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Transforming Feedback Practices through the Use of Screencast Video Feedback in L2 Writing Classrooms

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Abstract: Giving feedback to student writing is one of the writing teacher’s most important tasks in the classroom. Writing teachers can use many forms of feedback, such as written feedback, teacher-student conferencing, peer feedback, or self-assessment. Additionally, the influx of technologies into writing classrooms allows teachers to use screencast video feedback when responding to student writing. In this article, two second-language writing teachers questioned their feedback practices when responding to students’ texts. They implemented feedback innovation by using screencast video feedback in their classrooms to explore how their attempts to use video feedback affected their individual practices. The implementation of video feedback opened their eyes as writing teachers because of its multimodality. The innovative use of aural, visual, textual, and gestural modes enabled them to view feedback as a tool for improving and learning writing rather than solely correcting students’ errors. This article provides ideas and suggestions for writing teachers interested in improving feedback practices with screencast video feedback.
Giving feedback to student writing is one of the second-language (L2) writing teacher’s most important tasks in the classroom (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). Integrating technology in writing classrooms provides L2 writing teachers with the opportunity to incorporate screencast video feedback as a new tool for responding to student writing. According to Cunningham (2019), screencast video feedback “provides recorded spoken comments on student work with the added provision of a video of the paper on the screen where the instructor can gesture, highlight, and show areas of the work being spoken about” (p. 224). Researchers have analyzed screencast video feedback in various contexts, such as English as a foreign language (Zhang, 2018), English as a second language (Cunningham, 2019; Séror, 2012), and first-year writing programs (Thompson & Lee, 2012). Some researchers, such as Séror (2012) and Thompson & Lee (2012), emphasize the socio-emotional, multimodal, and interchangeable affordances of video feedback. Overall, students reacted positively to screencast feedback due to its personal, conversational, and multimodal nature. Furthermore, the inclusion of comprehensive and elaborated details led to more meaningful revision.

Although research on student perceptions of screencast feedback is crucial and promising, exploring how teachers innovate feedback by adopting new tools (e.g., screencasting) is equally important. Such research can contribute to the literature of teacher education and feedback literature, throwing “light on the theory-practice divide, if any, and the problems that teachers face in undertaking feedback innovation, with direct implications for teacher education and teachers’ continuing professional development with regard to feedback in writing” (Lee et al., 2016, p. 249). Séror’s (2012) study responded to the need for feedback innovation research by adopting screencast feedback in L2 writing classrooms. Although Séror described his use of this new feedback tool in detail, he did not address how that feedback innovation attempt affected
his conception and practice of giving feedback. Intrigued by the potential of screencast feedback, we voluntarily created an informal professional learning community for our own feedback innovation. In this article, we describe our design for and implementation of video feedback innovation in our L2 distance learning writing courses. Additionally, we share our reflections and examine how experimenting with screencast feedback has transformed our individual feedback practices.

**Context**

Heon and Sarah investigated video feedback innovation at a large, land-grant university in southern New England, USA. We teach primarily L2 writing courses within the First-Year Writing (FYW) program. Two courses, ENGL 1003 (English for Non-Native Speakers)\(^1\) and ENGL 1004 (Introduction to Academic Writing),\(^2\) prepare students for the FYW course, ENGL 1007 (Seminar in Academic Writing and Multimodal Composition). ENGL 1003 introduces emerging L2 writers to the rhetorical process, and ENGL 1004 develops students’ writing practices and introduces them to meaningful participation in critical conversations. ENGL 1007 introduces students to different modes and approaches to composition and increases their awareness of various rhetorical situations. ENGL 1007 is a university-required course; all students must complete ENGL 1007 before registering for upper-level and university-required writing-intensive courses. Incoming students must complete an online Guided Placement Survey (GPS) to determine the most appropriate course according to their needs, abilities, and prior experience in English writing.

\(^1\) Due to the problematic nature of this course title, the course has been renamed as of Fall 2023 to more accurately reflect its content as a writing course, rather than a language course. At the time of this writing, the course catalog description for English for Non-Native Speakers read in part, “[The course] is an introduction to the rhetorical process for emerging second-language writers. It stresses the writing situation and the purpose of writing and pays particular attention to the critical engagement and reflection skills needed to participate successfully in the American university discourse community.”

