Lancaster University

TEACHING AND SCHOLARSHIP BRIEFING

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Creating Audio-Visual (AV) feedback for students: A toolkit for staff

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Imagine you just bought a new gadget. Do you (a) read the instruction booklet or (b) just look up a quick video on how to use it on YouTube? I bet it was the latter...

What if, instead of writing feedback that they do not read, you could make feedback videos for your students that they will actually watch? I developed a toolkit so that you could do just that.

Audio-Visual Feedback

Audio-Visual feedback is a way of using videos to give feedback to students instead of traditional written feedback.

Using University software, staff can record a commentary on the students' work, open on screen. The resulting video is then sent to the student to view at their leisure.

Problems with traditional written feedback

Feedback on student work has traditionally been given in written form. The marker typically gives a brief summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the piece which provides a rationale for the grade. Sometimes the marker may underline areas, or write annotations on areas of the text. Despite increasing efforts to raise the quality and volume of written feedback, student satisfaction with feedback comments remains doggedly low for many disciplines.

AV feedback as an alternative

I considered my own increasing reliance on online video explainers which cover everything from assembling products to how to get the most from a rock-climbing session. I wondered whether I could apply this technique to my student feedback.

I realised that audio-visual media adds much richness and depth, as well as functionality. I could control the timing and pace of the video on playback, check in with a transcript, and review anything I did not understand. A video is a warmer and more personal experience than a bare piece of writing.

Different types of AV feedback

There are three different types:

1. Purely audio - this can simply be recorded as a voice file on an phone or laptop.

2. AV of document on the screen (aka 'screencasting'), showing the coursework file and with accompanying audio narration, best recorded on University software.

3. AV as above with (2) but with capture of the face as well as voice of the marker shown in inset.

Case Study: Contemporary Issues in the Legal Profession

I ran a three-year pilot of AV feedback on Contemporary Issues in the Legal Profession. This module is a 15 credit optional second-year module with around 30/40 students from mixed backgrounds (eg. some additional learning needs; non-native speakers). Students were given the option to submit a full draft of their coursework, and I recorded a video of myself going through it which I then sent to them. The video showed their work on the screen, overlaid with my narration. Video durations varied between 5 and 15 minutes, depending on the script.

The feedback below is representative of the students' reactions & the module scored 5/5 ratings:

"I found the audio feedback extremely useful. This is because I could clearly understand the criticisms and annotations provided to me. It is much easier, in my opinion, to capture the tone and thoughts provided on my coursework through audio format rather than through written feedback. It also provided much more detail than written feedback as spoken voice allows someone to expand on their points a lot more freely and off the top of their head, rather than carefully formulated bullet points of advice. I would love to have this type of feedback in all of my modules."

"I found it the most useful feedback exercise that I have ever taken part in. This was because rather than written words on the page I could understand more clearly through your voice with reference to the relevant parts of the draft."

Creating AV feedback: considerations and reflections

I used the University's standard software, Planet Estream, as this gave me a place to order and store files securely and enabled me to do screencasting, which is where the student's essay is captured on the screen with my audio commentary in real time. If I needed to explain a particular concept I could easily open up a new window to show a resource (for example, web page of the Supreme Court) which was captured in the video as well as my narration. It is possible to record AV feedback on other hardware, such as an iphone, but I do not recommend this as there are data protection and storage issues, plus no closed captioning facility. I chose screencasting over pure audio as there is the added precision of having the document to cross-reference with in real time. With just pure audio (e.g. solely voice narration, as if you were reading out your written feedback) it can be difficult to pinpoint which part of the coursework or document is being referred to. With a screencast you can highlight sections of text or specific words/numerals in real time and use your cursor to draw or indicate, as well as voice directions. I decided not to record my face, as I felt this was potentially adding too many visual sources. I was also aware that facial expressions could potentially be misread - I wanted to ensure that the student was focussing on the words rather than my looking puzzed or bemused (which in reality might just be me thinking about a point the student made, but with no actual confusion on my part).

I was not familiar with how to use Estream at first, but soon found my way around it. Estream comes with a lot of functionality, so the marker can check, for example, if the student has actually looked at the feedback as the file comes with viewing stats. The duration of the video can depend on the piece you are giving feedback on but I found 5-10 minutes was generally sufficient. If I were commenting on a Ph.D. or dissertation chapter it might be longer.

There is a time investment in learning how to use the software, and figuring out the administrative side of things such as where files will be stored and named, and how they will be organised for a moderator/external. However, I found that recording the files took no longer than it took me to mark a piece in the traditional manner, and the amount of feedback I could give was greater, as I can speak faster than I can type. I use AV feedback on all modules where I am the sole marker and for my dissertation/Ph.D. students. My external examiner has commended me on the feedback, and as seen above the students are very positive about it.

The AV Toolkit Resource

Increasingly, staff are experimenting with AV feedback across the University. To support them, I have created a quick and easy Moodle toolkit. I initially considered building this toolkit using Xerte (interactive software that is used for online training resources, such as drag-and-drop answers, embedded video and audio files) but Xerte was far too clunky and not as visually pleasing as the Moodle or as quick to build.

The AV Toolkit Moodle contains a number of sections. In each section there are some micro-resources (short videos of less than 4 minutes and/or brief slide presentations) that explain what AV feedback is, and how to create and use such resources. In the toolkit I explain how to use the approved University software, Planet Estream. I deliberately created very short resources and TL;DR summaries as I am aware that staff have limited time, and it is important to explain things quickly and simply otherwise people are put off!

