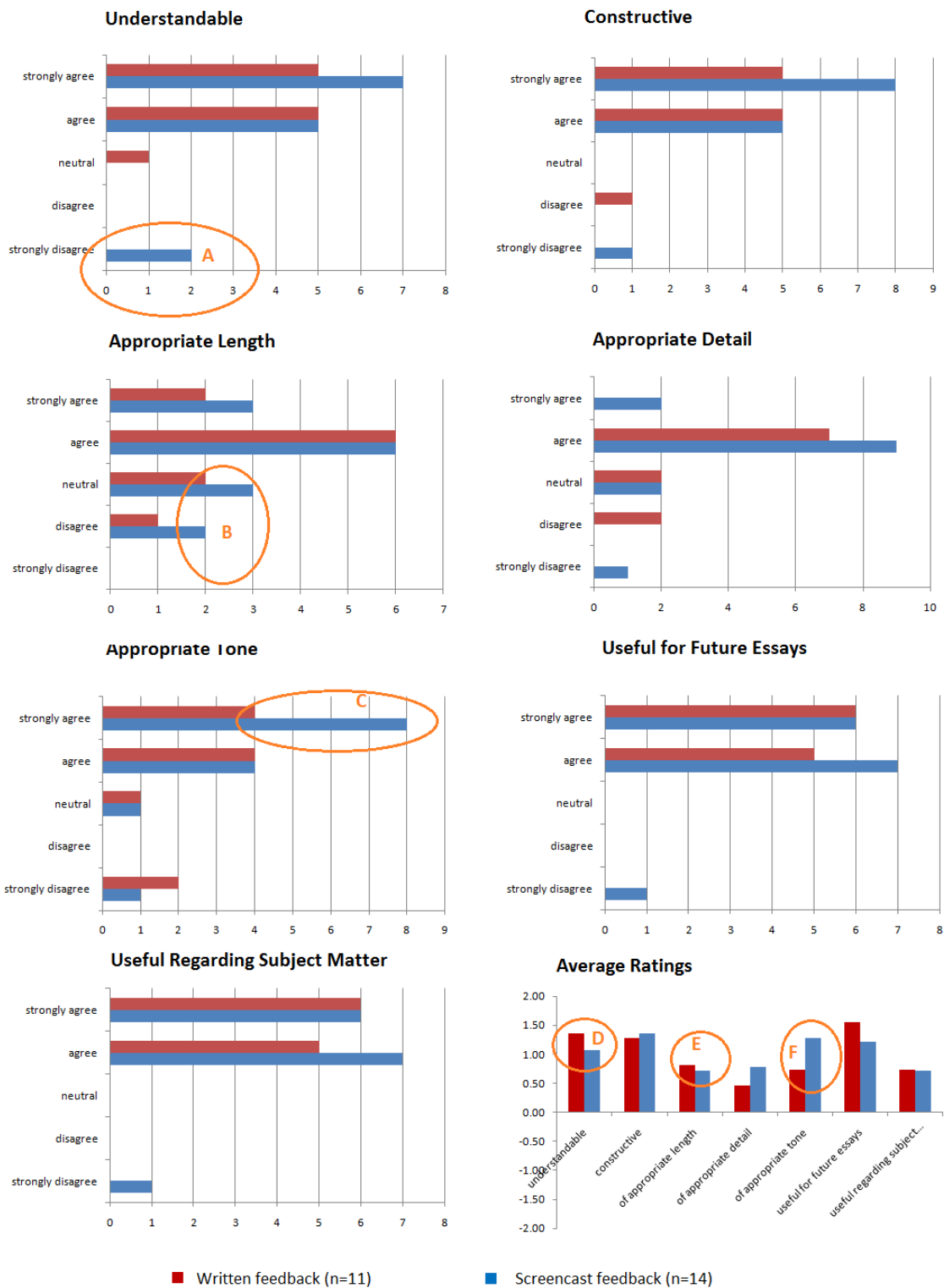■ Written feedback (n=11)   ■ Screencast feedback (n=14)

Figure 1: Number of students selecting a level of agreement for statements on feedback quality and average ratings (bottom right), corrected for valence.
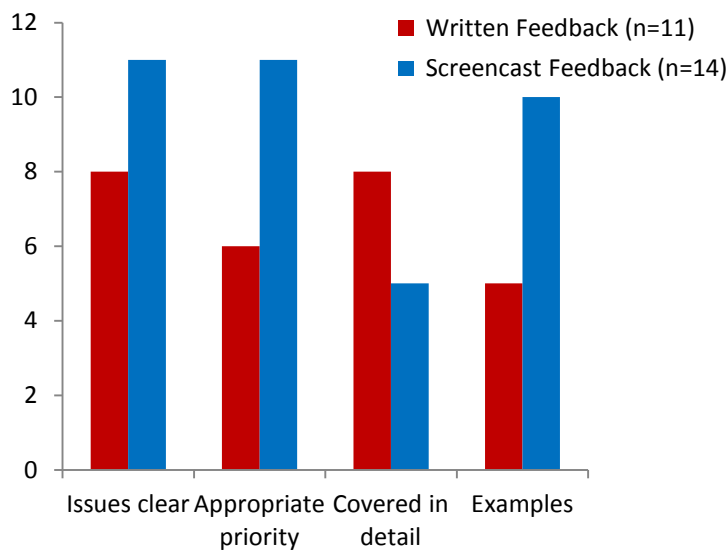
Figure 2: Average ratings for sufficient and appropriate emphases and prioritisation of important issues, corrected for valence and number of respondents per group.

Question 6 addressed the issue, referred to earlier, of students needing to be able to receive feedback in a positive way (Mackiewicz and Riley 2003). Responses to the question, which was designed to assess how students perceived the balance between critique and praise (as negative and positive dimensions of feedback), showed a positive trend with the screencast feedback and a trend towards critique with the written feedback (Fig. 3 below). There appeared to be no difference by feedback type in perception of the usefulness of the feedback for learning and application to help with future essays (question 8: see Fig. 4, below).
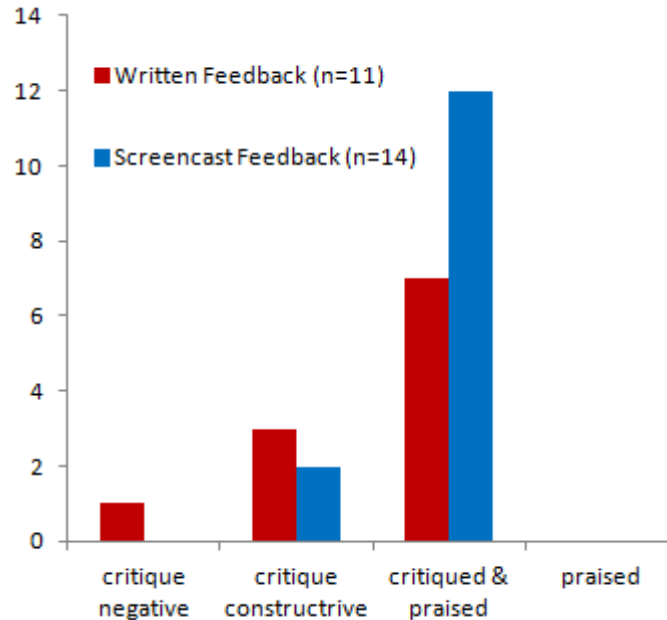