\(^2\) While ENGL 1003 is entirely populated by L2 students, ENGL 1004 consists of L2 and domestic writers in the same course sections.

Heon is a native speaker of Korean with English as an additional language, and Sarah is a native speaker of English. Heon earned his PhD in 2019 in Foreign, Second, and Multilingual Education from The Ohio State University and has been teaching in the University of Connecticut’s writing program for four years. Sarah earned her PhD in Composition and TESOL in 2016 from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and has been teaching in the University of Connecticut’s writing program for five years. We have 27 years of collective experience teaching second-language writing at the college level, including previous roles teaching university writing courses. In our current writing program, we were hired as full-time teaching faculty specializing in second-language writing. Our additional responsibilities include developing curriculum, designing guided self-placement surveys, and implementing research-oriented pedagogical innovations.

In Spring 2022, at the time of our investigation into video feedback innovation, we were both teaching distance learning sections of our courses. The courses were primarily asynchronous, with synchronous sessions held weekly. Heon taught one section of ENGL 1004; the synchronous sessions met twice each week for 105 minutes. Heon investigated the use of video feedback in his course, which was composed of 15 students, all of whom were L2 writers and native speakers of Chinese. The class met for 15 weeks, and all the students were in their second semester of college writing. Sarah taught two sections of ENG 1003. Those sections were “intensives,” which met for 10 weeks, but students completed the same amount of work as students taking the 15-week version of the course. Synchronous sessions met twice each week for 75 minutes. Attendance at the first synchronous session of the week was required, but the second session was optional. This session allowed students to ask Sarah questions about the coursework or assignments and to clarify the material discussed during the synchronous sessions. Sarah chose one section of her course to investigate her use of video feedback; the section was made up of 15 students, all of whom were L2 writers and native speakers of Chinese who
were in their first semester of college writing. In the section of her course that was not included in this investigation, Sarah provided feedback via written commentary on drafts and online writing conferences.

In our FYW program, all the courses are grounded in a Writing Across Technology curriculum. The program highlights the importance of guiding students to strategize and engage in critical thinking about the technologies they use to compose and the synergistic effect achieved when they compose using multiple modes. Due to the supportive environment for using technologies in the classroom, we became interested in technology-mediated feedback, such as screencast feedback, because we questioned the effectiveness of the written feedback we had traditionally used for our students’ drafts. For instance, we were often frustrated when responding to the global aspects of writing. Despite investing time and energy into written feedback, students often did not understand our feedback. This, in turn, led to unsuccessful revisions. Thus, we two became an informal professional learning community as we read research literature on screencast feedback, discussed our plans to design and implement screencast feedback in our classrooms, and shared our reflections on using screencast feedback through regular online meetings throughout the semester.

**Materials and Procedures**

We chose Screencast-O-Matic® (now called ScreenPal®, https://screenpal.com) desktop screen recording software for our video feedback because we wanted a software tool that would be easy for us to use and equally easy for the students to access their individual videos. We also wanted a tool with a free, basic version and one with a global presence to ensure that distance-learning students experiencing varying levels of reliable internet access could easily download and watch their video feedback screencasts. In addition to Screencast-O-Matic®, we wrote individual journals to reflect on our video feedback efforts.

We also met weekly via Zoom throughout the semester to discuss our approaches to video feedback and to share our journal reflections.

In both Introduction to Academic Writing and English for Non-Native Speakers, the semester’s coursework was divided into four modules. Jeon utilized video feedback for the cumulative projects in Modules 3 and 4 of Introduction to Academic Writing. In the Module 3 project, students wrote an essay responding to an article by Garnette Cadogan (2016), reflecting on the effects of navigating spaces through the lens of their personal experiences and observations. Then, in the Module 4 project, students created their own multimedia blog posts explaining what affects their movements in different spaces and how they contribute to or change those spaces. Sarah used video feedback for the final project of Module 4 in English for Non-Native Speakers. In that project, students wrote an essay exploring how patterns of language they had previously observed and recorded shaped their lives.