The resources give walk-through demonstrations on how to create the resources, so that staff can see exactly what to do, which buttons to press, and where the files get stored. There is also information on how to edit the subtitles. I shared some previous examples of feedback on my module, so that staff can visualise what AV feedback might look like, but it is very adaptable to the circumstances. For example, giving AV feedback to a Ph.D. student on their draft 5,000-word chapter might look very different to feedback for a brief case-note of 500 words.

The academic case for AV feedback is solid, and there is plenty of scholarly work to support its efficacy. However, I wanted this to be an easy-to-use toolkit and not a dense academic paper. Accordingly, I chose to include a 'wider resources' section so that people could read more if they were interested, but could equally skip if they just wanted to concentrate on the practicalities of how to create AV resources.

I felt that it was important to have a fully supported resource, so that anyone with queries knows where to go for help. There is a section that gives my details, so that staff can contact me. I can then provide personalised 1:1 instruction and help, either virtually or at their desk in person. In order to develop the resource, there is a final section for staff to give feedback in the form of a quick (<2-minute) questionnaire. This will help me to adapt and develop the resource around user-led demands. It can also give me data on impact and effectiveness, which can otherwise be hard to capture for learning innovations.

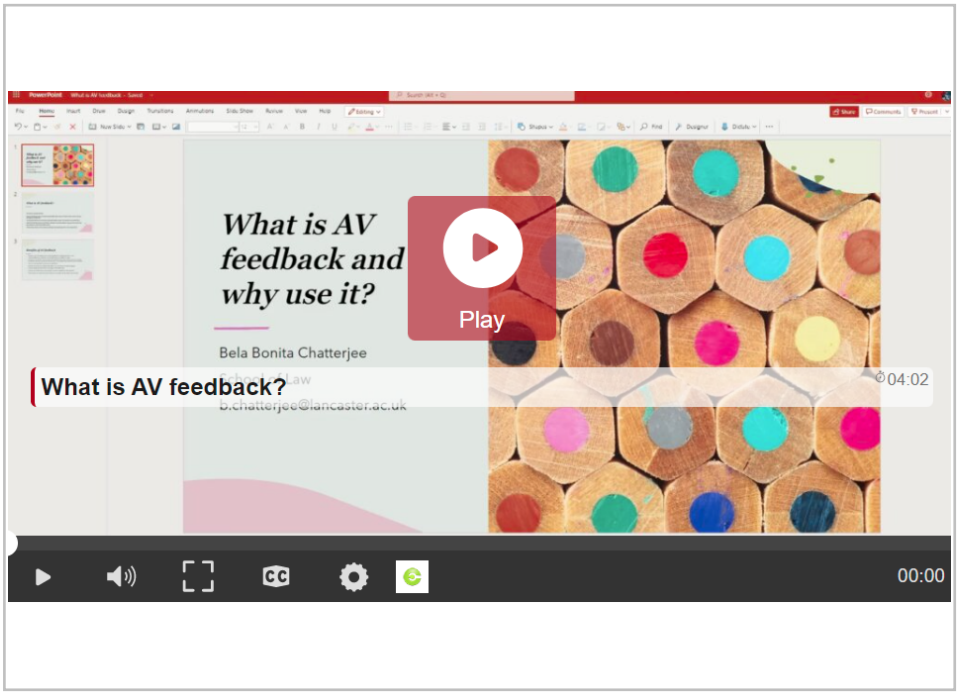
What is in the toolkit? Overview

The image (right) shows a video still from the toolkit, explaining what AV feedback is.

The kit contains short videos, slides, and resources on:

* How to create AV resources
* Handy checklist/TL;DR version
* Case studies
* Student voice - examples of how students react to AV feedback
* Wider reading/more resources
* Further help and support area
* Area for toolkit users to give feedback

Find the toolkit in Modules> Your Other Learning Spaces



Inclusive learning considerations

It is essential to create inclusive feedback. For my module, I carefully checked to see whether anyone had visual or auditory impairments, so that I could adjust for these to create an inclusive learning environment. For deaf or hearing impaired students, Planet E-stream provides an automatic captioning function. This can mis-translate 'technical' words so can require some editing, but it seems to be AI machine-learning based, so 'learns' words over time. The student controls the speed and volume of playback, plus having 'pause/rewind/fast-froward for added accessibility. Non-native speakers and dyslexic students found this function particularly helpful.

About the Author

Dr Bela Chatterjee has a keen interest in teaching, mentoring and curriculum design which she has developed over two decades at Lancaster University Law School. This project was developed as part of her inaugural ICE fellowship of 2021-22. She is the founder and current convenor of the University's Teaching and Scholarship network and has a number of teaching and scholarship accolades, including:

Highly Commended	: 2022 University Outstanding Contribution Awards
Winner	: 2018 FASS Dean’s Senior Teaching Award
Nominee	: 2016 HEA National Teaching Fellowship Scheme Awards
Nominee	: 2014 HEA National Teaching Fellowship Scheme Awards
Finalist	: 2013 Oxford University Press Law Teacher of the Year Award
Nominee	: 2013 LawCareers.Net Law Lecturer of the Year Award
Winner	: 2006 Lancaster University Sir Alistair Pilkington Prize

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References - Some further case studies from Lancaster University

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