

Technology Enhanced Oral Assessment and Feedback



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WHAT IS ORAL ASSESSMENT?

Oral assessment includes any assessment of student learning that is conducted, wholly or in part, by word of mouth. The key element is that at least part of the assessment task is marked based on the oral component of the task (Joughin, 2010). Oral assessment in its many forms continues to be a principal mode of assessment in higher education. As UOW moves to compliance with the new Higher Education Standards Framework (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, 2015) in effect from January 1, 2017, one of the key considerations is that methods of assessment are appropriate for students to demonstrate learning outcomes.

WHY USE ORAL ASSESSMENT?

Oral Assessment is a valid, reliable and authentic form of assessment, which can be used to demonstrate attainment of specific learning outcomes, e.g. communication skills. Further, with the concern over Academic Integrity, it can be a way for an academic to be fairly confident that the work presented by students is indeed their own. Oral assessment provides an opportunity for authentic formative and summative assessment tasks. The Australian Graduate Outlook 2014 (Graduate Careers Australia, 2016) identified that communication skills (which includes both written and oral communication) was the most important selection criteria used when recruiting graduates. According to Bates (2012) pedagogical reasons for using audio include the ability for students to use repetition and reflection to master certain skills, including language pronunciation. Although referring to instructor created resources, this approach is equally valid for students constructing and demonstrating their own meaning and understanding. The emergence of quality digital recording software has encouraged a trend toward recorded oral assessment.

WHY USE TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED ORAL ASSESSMENT?

The benefits of recording oral assessment tasks include the ability to retain artefacts of student work for portfolios, comparison of student progress, similarities and differences, and fairer grading as student submissions can be replayed to ensure accuracy, reliability and calibration across markers (Early and Swanson 2008). Early and Swanson (2008) also found that, if implemented as part of the learning design (Egan, 1999), oral assessment can also help with classroom management, as recordings for assessment tasks can be made outside class time (as opposed to the traditional model where an instructor has one-on-one sessions with each student), which in turn frees class time for other activities. From an interpersonal viewpoint, the study by Early and Swanson (2008) reported that students felt more creative when presented with the opportunity to use digital recordings for assessment as compared with traditional in-class oral assessment, a perception that was confirmed in interviews with the instructors.

HOW CAN I USE TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED ORAL ASSESSMENT?

While the use of technology enhanced oral assessment has been traditionally linked to the learning of languages, there are opportunities for the approach to be adopted in other academic disciplines. For example, digital oral assessment could include, but not be limited to:

- Medicine, Nursing and other Allied Health students recording case notes from clinical practicums, or pronouncing complicated drug names
- Conducting and recording authentic interviews, for example students in Psychology, Social Work etc.
- Recording fieldwork and site visit notes, in disciplines including the Sciences, Engineering and Informatics.
- Law students participating in, and recording mock court hearings.
- Education students recording a mock parent teacher interview.
- Students from all disciplines creating digital stories as an assessment submission.
- Language students converse with their peers, recording and submitting for assessment purposes.

Regardless of the task or scenario, it is essential that the assessment is an integral part of the learning design, where formative opportunities precede summative submissions, which must be constructively aligned to subject and course learning outcomes, and that the task, rather than the technology, is the principal concern.

WHAT IS AUDIO FEEDBACK AND WHY USE IT?

“Supportive, constructive and timely feedback, which is clearly linked to the assessment criteria, is an essential component of the learning process. It enables students to build on their positive achievements and have a clear sense of what they need to do to improve their performance when undertaking subsequent assessment tasks. Feedback is a two-way process, an on-going dialogue between students and teachers” (University of Wollongong, 2014). Oral feedback may include instructor and/or peer feedback given informally to groups or individuals during class or more formally, for example by the instructor during face-to-face appointments with students, or as a response to an oral or written assessment task. Oral feedback is a powerful tool when the affordances of feedback are combined with those offered by technology.

HOW CAN I USE TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED AUDIO FEEDBACK?

New technologies can enhance the feedback process by offering options to provide recorded audio feedback to students. Audio feedback can engage students and enhance your teaching presence. Further, students can review your feedback more than once, as it suits them. From an instructor standpoint, it may be quicker to record, rather than annotate a written essay or to type comments in a digital copy of an assessment task.

There are a number of different approaches to providing technology enhanced audio feedback. For general feedback, you may create a podcast and upload directly to your Moodle site, to be accessible to all students. More specifically, the UOW version of Moodle has an integration of the PoodLL plugin, which allows you to record individual feedback to each student assignment, or record feedback in relation to quiz answers.

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