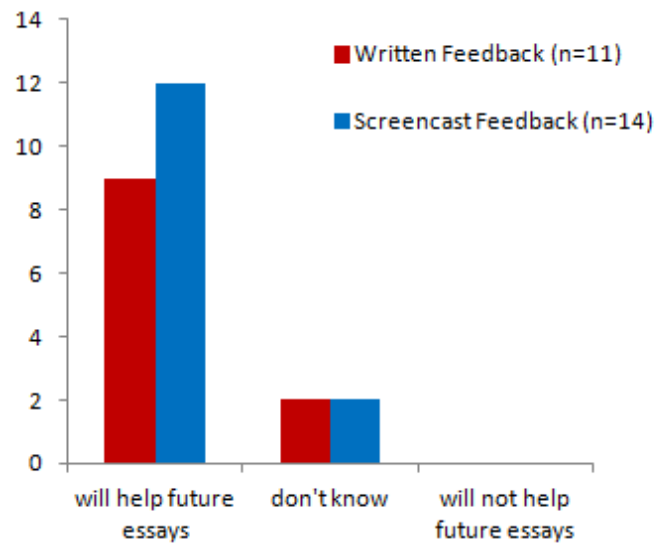Figure 3: Number of students responding for balance of critique levels.

Figure 4: Number of students responding for helpfulness of feedback for future essays.

Positives and negatives of screencast and written feedback

Responses to probing for positive and negative aspects of screencast and written feedback are listed in Appendices D and E, including the categories of issues which emerged from the data. Table 2 (below) summarises the findings. (Exceptions not included in the table are two negatives of screencast feedback, which were not relevant to the mode: not knowing the mark, an aspect designed into the trial, and not understanding lower and higher order abbreviations, which was a failure to explain on our part. A negative unrelated to the mode of delivery for written feedback was lateness. Technical difficulties with audio-visual feedback are reported separately in Appendix F.)

Table 2: Summary of positives and negatives for written and screencast feedback. (See Appendices D and E for raw data.)

	Screencast Feedback	**Written Feedback**
Positives	• More personal / easier to accept / '*More like an interactive course*' (7) • Simultaneous visual cues and explanations clarified points (5) • Succinct/active listening (2) • Improved understanding (3)	• Review/compare (6) • Holistic visual overview (5) • In depth (1) • More positive (1)
Negatives	• Time constraint (4) • Linear (no overview, scanning or review) (3) • Nervousness (2) • Multimodality difficult (1)	• Unclear (3) • Incomplete (1) • Slower to assimilate (1) • Cross-referencing hard (1) • Insensitive tone (1)

Preferences and reasons

Taking into account only the preferences after the second type of feedback (n=11), seven preferred screencast feedback and four preferred written feedback. Raw responses to the question about reasons for preferring *screencast* or *written* feedback are listed in Appendix G, and interpreted in Appendices H and I respectively.

The most frequent reason for preferring screencast feedback, as reported by five respondents, was the linking with visual cues (R12, R13, R15, R18 and R26), which, according to students, aided memory and understanding:

> Seeing the essay on screen whilst the tutor was giving audio feedback was very powerful in helping to retrieve my memories of writing the essay […] (R13)
> […] adds important visual cues that help understanding where exactly the issues are. (R18)

How the intonation helped students to interpret the level or importance of the critique was also frequently addressed (R10, R12, R13 and R15):

> I understood better where I was being praised, *critiques had a more encouraging feel to them.* (R13, emphasis added)
> I was able to *understand the level of the critique better* through the tone of your voice (i.e. there was less that I had to interpret myself in terms of how good/bad aspects were). (R15, emphasis added)
> […] providing a clearer tone and feel for the feedback. (R12)
> […] great to hear the tutor's voice […] It's *easier to accept criticism* by audio than text, as the former seems more human. (R22, emphasis added)

Further reasons were that the audio-visual screencasts were more engaging (R2, R5), provided a high level of detail/specificity (R5, R13, R17), succinctness (R10), and a stronger sense of socialization (R13):

> […] I *feel less isolated* as a distance-learner. (R13, emphasis added)

Two comments worthy of integration into the guidelines for audio-visual screencasting were:

> […] if you have made silly errors it does make it more embarrassing to hear someone mention them. (R5)

This suggests that certain lower order issues, such as the odd spelling mistake should *not* be pointed out verbally during a screencast.

> […] The instructor must strike a balance in not being too overcritical, even if it's warranted in some cases. (R24)

This second quotation emphasizes the priority of promoting self-efficacy and maintaining motivation over the necessity to cover all possible areas for improvement in a screencast. Indeed, another respondent wrote as part of her positive comment on *written* feedback:

> […] it was not a continuous stream of negative points. (R25)

The most common reason for preferring *written* responses was the flexibility of written feedback for later reference (R6, R11, R16 and R17):

> […] more likely to refer back to it in future assignments. (R6)
> […] easy to refer back to or flick through. (R11)
> I would be more likely to look over it again to help me with future submissions. (R16)
> […] paper feedback […] can be printed, read anywhere. (R17)

There were further reasons for preferring written feedback. Information could be digested at the student's own pace and in a single mode (R14):

> […] being able to digest feedback at your own pace […] only having to concentrate on one thing with written made it easier to process (R14[3]).

A student feared receiving negative feedback through a more personal mode:

> I received v bad feedback for a recent essay; I think if that had been spoken I would have found it quite upsetting as it's a more personal delivery. I was actually anxious about receiving my feedback in audio because of this. But because the feedback was positive it was ok. (R14)

Additionally, a student was concerned that screencasting might be too time-consuming (R22). This student had experienced technical problems opening the files. (See Appendix F.)