In addition to the stress associated with adopting an unfamiliar technology for writing feedback, there was also the necessity to scaffold the introduction of video feedback. This involved familiarizing students with the new technology and preparing them to receive video feedback (i.e., explaining what it was, how we would use it as teachers, and how the students could potentially respond to it). Our efforts were bolstered by the students’ familiarity with peer review feedback: The concept of having their writing reviewed was not new to them, only the method of feedback delivery.

Next, we read through our respective students’ drafts, making detailed notes to help us focus our feedback during the screencasts. While making the screencasts in Screencast-O-Matic®, we focused on global- and local-level comments. From the global perspective, comments for Jeon’s class were guided by the grading rubric for Module 3 and checklists for Module 4 (see Appendix A).
In contrast, comments for Sarah’s class used evaluative criteria (see Appendix B). Global-level comments were focused on content, structure, organization, and meeting the requirements of the assignment. Local-level comments focused on word choice, expression, grammar, punctuation, style, and documentation. All the feedback was given in English.

Once the recording began, we adopted a pleasant tone and mirrored the relaxed speech patterns that we used during synchronous sessions. This ensured that hearing our voices did not seem unusual to the students. We began each video with a friendly greeting, addressed the student by name, and gave overall encouraging comments. Then, we guided the student from the beginning of the draft to the end, highlighting and commenting on specific parts of the text. We ended the screencasts with more encouragement and a final comment, such as “I hope this helps you as you approach your revisions. Please let me know if you have any questions.”

Most of our videos were between four and five minutes long, although two of Sarah’s videos were seven minutes long, and four of Heon’s videos were eight minutes long. After completing each video, we uploaded it to the Learning Management System (LMS) for auto-captioning. The captioning process sometimes took as long as two hours, which we found frustrating and inefficient because it caused a delay in providing the feedback video to the students. After the auto-captioning was completed, we edited the captions for accuracy. Then, we uploaded the captioned video to the student’s draft submission in the LMS.

Reflection

Initially, we were anxious and resisted using screencast feedback. Heon, who is not a native English speaker, felt stressed and anxious about providing his audiovisual feedback in English within the timeframe recommended by video feedback research literature (i.e., five to six minutes; [Vincelette & Bostic, 2013]). That stress and anxiety resulted in awkward pauses and silences in his videos. Teacher participants in Vincelette and Bostic (2013) also shared similar anxiety toward video feedback; one
teacher participant was so preoccupied with speaking precisely within the time limit (i.e., five minutes) that he stopped utilizing screen tools, such as highlighting and scrolling. Sarah noticed an empathetic connection between her initial resistance to video feedback and students’ anxiety about writing in general. However, our initial anxiety about and resistance toward video feedback innovation proved ultimately transformative, leading us to enhance the application of our feedback with practice and effort.

Video feedback opened our eyes as writing teachers because of its multimodality. The combination of aural, visual, textual, and gestural modes while giving screencast feedback was innovative because we primarily give text-based comments in the margins or at the ends of students’ drafts. While giving screencast video feedback, we especially enjoyed the nature of switching back and forth between students’ texts and outside resources such as instructional materials or assignment rubrics and prompts. The ability to expand our feedback with screencasting is illustrated in Table 1, which contains a transcribed excerpt from the video for a student in Heon’s class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice commentary</th>
<th>On-screen events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One of my comments is related to your misinterpretation of Module 3 assignment project</td>
<td>Highlighting the introduction paragraph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Especially in your introduction, I cannot see which direction you are going to develop. In this essay, having a clear direction is very important</td>
<td>Switching back to the assignment prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let me show you the Module 3 assignment prompt one more time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

Transcripts of Video Feedback

3 For more scholarship on writing anxiety, specifically its effect on L2 writers, see Huerta et al. (2017), Tsao et al. (2017), and Zhang (2019).

Voice commentary (continued)

When you go to the “task” section, you can see three bullet points, and these are the three options of directions that you need to decide. Also, it is important that this is not a summary writing but your draft too much focuses on summarizing the Cadogan’s article. This essay needs to include your own experiences and observations about moving spaces.

