

# Using Mahara to improve students' perceptions of, and ability to effectively utilise, feedback on assessment

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- **Breakdown in communication**
- **Students unable to develop their learning (Higgins et al., 2002)**
- **Unable to use this to feed-forward to other assessments**
- **Student dissatisfaction - staff/student meetings; NSS scores**

- **Verbal feedback helpful (Orsmon, et al., 2006) . . .**
- **. . . but not practical (massification, etc.)**
- **Needs to be more effective AND efficient**
- **Helping students engage with feedback**
- **Develop students' ability to make effective use of feedback (Hulme & Forshaw, 2009)**
- **Understand good performance, current performance, and how to bridge the gap (Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2004)**

- **Guided feedback reflection exercise**
  - understand good performance
  - evaluate current performance
  - think of areas of strength and how to maintain this
  - areas of weakness
  - target their goals for next assignment
  - identify next steps
- **Web-based e-portfolios**
  - identify areas for development across successive assessments (and different disciplines?)
  - Chart their development

- **As a result, this project investigated the use of web-based e-portfolios, using software that is freely assessable to all University of Glasgow students (Mahara).**
- **These portfolios encouraged student to upload the feedback they received and then reflect on this feedback.**
- **The current project built on previous work as e-portfolios have the additional advantage of being easily accessible to students from anywhere at any time.**



Phase 1:  
Consultation  
with L3 students



Phase 2:  
Intervention  
with L2 students



Phase 3:  
Evaluation of  
intervention

- **We created, with student consultation, a feedback reflection. This reflection encouraged students to ask themselves the questions staff would ask them if they requested more feedback.**
- **Recruited two L3 students as interns**
- **Ran 2 FGs with L3 students (12 students in total). In these focus groups asked about general perceptions of feedback and also for their views on the feedback reflection**
- **Changes were made to reflection on basis of this**

- **Students had poor perceptions of feedback**
- **But agreed that they have a role to play in the feedback process:**

"Students are expecting more from the markers than from themselves. They want told what is right and wrong instead of actively thinking about it and evaluating the report again!"
- **So overall they were supportive of the idea and thought it would be useful for student learning and development**



- **This intervention ran across both semester 1 and semester 2**
- **Students completed their Lab report and received feedback**
- **They were then invited to complete the feedback reflection.**
- **In both semesters after completing the feedback reflection, students completed evaluation questionnaires and engaged in focus group discussions**

## **Semester 1:**

- **First we tried online- 1/450 students**
- **They were then invited to feedback reflection sessions. 5 sessions were run and 2/450 attended**
- **Interesting during this period of time 27 people emailed for additional feedback. Only one of these people engaged with the feedback reflection**
- **We waited a few weeks and ran the feedback reflection again the week before the 2nd report was due. Engagement was higher and 55 additional students attended (74 registered)**

## **Semester 2:**

- **Due to time we ran one session in the lab 11/450 attended the session (31 registered).**
- **No students have completed this online this is despite encouragement to complete this...**

- **In order to do the reflection students needed 5 things:**
  - **The reflection proforma**
  - **The lab report writing guide**
  - **Their own written report that they submitted**
  - **The feedback they received on their report**
  - **A recently published report**
- **It was hoped all of these things together would allow students to consider where they are now and where they want to be.**



Step in the reflection	Example Question
Step one: The strengths of your work	Which parts of the report were well written/done
Step 2: The weaknesses of your work	Which parts of the report were problematic and areas you should concentrate on?
Step 3: After reflecting on your report and thinking about the process	What would you change about the process/way you approach the lab report/piece of coursework?
Step 4: Using feedback effectively. Feedback is effective to feedforward to future work!	<p>Having reviewed your report, feedback, and the report writing guide, what are the 3 main things you need to keep on doing in the future, in order to write something like a published paper?</p> <p>Having reviewed your report, feedback, and the report writing guide, what are the 3 main things you need to focus on to improve your work in the future, in order to write something like a published paper?</p>

Question	Median
I think the questions in the reflection were suitable for encouraging me to consider the weakness of my report	4
How valuable was completing the feedback reflection for developing your critical thinking skills?	4
How valuable do you feel the project has been in developing a positive attitude towards learning?	4
How valuable was completing the feedback reflection for developing your skills as an independent learner?	4
How valuable was the feedback reflection for developing your confidence surrounding what is expected of you in future work?	3



Question	Median
The resources on Moodle provided me with the information I needed to upload my feedback to Mahara.	5
I think Mahara is a good way for me to store my reflections on feedback.	4
I will use Mahara in future to store my reflection on feedback	3



**I will use this feedback reflection pro-forma with future assessments**

**4**

**To what extent do you think that what you considered in your feedback reflection will help you research your future psychology coursework?**

**4**



Question	Median
How enjoyable did you find the experience of reflecting on your feedback?	3
How satisfied were you, overall, with the opportunity to be guided through a reflection on your feedback?	4



**"I actually thought reflecting was helpful, because to be honest, while writing this one - the 2A report - I did look at the feedback sheet but I didn't really think properly about what the strengths were and what the weaknesses were. I just looked at the specific comments, but I didn't give it as much thought as I probably should have. And so this really helped me to actually realise what my strengths are, what my weaknesses are, and what I should improve."**

**"If I just looked at this, I would just go straight to the marked fields, and just read the comments there. Whereas here I actually read through the report; I looked at the recent paper as well; and I looked at the lab report writing guide. And I combined it, and it just helped me notice - just like, properly realise what was wrong and what was right, and why. Because some of the comments I didn't really think 'that was wrong', but then obviously after I read the writing guide again, I realised I didn't really read it properly in the first place. So then I just compared it to the comments, and saw!"**

**"Doing this made me go back through my report and process it and so I understand the comments now."**

**"I have the tendency, I think all students have the tendency to blame the marker and I started to write something about the marker and then I realised this is about me, it's not about the marker. This is about what I need to improve and that was really helpful [...] it changes focus from marker to yourself because when you have to answer a question you have to go back and look for that answer but when you get feedback and not this you just glance over it and don't look at your report [...] so this made it easier to understand some of the feedback."**

- **Overall, data suggests that students believe reflection on feedback is important and useful. . .**
- **. . . but it seems that they only see this AFTER engagement!**
- **Perhaps reflection in evaluation at end help consolidate usefulness of exercise?**

- **Getting students to engage was a challenge!**
- **Sustainability as an on-line resource?**
- **"I wouldn't have done this if I was on my own. I wouldn't have done it if there wasn't a class."**
- **Most of the students believed that they learn more if they are made to do things, so making this a compulsory exercise would be a good idea**

## Mahara

- **Students liked the generalisability**
- **Not used for anything else, so unlikely to use it by themselves**

**However, they are still heavily dependent on staff! They still want more, and better feedback, and with this they think they will get better at reflecting on feedback.**



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