Learning styles, order of feedback and preferences

Students were asked to indicate their preferred learning style if known, as the screencast feedback demands multi-modal assimilation, which might hinder processing of information. Only eight students responded to this question. Although this is a very small number of students, it is interesting that the three students with a 'kinaesthetic and visual' learning preference preferred the audio-visual feedback, which included movement of the cursor and scrolling through the document. (See Fig. 5, below.) A student who did not understand the question, but preferred written feedback, wrote that she 'wasn't good at listening' (R14; Appendix G).
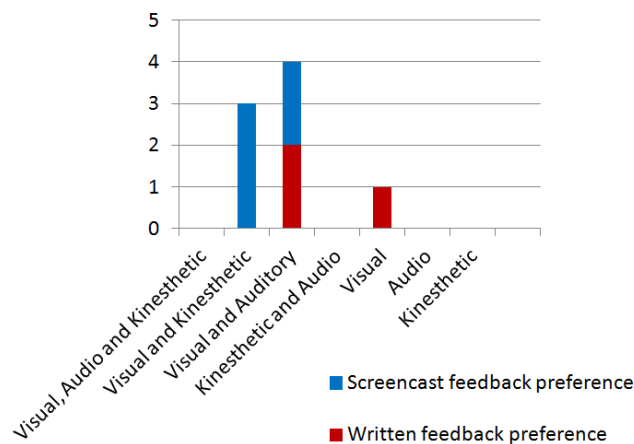

Figure 5: Feedback preference for students with known learning preferences (n=8)

After experiencing both types of feedback, students were asked to indicate their preferred feedback type. (See question 9 in Appendix C.) Only 11 students completed the questionnaire after their second feedback type. Out of these 11, four had received screencast feedback first and seven written feedback first. Although these are very small numbers, screencast feedback was preferred by the majority of students, regardless of which they had received first. (See Fig. 6, below.) In addition to the small numbers, however, *learning effect* may have confused this result. Once students had reinforced their understanding with two feedbacks, they may have concluded on a preference biased by novelty rather than effectiveness for learning.

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[3] This student wrote: 'I don't know what kinaesthetic learning is so can't answer next question but I am not good with listening!' See Appendix G.

Screencast feedback first (n=4)   Written feedback first (n= 7)

Figure 6: Preference for written or screencast feedback by order of feedback type received (n=11).

Discussion

Evaluation of the quantitative data

Seven students preferred screencast feedback, and four preferred written, i.e. most students preferred the audio-visual feedback.

Similar to Lunt and Curran's (2010) work on audio feedback, screencasting in this trial was quicker than writing feedback, saving 30 minutes per essay. This may help tutors to return more timely feedback for the benefit of students.

Average ratings for written feedback suggested that it was more understandable and that important issues were covered in more detail. (See Figs. 1 and 2.) This result for understanding contradicts the suggestion that visual cues and contiguity would help understanding in the screencast feedback. Two students strongly disagreed that the screencast feedback was understandable and had only received screencast at that point. The same lecturer provided the feedbacks whether written or audio-visual, so that the quality of content should have been consistent. However, the tutor's inexperience with audio-visual screencasting may have played a role here. Average ratings for screencasts suggested that they were of inappropriate length, but had a more appropriate tone than written feedback (Fig. 1); on average, respondents thought that screencasts were better at identifying which issues were important, prioritising them and supporting explanations with examples (Fig. 2). Feedback was perceived as less critical in the screencast feedback (Fig.3), but perception of usefulness for future essays was positive for both feedback types (Fig. 4).

Evaluation of the qualitative data

Qualitative data showed that screencast feedback was more personal and easier to accept. Simultaneously hearing explanations and seeing the relevant part of an essay helped to clarify points for five students. Three students explicitly commented on improved understanding. This qualitative testimony contradicts the quantitative data. Additionally, although inappropriate length was highlighted by the quantitative data, qualitative feedback suggested that the time constraint forced succinctness and demanded active listening.

Advantages of written feedback for students were that it could be repeatedly reviewed and that aspects were categorized with a holistic visual overview. This mirrors the difficulties reported with the linear nature of screencast feedback, which prevented students gaining a visual overview and the possibility of scanning to review feedback. A partial solution is to include a spoken overview at the beginning of the screencasts. Armellini (2012) and other researchers emphasize the need for audio feedback to be structured, although not scripted: 'To maintain the impromptu quality of spoken language, having a plan or a pre-prepared template is preferable to using a script', (JISC 2010: 41). Additionally, the tutor was new to screencasting as were the students, and with experience and familiarity, the tutor will be better able to structure audio feedback during the screencast, and the students will become more used to assimilating information in this way. A further positive of written feedback in this study was that it could be digested at the student's own pace. However, written feedback was also described as unclear, incomplete, slower to assimilate and more difficult to cross-reference with the essay.

In justifying their preference for screencast feedback, students most frequently referred to the linking with visual cues, which they found aided memory and understanding. Intonation helped students to understand the level of critique, or how important it was or was not, and 'critiques had a more encouraging feel to them' (R13). Students also reported that the screencasts were more engaging, had a high level of detail/specificity, succinctness and a stronger sense of socialization: 'I felt less isolated as a distance-learner' (R13). Middleton (2011) explains that the emotional bonding created through the audio-visual feedback results not only from the richness of the media, but also from the students' observation of the tutor's cognitive engagement with the student's personal work. The qualitative feedback, therefore, strongly suggests that audio-visual feedback can influence social and emotional aspects positively, in agreement with other recent research (e.g. Middleton 2011 and Stannard 2007).

While emotions clearly influence self-efficacy and learning and play a particular role in feedback, which threatens pride and self-esteem (Värlander 2008), emotions invoked by screencasting may well have positive and negative effects. Most responses in this research suggest a positive interpretation of feedback by students, but some responses highlighted negative emotions. Two students felt nervous at the prospect of receiving (potentially negative) screencast feedback, and one wrote 'if you have made silly errors, it's more embarrassing to hear someone mention them' (R5). Also, viewing issues from a wider context, after the trial had finished, two students began a dialogue with the tutor by email, discussing their feedback further, one writing:

> […] but I wanted to justify some of my choices and ask some questions for future essay development based on your comments. I don't know if this is something that could be built into the audio system in the future where students can respond to comments somehow. I know it is a technological dream maybe, but just thought to make this suggestion and wish for the best (Student email 16 March 2011).

