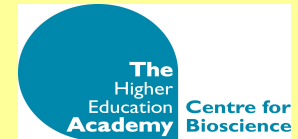


# Students' responses to academic feedback provided via MP3 audio files

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# Background

- Providing feedback is time consuming for academics (Carless *et al.*, 2006)
- Feedback may not be effectively used by all students (Higgins *et al.*, 2002)
- Students need to develop the ability to use feedback (Sadler, 1989)
- “Think-aloud reading” (Shriver, 1992) enhances writers awareness of the needs of their audience
- Academics are endeavouring to utilise electronic means of delivering student feedback and enhancing the quality of that feedback (e.g. Pitt & Gunn, 2004)
- Electronic forms of feedback may be more easily archived and distributed for quality assurance purposes

# Research Questions

- How do students respond to, understand and interpret feedback provided in MP3 format?
- How do students use feedback when it is provided in MP3 format to support their learning and how does this usage differ from their use of conventional written feedback?
- Is it practical and feasible for tutors to provide feedback to students using MP3 audio files?

# Methodology

- 15 self-selected Human Biological Sciences students
  - 9 Level 2 and 6 Level 3 students
  - 11 full time and 4 part time students
- Feedback as MP3 audio files was provided on formative submission of draft written work
  - MP3 files were generated on a desktop PC using freeware
  - MP3 files were sent to the students by e-mail
- Semi-structured interviews of all students within 3 weeks of receipt of feedback
  - Interviews focused on interpretation and implementation of feedback
- 12 assignments also conventionally marked and written and audio feedback comments were classified to enable comparison
  - Categories based on Brown *et al.* (2003)

# Results

## **Students' response was very positive**

- All students said they would like to receive more feedback in this format
  - 2 said they would like to receive both audio and written feedback

*'I mean feedback's good anyway, but if it's more helpful then it's better all round'*

- Students said they found the feedback more personal than written feedback

*'It seemed more conversational'*

# Results

## **Students' practical usage of audio feedback**

- 13 Students listened to the feedback more than once. They also appreciated the ability to pause, rewind and play sections again

*'Found myself listening to it three or four times'*

*'Could pause and think with the audio'*

- 12 Students made written or electronic notes on their essays from the audio feedback