On-screen events (continued)

Highlighting the task section of the prompt using the color highlighter tool

My suggestion is read your draft and then check what you have. And then, think about which direction maybe can fit well with what you have. And then, explicitly state your direction in your first paragraph so that readers expect what you will develop in your main part of the essay.

Switching back to the student text

As shown in Table 1, the student’s draft revealed his struggle to comprehend and interpret the expectations of the Module 3 composition project, in which students composed a short response to an article. Therefore, Heon displayed Module 3’s assignment prompt on the screen and clarified the material, enabling the student to recognize his misinterpretation of the assignment. If Heon had used written feedback in the margin, he would have simply commented, “You need to review the assignment prompt in detail.” However, because of the affordances of video feedback, Heon could switch his screen from the student draft to the assignment prompt, explain what went wrong with the student’s draft, and suggest how the student could improve his draft to meet the requirements of the Module 3 prompt. The transcript example indicates that video feedback’s multimodal and shuttling nature helps us envision feedback in a new way. As Lee (2021) pointed out, feedback-literate teachers consider the goal of feedback to be improving student writing and learning instead of “fixing students’ immediate problems in writing (e.g., by correcting errors)”

The use of video feedback helped us experience how that tool can improve the learning of writing.

Our innovation using screencast video feedback transformed our individual feedback practices. When using written feedback, Heon’s goal was focused on solving immediate problems, such as fixing errors or reformatulating sentences, without deeply considering how his feedback could support the learning of writing. While utilizing the video feedback tool, however, Heon realized that transitioning between students’ drafts and on-screen instructional materials with audiovisual explanations significantly aided students in reviewing their classroom learning and integrating these insights into their revision strategies and future writing contexts. Our video feedback included comments inviting students to consider how they could apply their learning to future writing tasks. Given that students will engage with various writing tasks throughout their college education, the feedback aimed to provide generalizable explanations of writing concepts, knowledge, and skills that can be used in future contexts.

The introduction of video feedback innovation empowered Sarah to reimagine feedback and its effectiveness in her writing classes. Sarah firmly believes that constructive feedback guides emerging writers, helping them navigate the rhetorical situation through their writing. Video feedback, however, provides students with a more engaging and immersive understanding of the reasons for their writing. It also illustrates how they may transfer the experience of writing in one class to writing in other classes and situations. While video feedback is a tool for teachers to respond to students’ writing in a more direct, accessible way, it is also a tool for students because it provides them with an artifact they can retain, rewatch, and re-engage with. This enables them to interact with their writing in a more meaningful way and to consider how they can use their writing in future contexts, even beyond their university studies.

In addition, using screencast video feedback quickly transformed us into writing teachers who realized the importance of the relational aspects of student feedback. Carless and Winstone (2020) noted that “feedback
processes often invoke strong emotions or threats to self-esteem” (p. 5). Because of the relational nature underlying feedback, teachers should “build rapport with students and increase the positive motivational impact of feedback” (Lee, 2021, p. 1055). Video feedback was the key for us to facilitate relational support during the feedback process because we were able to engage with each student personally based on their unique needs.

For low-proficiency listeners, Heon slowed down the rate of his speech in his screencasts so that students could process his words, effectively reducing issues of misunderstanding and miscommunication. Furthermore, the follow-up questions from Sarah’s students regarding her screencast feedback were meaningful, serving as a prime example of building rapport by “encouraging students to continue discussion or ask for clarification” (Carless & Winstone, 2020, p. 6). By engaging with the comments, students transform into active agents in the feedback process, eventually developing into feedback-literate students (Lee, 2017). Considering that both of us taught online courses during the COVID-19 pandemic, social presence and incorporating a conversational tone in screencast feedback may also effectively mitigate the sense of isolation students often experience in online learning environments.

We faced an unexpected challenge while implementing video feedback in our classrooms: We thought that screencast feedback would save us time. However, the screencasting workflow of recording, saving, uploading, captioning, editing, and sharing cost a significant amount of time. Specifically, the auto-captioning process was time-consuming, which we both found frustrating. Despite the time commitment to providing screencast video feedback, we concluded it was worth investing our time and effort as we witnessed students’ positive reactions to our video feedback. Just as students from Zhang’s (2018) study considered video feedback “beneficial in motivating and engaging in writing” (p. 21), Sarah noticed that her students were eager to receive her feedback when
she explained screencast video feedback and showed students a sample screencast she had created.