Coffin *et al.* (2003) write that 'an attempt to develop dialogic exchange between lecturers and students is essential if the well-documented gap between lecturers' and students' understanding about what is required in academic writing is to be bridged' (Coffin *et al.* 2003: 122). Certainly in this case on a distance learning course, screencast feedback appears to have encouraged such exchange, and this would be useful during modules, rather than only after summative feedback when the module has finished.

Weaknesses and suggested improvements
For our future action research, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed. Findings are interpreted from a small number of students, whose perceptions may not be representative of all of our distance learning students on the MA in Professional Communications. Certainly, for the quantitative results, it is difficult to draw conclusions. Question design such as inconsistency in valence (e.g. rate your agreement that feedback was 'clear' or 'unclear') may have confused respondents so that redesign is necessary. It is also questionable whether the 'related' design using the same students for both types of feedback was useful. It served to show that similar feedback is possible with both feedback types: no students complained that different issues were covered in the two feedbacks. The only comment relating to this issue was: 'The written and audio-visual feedback did not include the same comments (although the gist of it was the same)' (R21) (See Appendix E.)

However, the design required students to complete the questionnaire twice, which three failed to do, reducing the available data. A larger number of students, with one-off questionnaire completion following screencast feedback would provide more reliable quantitative data. Further, the research did not triangulate data from different sources. In a future phase of this research, data on grade improvement and the use of feedback in later essays (document analysis) will be collected to assess the understanding of feedback and its application in feed forward. The design will therefore avoid using a single data source, using measures other than student perceptions instead. Student profiles (writing proficiency, learning preferences) and assignment type may also confound interpretation of effectiveness of screencast feedback and therefore need consideration in future research design.

Further, this research gathered student perceptions on a single tutor's written and audio-visual feedback, and the quality of the tutor's feedback was not evaluated by experts. An additional confounding issue, therefore, is whether students' perceptions were influenced by the quality of the feedback, rather than the way it was delivered. Future research requires using feedback from multiple tutors and evaluation of the feedback by experts.

Conclusion

The results of this very small trial in a single DL context suggest that feedback is received more positively in the richer media of audio-visual screencasting, and that this may encourage emotions more conducive to receiving and processing feedback, whilst possibly helping to socialise students within the learning context. The simultaneous visual cues and explanations appear to help with understanding and the screencasts are also quicker to capture than writing feedback. However, preferences for written feedback were based on the holistic overview afforded, which could be scanned and revisited and which was not confined to a linear delivery, nor time limited. Actions proposed as a result of this action research are to add new guidelines, to implement screencasting for formative assessment, and to do further research.

Three new guidelines for audio-visual screencasting will be added. The first will be to give an overview of what will be covered at the beginning: e.g. 'Main points for improvement in future essays are X, Y and Z.'. This will provide students with an initial 'mental map' of what is to be covered, to substitute the structural overview they gain from the written feedback. The second guideline will be to avoid pointing out verbally during a screencast any low order issues such as the odd typographical error. The third will be to prioritise promoting self-efficacy and motivation over the necessity to cover all possible areas for improvement.

We further propose implementing screencast feedback for the formative evaluation of mid-module essays on an optional basis. This is a compromise, because it allows us to re-evaluate with larger numbers of students the effectiveness of the feedback and helps to save tutor time. Students will still always receive written feedback for their end-of-module essays, so they will have a document for future reference after the module ends. Offering optional screencast feedback for the mid-module essay may also help to socialise students during the module and encourage dialogue over feedback.
In a follow up phase of this research, written and screencast feedback quality will be evaluated by peer tutors and feed forward effectiveness through evaluation of revised versions of assignments. This will not only control for the quality of feedback provided to students (whether screencast or written), but may also contribute to guidance on articulating and structuring screencast feedback appropriately.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A: Assignment Criteria Rubric

	Excellent (70+)	Good (60-69)	Reasonable (50-59)	Passable (40-49)	Fail (below 40)
Understanding of principles	theory/concepts used extensively and critically to support argumentation and approach, reflect on practice, and provide new insight	theory/concepts well used to support argumentation and approach, and to reflect on practice; some critical evaluation to provide new insight	some use of theory/concepts to support argumentation and approach, and to reflect on practice; some critical evaluation	few references to theory/concepts; limited or no evaluation; descriptive approach to comment on practice; limited understanding; omission	no references to theory/concepts; essentially a description of practice; significant misunderstanding; omission
Argumentation	case very well argued; logical, balanced reasoning; strong thread between sections; strong arguments; comprehensive justification of opinions and conclusions	well argued case; logical reasoning; evident thread between sections; good arguments; good justification of opinions and conclusions	clear case, reasonably argued; mostly clear reasoning; evident thread between sections; valid arguments; some justification of opinions and conclusions	weak or poorly argued case; reasoning clear in places; thread between/within sections weak; poor arguments; weak or little justification of opinions and conclusions; some irrelevant information	flawed or unclear case; reasoning unclear or faults/jumps in logic; no thread between sections; no or poor arguments; no justification of opinions and conclusions; irrelevant information
Explanation of approach	detailed, explicit interpretation of assignment task, fully identifying assumptions and all key concepts/issues; description and evaluation of approach taken, incl. methodology	correct, explicit interpretation of assignment task, identifying assumptions and all key concepts/ issues; good description of approach, incl. methodology, some evaluation	some interpretation of assignment task, but some assumptions or key concepts/issues not clearly identified; description of approach taken, but no or limited evaluation	partial attempt at discussing assignment task and approach taken, but no evaluation; assumptions and/or key issues/ concepts poorly identified; possible misunderstanding	no discussion or misunderstanding of assignment task; approach not considered; no identification of assumptions and of key concepts/ issues
Structure	balanced structure emphasising argumentation; strong introduction, evident connections between sections (incl. appendices); strong conclusion derived from discussion of assignment task	balanced structure; good introduction; good connections between sections (incl. appendices); well focused conclusion derived from discussion of assignment task	clear structure; adequate introduction; logical connections between most sections (incl. appendices); adequate conclusion derived from discussion of assignment task	basic or problematic structure; poor introduction; unclear connections between sections; weak conclusion poorly related to discussion of assignment task; poor use of appendices	no apparent structure; poor or no introduction; no connection between sections; no conclusion, or conclusion unrelated to discussion, or gives new information; poor use of appendices
Use of examples in argument	examples/appendices very well integrated in the discussion and critically evaluated; alternatives/issues fully considered and evaluated	examples/appendices well integrated in the discussion with some critical evaluation; alternatives/ issues considered	examples/appendices reasonably integrated in the discussion; descriptive rather than critical comments	examples/appendices used, but mostly descriptively or unclearly or inappropriately; limited or unclear integration in the discussion	missing, or poor or no examples/ appendices; poor or no evaluation or integration in the discussion; plagiarism
Use of literature in argument	extensive, critical use of academic and professional literature, incl. say, 15+ texts, some original references; meticulous referencing; correct listing in bibliography	good critical use of academic and professional literature, incl. say, 10+ texts, largely recommended ones; meticulous referencing; correct listing in bibliography	some use of literature, mostly professional, some critical use, incl. say, 5+ texts, essentially consistent referencing; correct listing in bibliography	minimal use of literature, essentially professional and recommended texts; little or no critical use, possible misunderstanding; inconsistent or unclear referencing; incorrect bibliography	no use of literature, or texts poorly chosen; no critical use of literature; significant misunderstanding; no referencing; poor or no bibliography; plagiarism
Writing style	analytical style used to emphasise argument and structure; objective presentation; extensive use of critical vocabulary; excellent paragraphing and verbal navigation	analytical style used to support argument; objective presentation; good use of critical vocabulary; good paragraphing and verbal navigation	descriptive rather than analytical style; some attempt at argumentation but tone sometimes subjective; some use of critical vocabulary; satisfactory paragraphing and verbal navigation	style mostly descriptive; limited use of critical vocabulary; tone mostly subjective; use of jargon; possible misunderstanding; paragraphing and verbal navigation sometimes poor	confusing style; little or no use of critical vocabulary; subjective or opinionated tone; over-use of jargon; misunderstanding; poor paragraphing and verbal navigation
Presentation	excellent use of space, typography, navigation aids and visuals; no proofreading errors	effective use of space, typography, navigation aids and visuals; few if any proofreading errors	adequate use of space, typography, navigation aids and visuals; a few proofreading errors	basic consideration given to some presentation issues; some proofreading errors	no consideration given to presentation; little evidence of proofreading