*'[audio] is more practical'*

# Results

## Students' comprehension of audio feedback [clarification, learning (Orsmond *et al.*, 2005)]

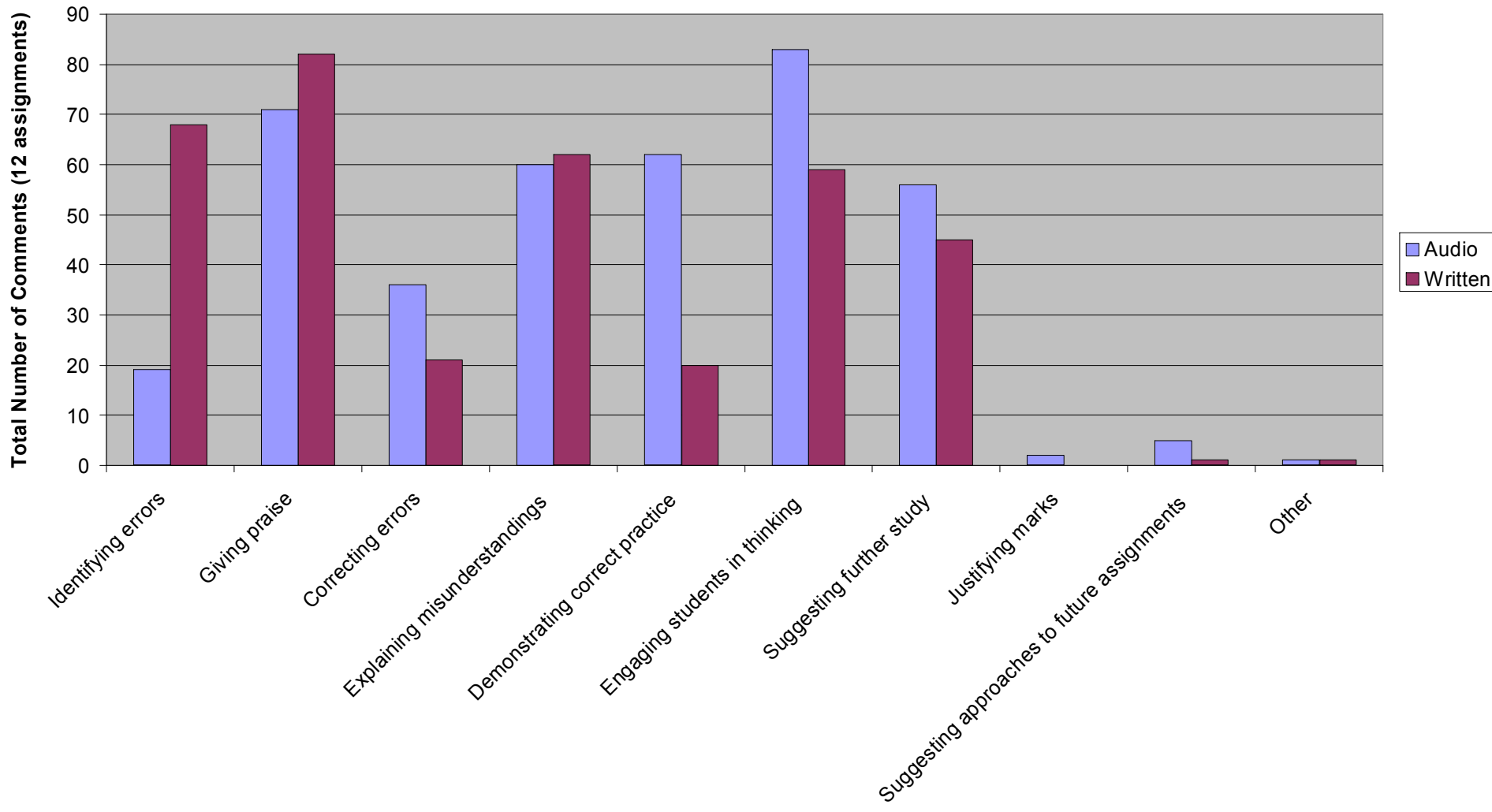
- Students were able to understand the feedback to a greater extent  
*'Tone of voice conveyed information as to whether the changes [needed] were minor or major'*  
*'Circles and question marks written are difficult to interpret'*  
*'The spoken word meant more than words on a piece of paper'*
- 7 Students said the feedback was more detailed than the written feedback they usually received  
*'This feedback was quite longer than I expected, but on written feedback it can be just a few ticks, It looks really rushed. Not much to it'*  
*'If they're writing it down, you can only write down a few comments, but when it's spoken you've got so much more time and things like that, to say what you want to say and get across to the student what you mean'*
- 4 students said they found tutors handwriting difficult to read

# Results

## Students' usage of audio feedback in their learning [learning, motivation, reflection (Orsmond *et al.*, 2005)]

- Students were able to work with the feedback to a greater extent  
*'Hearing somebody say that to you, you do go away and um have something to eat and think about what's been said whereas you read it and it doesn't fit, it doesn't seem to ring quite the same...you've got somebody's words in your head'*  
*'I think "yes", I know what you mean". I understand.....whereas reading the written feedback I did not really understand how to do it'*  
*'in speaking you can hear the thought processes'*  
*'[audio feedback] sticks more than written'*
- Audio feedback tended to focus on possible approaches of doing things rather than stating a single alternative approach that the student may not understand  
*'It seems like written feedback just goes with one essay, but the audio feedback could go with other essays as well'*

Figure 1 - Classification of Audio and Written Feedback. Categories are based on Brown et al. (2003)



# Characteristics of effective mp3 feedback

- Recorded with sufficient quality to enable students to appreciate the personal qualities of your voice.
- Does not need to be supplemented by written feedback.
- Not be presented in an excessively formal way.
- Not rushed.
- Provides examples.
- Explicitly contributes to the development of the student as a professional biologist.

# Discussion

- Why might MP3 Feedback be so effective?
  - Students may have a more aural learning style than tutors (Flemming, 2008)
  - Spoken feedback has more *variation* than written feedback (Pang, 2003)
  - Spoken feedback naturally concentrates on developmental aspects of learning
- But
  - The students were self-selected
  - What is the novelty effect?
- Staff reported that providing audio feedback did not save them time, but it might do so with more practice
- File size can be reduced by mono recording and lower sampling rate.

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