Appendix B: Written Feedback for Student

Overall evaluation

This was a very good essay, demonstrating an understanding of the ethical issues and dilemmas that occur in professional communication practice.

A slightly more explicit introduction would have helped the overall conclusion and I would have preferred fewer quotes. This would have allowed you more word count to analyse some of the topics in more depth against the theories of ethics.

I try to explain these points below.

If there is anything I haven't explained clearly please feel free to contact me.

Kirstie Edwards: Kirstie.edwards@skynet.be

Understanding of principles

It's perfectly clear that you understand the theories covered in the module.

Argumentation

Your arguments are clear. There was scope to improve the overall argumentation through the inclusion of your approach in the introduction as explained below. Additionally, you could have referred explicitly to Kantian and Utilitarian theories when applying them, for example in the 'visuals' and 'duty versus loyalties' sections.

Explanation of approach

Your approach to the assignment was not explained in the introduction. I cover this point in more detail below.

Structure

The structure is certainly clear; however, the introduction and conclusion missed some navigation and summary information respectively. I needed a paragraph at the end of the introduction telling me that you were going to analyse examples from your professional practice in the light of Kantian and Utilitarian ethics and conclude on whether professional constraints on truth-telling affect your work. This would have added coherence of a main argument from the beginning to the end of your essay.

New information should not be included in the conclusion (e.g. about electronic payments), and key points should be summarised.

Use of examples

Excellent.

Use of literature

You underpin your writing very well from the literature. I would now try to integrate the literature more seamlessly (i.e. without the quotations).

Writing style

I would try to paraphrase more in your own words. This might free up word count to include more analysis and would prevent the interruptions in flow of your writing.

Presentation

Excellent.

Appendix C: Questionnaire

Audiovisual and Written Feedback Trial

1. Audiovisual and Written Feedback Trial

Thank you for participating in this trial.

The questions which follow aim to explore whether audiovisual feedback is equivalent to written feedback on essays. You will need to complete this questionnaire twice; for the first feedback you receive and for the second feedback you receive. Please only answer the questions for the latest type of feedback you received. Questions with an asterisk must be responded to.

Responses are anonymous, so please email me when you have completed the questionnaire so that I can send you the next type of feedback, or if you have already had both types of feedback, so that I can send you your mark.

If you have any queries about the trial, please email me at kirstie.edwards@skynet.be.

＊1. Please indicate which questionnaire response this is and whether you have received audiovisual feedback before:

- ○ first feedback = written
- ○ first feedback = audiovisual (no previous experience)
- ○ first feedback = audiovisual (previous experience)
- ○ second feedback = written
- ○ second feedback = audiovisual (no previous experience)
- ○ second feedback = audiovisual (previous experience)

2. Please comment on any negative aspects of how (i.e. written or audiovisual) the feedback was delivered, which might impact on your ability to understand the feedback and use it in future essays:

3. Please comment on any positive aspects of how (i.e. written or audiovisual) the feedback was delivered, which might impact on your ability to understand the feedback and use it in future essays:

4. For the audiovisual feedback only, please indicate any technical difficulties you experienced:

5. Please indicate your agreement on whether the feedback delivered in this way (written or audiovisual) is/was:

	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree
understandable	—	—	—	—	—
constructive	—	—	—	—	—
of appropriate length	—	—	—	—	—
of appropriate detail	—	—	—	—	—
of appropriate tone	—	—	—	—	—
useful for future essays	—	—	—	—	—
useful regarding subject matter	—	—	—	—	—

✱ 6. The time which tutors have for providing feedback is limited. Time restrictions often mean that guidance on what students can improve (i.e. critique) is prioritized over praise on what students have achieved. Please indicate whether you felt:

◯ critiqued in a negative way

◯ critiqued, but constructively

◯ both critiqued and praised

◯ praised

◯ not sure

✱ 7. Related to the guidance provided, did you feel that the most important issues were prioritized and emphasized appropriately? Please indicate your level of agreement with the statements that important issues were:

	strongly disagree	disagree	neither agree or disagree	agree	strongly agree
unclear	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
prioritised appropriately	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
covered in detail	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
supported with examples	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

✱ 8. Will you be able to apply the guidance provided to help you with future essays? Please indicate whether feedback delivered in this way:

○ will not help with future essays

○ will help with future essays

○ don't know / unsure

✱ 9. After you have received your second feedback type, please indicate your preference for written OR audio feedback and try to explain the reasons for your preference:

✱ 10. Please indicate (if you know) your prefered learning style (you can select more than one if appropriate):

○ Visual   ○ Visual and Kinesthetic

○ Auditory   ○ Auditory and Kinesthetic

○ Kinesthetic   ○ Visual, Auditory and Kinesthetic

○ Visual and Auditory   ○ I don't know my preferred learning style

Done

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Appendix D: +ve and -ve Responses to Audio-visual Feedback

R= respondent number (n=14)
Responses are raw data
Highlighted texts are researcher interpretations for categorizing comments.
Categorizations are summarised below the table.

R	Negatives	Positives
2	None really, It was all quite clear.	It felt a lot more personal [social] and so was easier to take in.
5	The presentation finished before the end but little else negative to say [time constraint]	Certainly, the delivery is focussed [focussed] and you tend to pay attention more. You have to be an active listener to pick up what the narrator is saying [attention] and having audio as well as text feedback means you obtain more feedback that you normally would.
6	You do not have the option of looking directly at the section you wanted to. [linearity] No grade! [not knowing mark]	It was good to see exactly what you were talking about and to see it on the screen. I found this really useful. [linking]
10	Initially I was unable to open the audio-visual file as the instructions directed. It took quite a few attempts and was quite frustrating. If users are not very technical some of the instructions may be difficult to interpret. [technical issue]	The audio-visual feedback was a lot more personal [social] and I liked the way it highlighted the main points in a succinct manner. [succinct]
11	Not quite negative, but slightly distracting to hear the voice of an online tutor whom I've never previously heard speak. Although the audio-visual feedback was very rich, I doubt I'll revisit it as often as the printed equivalent as it's not so convenient and one doesn't have an instant visual overview (inability to just 'flick through' as it were). [can't scan to review/linearity and distracting to hear voice of online tutor]	The audio feedback gives a more nuanced impression than the stark words on the page. Combined with the visual element it was very powerful. [attention] Assuming we get a copy of the annotated PDF, that alone will be very useful.
13	When watching a screencast, it is more difficult to absorb the feedback 'as a whole' than when the feedback is on paper, because the comments are presented in a linear fashion. However, the screencast's pause and rewind controls are easy to use, so I was able to easily listen to portions of the feedback again to understand them better and reflect. [assimilating in a linear fashion rather than grouped topics together]	Being able to hear the tutor's tone of voice helped me understand better [Understanding]how the feedback was intended (both in terms of interpreting meaning and understanding level of praise), especially where points of criticism were covered. Even where criticisms were made, hearing tone of voice helped reinforce that these were constructive and well-intended. [social] The screencast enabled me to see specific examples being referred to within the essay, which I liked. [linking] I liked the way the tutor explained how she would structure the screencast - i.e. higher-order elements first, and then lower-order issues later.
14	I didn't twig what 'HO' and 'LO' was until a few minutes in [difficulty understanding]	No response
15	I was more nervous receiving the audio-visual feedback, but this may be simply because this was the first time. [nervous to receive audio-visual]	Very clear feedback and I liked that you went through my essay with me - It was nice to hear the voice of the marker - Hearing the voice helped me to get an overall impression of how my essay fared [social]
17	The recording was perhaps incomplete. It got cut abruptly. I was also unable to know my overall marks and whether or not I had passed. [time constraint] [not knowing mark]	I got a lot more context from the audio-visual feedback (from the tone of voice, pauses, etc). [social] I first read the comments only, and I must admit I felt a lot better after listening to what was being said.[social]
18	No response	No response
19	I did not get to read my own text before, and should have had a paper version to follow the comments. It was hard to follow the scrolling, the voice and read the comment in the lower	I liked the comments on particular sentences of paragraphs, [linking] and I really felt like being in front of the tutor. this was not interactive of course, but I almost felt like it was. [social]

	window. the sound was not so clear [assimilating multimodal difficult with scrolling]	
22	The delivery speed was a little fast. However, I just needed to replay after I missed a bit. [speed/time restraint]	As it's been a long time since I wrote this paper, it helped to see the text itself that was being commented on. [linking] I also liked that the audio feedback was limited to areas of improvement. It was a nice adjunct to the textual feedback.
23	Time constraints for recording time to provide feedback. [time constraint]	Very useful in understanding the comments noted on the essay in writing. Expands on comments and facilitates for elaboration on concepts and improvements that could be made to essay. This helps provide a better understanding than written feedback. [Understanding]
26	No negatives.	I really liked the fact that I could see the document and the annotations, whilst listening to the tutor. [linking] It is the first verbal communication I have had from the Uni since the start in 2008, so was very welcomed.[social] I liked the fact that I could follow the pointer on the screen as Kirstie was talking and it clarified up some of the things that I wasn't too sure about when I got the written only feedback.[understanding] I felt more positive about what I had done, than when I had read the written alone. [social] I will be able to go back to it and play it when I have written future essays to ensure that I have tried to correct and change things as pointed out in this essay. [understanding]The timing of it was quick enough to not be a drag to listen to, I would be delighted to receive more feedback like in this method, providing that the same visual annotations that I could follow on screen came with it.

Categorizations:

Responses repeated from the technical issues question are not analysed here. Technical issues are dealt with in Appendix F.

Negative issues:
- Time constraints / speed (R5, R17, R22 and R23)
- Linearity of feedback and no possibility of scanning (R6, R11 and R13)
- Nervousness/distracting to receive audio-visual feedback from tutor (R11 and R15)
- Difficult to assimilate with multimodality and scrolling (R19)
- Difficulty understanding the difference between LO and HO issues (R14)
- Not knowing the mark (R6 and R17)

Positive issues:
- More personal and easier to accept / social / positive / more like an interactive course (R2, R10, R13, R15, R17, R19 and R26)
- Seeing what you were talking about on the screen / linking (R6, R13, R19, R22 and R26)
- Focussed/ succinct (R5 and R10)
- You tend to pay attention/active listening / powerful (R10 and R11)
- Explicit references to 'understanding' or 'clarification' (R13, R23 and R26)

Appendix E: +ve and –ve Responses to Written Feedback

R= respondent number
Responses are raw data
<mark>Highlighted texts</mark> are researcher interpretations for categorizing comments.
Categorizations are summarised below the table.

	Negatives	**Positives**
1	N/A	Easy to print off and refer to, and to cross-compare with other written feedback to see recurring themes. [can refer back/ review in context of other feedback]
3	It was useful and clear to understand, however, the feedback came too late [lateness]. I have since submitted another essay which would have greatly benefitted from the feedback you have provided.	the use of examples from my essay to explain what you mean. It's great because I can refer back to it in written format and use it as something concrete to work on [can refer back to it]
4	I think the feedback is incomplete. I would like to see my essay with red comments on it at each point that was not clear or at awkward phrases, grammar mistakes ...[incomplete]	The paragraphs are very clear, it is easy to highlight my issues and have hints to improve my essays. Actually, I rewrote the paragraphs title in my own grid and write the negative comments at each essay I write. Thus I can appraise my evolution as an academic essay writer, and avoid to do the same mistakes again and again [can review in context of other feedback]
7	No response	Clear explanation of all aspects of the essay's evaluation [overview of all aspects of essay]
9	One or two of the feedback statements are a little ambiguous and could be interpreted in different ways - I'm not sure which might be the correct interpretation. There are no clues other than the writing itself from which to decide. [ambiguity]	I can print out the feedback and re-read it. I can also refer to a printout of the essay and compare. I can re-read the written feedback and compare comments in different sections of it, enabling me to reflect on the different comments as a whole and at the same time. [overview of all aspects of essay /can refer back]
12	Written feedback is often lengthy and sometimes requires me to read it twice to fully digest all the information available. This makes it much more time consuming compared to the audio-visual option. [Slower to assimilate] Also, where paragraphs are referenced in written feedback require the reader to refer back to the original document. The audio-visual feedback allows me to see the area being addressed whilst taking the comments on board [cross-referencing difficult].	Although it may be considered time consuming the written feedback is more in depth allowing a fuller understanding of how work can be improved in the future. [in depth allowing fuller understanding]
16	No response	you are able to go straight to the bits that you are worried about. Easy to follow. Clear headings. [categorized /scanning/immediate access] [can review]
20	None	The feedback was well structured with headings which makes it easy to follow. [categorized feedback]
21	The written and audio-visual feedback did not include the same comments (although the gist of it was the same). In contrast to the written feedback, I felt that the words were chosen more carefully and sensitively for the audio feedback. The same level of sensitivity was lacking in the written feedback. [insensitive tone]	No response
24	Whereas before I would have been happy with simple text changes and comments. after seeing the audio-visual feedback, it is obvious that the instructor can provide much more detailed information [not detailed enough]	Standard

25	I believed that I was doing certain things correctly and following advice, so I'm not quite sure what I'm doing wrong. I understand what is being said, but applying some of it when I thought I was doing it correctly is going to be difficult without being able to discuss it in person or see the exact parts highlighted that were incorrect, particularly in relation to the referencing system. [unclear]	The feedback was broken down into easy to follow sections and the fact that it is written will allow me to easily refer back to it on future occasions. There were positive aspects to it, it was not a continuous stream of negative points, it is clear that it is intended to be constructive feedback. [categorized feedback] [can review] [more positive]

Negative issues reported for the written feedback were:
- Ambiguity / unclear / not detailed enough (R9, R24 and R25)
- Incompleteness (R4)
- Slower to assimilate (R12)
- Cross-referencing from feedback to essay difficult (R12)
- Insensitive tone interpreted (R21)
- Lateness (R3)

Positive issues reported for the audio-visual feedback were:
- Possible to review/refer repeatedly / in context of other feedback (R1, R3, R4, R9, R16 and R25)
- Overview of all aspects of feedback / categorized (R7, R9, R16, R20, R25)
- In depth allowing for a fuller understanding (R12)
- More positive (R25)

Appendix F: Technical Difficulties with Audio-visual Feedback

Eight respondents reported technical difficulties when specifically asked (n=14)
Six reported no technical difficulties.

R	Comments when specifically asked if they experienced technical problems with the audio-visual feedback	Summary / inference
2	I had to assign a program (a browser) to open the .swf file. My computer would not have done this automatically. If I didn't already know how to do this it would have been troublesome.	Poor instructions / incompatibility of .swf file with browser on student's computer
5	video finished before the end	Time limit problem / lack of tutor experience to manage time
10	As per previous comments, the document did not open easily and a few attempts were required before I could access the feedback.	Poor tutor instructions
17	Like I mentioned earlier, the recording got cut abruptly, so I don't really know if I received the complete feedback or not. I was also unable to listen to the feedback at work (because my computer does not have speakers).	Time limit problem / lack of tutor experience Cannot be listened to privately at work without headphones
19	none but the sound was not so clear	Poor sound quality
22	The SWF format was not recognized by my system. It opened up Notepad as the default program. I had to do an "Open with..." context menu maneuver to get it working. Maybe you could package the .swf file inside of an open source player? Just an idea.	Poor tutor instructions / incompatibility of .swf file with browser on student's computer
23	increasing the size of the interface on my screen as I couldnt find the maximise button on the window. Secondly it was difficult to open the file with flash player as I was not familiar with this program.	Poor instructions / incompatibility of .swf file with browser on student's computer
26	I initially couldn't get it at work as I have no speakers, I then had problems at home with finding a programme to open it up on, so had to resort to a third laptop. I needed to save it to desktop and then import it into Quicktime to make it work.	Poor tutor instructions / incompatibility of .swf file with browser on student's computer

Appendix G: Respondent Preferences

R= respondent number
Responses are raw data
<mark>Highlighted texts</mark> are researcher interpretations of reasons for preferences for audio-visual feedback.
Underlined texts are researcher interpretations of reasons for preferences for written feedback.
<mark style="background:red">Red highlighted</mark> texts are important points to be added to the guidelines.

When?	Preference	R	Explanations given
After first audio-visual feedback	Audio-visual	2	In general I would prefer audio feedback. It's much <mark>more engaging</mark> and <mark>likely to be remembered</mark>.
	Audio-visual	5	audio is better because there is much <mark>more scope for providing detailed feedback</mark>. However, <mark style="background:red">if you have made silly errors it does make it more embarrassing to hear someone mention them</mark>. While it is <mark>more direct</mark>, I found that I had to <mark>actively listen and therefore would hope to use the points raised when writing essays in the future</mark>
	Written	14	I think I prefer written, although having received the audio first the written clarified things. Perhaps if I received written first the audio would have clarified things. However <u>being able to digest feedback at your own pace</u> and <u>only having to concentrate on one thing with written made it easier to process</u>. With the audio I was reading and listening. NB the written referred to examples given in the essay but that was not included so that was a bit confusing - and the assessment grid was empty<u>? I received v bad feedback for a recent essay; I think if that had been spoken I would have found it quite upsetting as its a more personal delivery</u>. I was actually <u>anxious about receiving my feedback in audio</u> because of this. But because the feedback was positive it was ok. I don't know what kinesthetic learning is so cant answer next question but I am not good with listening!
	Audio-visual	23	Audio
	Audio-visual	10	I prefer the audio feedback as I think it provides a <mark>clearer insight into how the work has been received</mark>. It <mark>allows me to gauge the tone</mark> of the piece and gain a better emphasis of what is required in future, <mark>without being too long</mark>.
	Both together	17	My preference is for both audio-visual feedback and paper feedback. Audio-visual feedback can give <mark>more context</mark>, whereas paper feedback is <u>more flexible</u> (<u>it can be printed, read anywhere</u>) + the assessment grid is useful.
	Written	19	I prefer the written version provided that we also receive the text with comments at each issue or good point as we did for collaborative work essay
After first written feedback		1	N/A
		3	No response
		4	No response
		7	No response
		9	No response

		20	This is my first feedback type.
		25	No response
After second audio-visual feedback	Written	6	I am unsure. I feel with the written format you are <u>more likely to refer back to it in future assignments</u>.
	Audio-visual	13	Preference: screencast The screencast was a ==much richer experience. Seeing the essay onscreen whilst the tutor was giving audio feedback was very powerful in helping to retrieve my memories of writing the essay== - written feedback does not have the same effect as quickly, as it takes time and considerably more effort to refer back to the essay when using written feedback. ==Comments were made much more specific== when using the screencast than with written feedback, because the tutor was able to scroll easily to different parts of the essay when describing elements to improve on. I ==enjoyed hearing the tutor's voice - I understood better where I was being praised,== ==critiques had a more encouraging feel to them, and I feel less isolated as a distance-learner.==
	Audio-visual	15	audio feedback - I thought I would prefer written, but in fact audio was better. ==I was able to understand the level of the critique better through the tone of your voice (i.e. there was less that I had to interpret myself in terms of how good/bad aspects were). It was also very helpful to see the essay and hear the critique as you went through it.==
	Audio-visual	18	Audio-visual feedback: Comparing with the written feedback, it ==adds important visual cues that help understanding where exactly the issues are.==
	Written	22	I think written feedback is sufficient because I doubt that the video feedback is worth the time investment. Its really ==great to hear the tutor's voice== though, so it's a close call. ==It's easier to accept criticism by audio than text, as the former seems more human.==
	Audio-visual	26	100% audio, provided it comes with the visual annotation that I could see on the screen. ==I liked that I could follow the mouse as Kirstie was talking.==
	Written	11	On balance I prefer written (at least if that includes the annotated PDF). <u>Audio is a nice bonus but not something that is easy to refer back to or flick through.</u>
After second written feedback	Audio-visual	12	I think I prefer the audio-visual feedback for providing ==a clearer tone and feel for the feedback== provided. One downfall may be the length, which forces the main points only to be covered and leaves less time to cover finer details as found in written feedback. Generally though, I prefer the audio-visual as ==it allows me to both see and hear where I need to focus for future work.==
	Written	16	I think both are useful. I would have to say written but only because <u>I would be more likely to look over it again to help me with future submissions.</u>
	Audio-visual	21	I prefer audio-visual feedback mainly because it comes across as ==more sensitive==. However, I'm not sure if this is simply because I heard the feedback rather than reading it (or the effect of rich media). ==With audio-visual feedback, tutors too are perhaps likely to choose words more carefully.==
	Audio-visual	24	Audio with a slight bit of reluctance. The instructor must strike a balance in not being too overcritical, even if its warranted in some cases

Appendix H: Interpreted Reasons for Audio-visual Preference

R	Explanations given (extracts: please see Appendix E for raw data)	Researcher interpretation
2	more engaging likely to be remembered	Engaging / active learning
5	more scope for providing detailed feedback more direct…I had to actively listen and therefore would hope to use the points raised when writing essays in the future ==if you have made silly errors it does make it more embarrassing to hear someone mention them==	Higher level of detail Engaging/active learning
10	provides a clearer insight into how the work has been received. It allows me to gauge the tone of the piece and gain a better emphasis of what is required in future, without being too long.	Tone communicates level of critique Concise
12	providing a clearer tone and feel for the feedback. it allows me to both see and hear where I need to focus for future work.	Tone communicates level of critique Linking / visual cues
13	Seeing the essay onscreen whilst the tutor was giving audio feedback was very powerful in helping to retrieve my memories of writing the essay… takes time and considerably more effort to refer back to the essay when using written feedback.	Linking / visual cues
	Comments were made much more specific … because the tutor was able to scroll easily to different parts of the essay when describing elements to improve on.	Higher level of detail/specificity
	I enjoyed hearing the tutor's voice - I understood better where I was being praised, critiques had a more encouraging feel to them, and I feel less isolated as a distance-learner.	Tone communicates level of critique Social aspect / personal
15	I was able to understand the level of the critique better through the tone of your voice (i.e. there was less that I had to interpret myself in terms of how good/bad aspects were). It was also very helpful to see the essay and hear the critique as you went through it.	Tone communicates level of critique Linking / visual cues
17 [4]	Audio-visual feedback can give more context, whereas paper feedback …can be printed, read anywhere	More context/specificity
18	adds important visual cues that help understanding where exactly the issues are.	Linking / visual cues
21	more sensitive. With audio-visual feedback, tutors too are perhaps likely to choose words more carefully.	Word choice more sensitive
24	==The instructor must strike a balance in not being too overcritical, even if its warranted in some cases==	
26	visual annotation that I could see on the screen. I liked that I could follow the mouse as Kirstie was talking.	Linking / visual cues

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[4] This respondent reported preferring both after the first feedback, but had obviously chosen for a single preference when s/he received the second feedback, as all respondents chose a single mode after the second feedback.

Appendix I: Interpreted Reasons for Written Preference

R	Explanations given (The following are extracts. Please see Appendix E for raw data.)	Researcher interpretation
11	Audio is a nice bonus but not something that is easy to refer back to or flick through.	Easier to review/reference
14	being able to digest feedback at your own pace	Having control over speed
	only having to concentrate on one thing with written made it easier to process	Focusing on one mode
	I received v bad feedback for a recent essay; I think if that had been spoken I would have found it quite upsetting as it's a more personal delivery I was actually anxious about receiving my feedback in audio because of this. But because the feedback was positive it was ok.	Fear of a more personal interaction with negative feedback
16	I would be more likely to look over it again to help me with future submissions.	Easier to review/reference
17 (both)	Audio-visual feedback can give more context, whereas paper feedback …can be printed, read anywhere	More context/specificity (audio feedback) Easier to review/reference (written feedback)
22	I think written feedback is sufficient because I doubt that the video feedback is worth the time investment	Too time-consuming (unclear whether tutor or student time)
6	… more likely to refer back to it in future assignments	Easier to review/reference