In general, students were enthusiastic about confirming that they understood how soon the screencast feedback would be ready, where they would find it, and how they should use it to revise. Sarah noted that this marked a significant shift from the written comments she had previously provided to the students on their writing assignments during the semester. The students’ engagement with those comments and their application or retention of her written feedback seemed negligible; Sarah was uncertain that her students were reading her feedback, let alone using it as a guide to revise their writing. However, during this screencast feedback innovation, her students seemed more interested in receiving her video feedback than they had been in receiving her written commentary. This increased interest in screencast feedback was seen in their active engagement with the video feedback: Sarah received several follow-up questions from students about her screencast comments. The number of follow-up questions was atypical for Sarah because her written feedback had not received many follow-up questions. 

We did not expect to develop a deeper appreciation of the importance of captioning instructional videos. As instructors who value access and inclusion, we naturally assumed the responsibility of captioning our videos, recognizing the significance of doing so in support of students who speak and write English as an additional language. However, in our Zoom conversations about our process, we came to consider captioning as imperative if we are truly committed to students’ writing development. Zdenek (2020) argued for a more complete integration of captioning into curricula and workplace practices, “challenging the traditional view that reduces captioning to an afterthought—an outsourced form of transcription intended merely to meet legal requirements” (p. 541). Zdenek’s work

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4 In reviewing our journals during our weekly Zoom meetings, we had similar conclusions about our experiences with screencast video feedback. As a result, we focus here on Sarah’s anecdotal experiences because Jeon’s example and transcript of screencast feedback is spotlighted at the beginning of this Reflection section.

is grounded in disability studies, which is relevant to our view of captioning as an ethical requirement. This is not because we consider our second-language writers as “disabled” but because we see the cross-curricular value of the work of Zdenek and those who have advocated for cross-disciplinary research and practice in caption studies (Brooke, 2009; Butler, 2018; Iwertz & Osorio, 2016).

**Final Thoughts**

As we look back on our screencast video feedback innovation, we identify two crucial aspects of the success of video feedback. First, practice and preparation are important. We found that assignment rubrics and checklists were helpful, as they guided us on what to show and discuss in our screencast videos. Given that research literature on video feedback recommends no more than six minutes when creating a screencast video, being prepared with evaluative criteria can make teacher feedback organized and constructive.

Second, creating a professional learning community is important. In our case, Heon initially shared with Sarah his skepticism about using written feedback, and then we consulted video feedback research literature. Based on that conversation, we discussed the research literature, developed a plan for implementing video feedback in the classroom, and explored our reflections on using video feedback through regular online meetings. Although ours was not a formal professional or program-based learning community, it was pivotal in nurturing the seeds that transformed our classroom feedback practices. Such an innovation attempt may be particularly important in FYW programs where “most of the work of teaching writing is done by graduate students and adjuncts with very little formal education in pedagogy [including feedback practices]” (Brewer, 2020, p. 3). Therefore, organizing a feedback innovation community with like-minded colleagues would be a valuable initiative. The community would provide peer support among instructors, encouraging them to critically examine and question their current feedback practices,
bringing about more effective systems tailored to their specific teaching contexts.

The goal of this article is not to critique the pedagogical value of other feedback practices, such as written feedback, writing conferences, peer feedback, and self-assessment. Instead, these types of feedback can be used cooperatively with screencast video feedback; “voice and visual dimensions enrich and supplement more conventional feedback practices” to produce comprehensive and resource-rich feedback (Séror, 2012, p. 114). As Vincelette and Bostic (2013) pointed out, “today’s students live in a world in which they are immersed in multimodal messages” (p. 260). In that regard, we thought that finding a way to respond to student texts in a multimodal way may be more effective than written comments or writing conferences. Therefore, we invite readers interested in improving their feedback practices with multimodal sources (i.e., visual, aural, textual, and gestural) to explore and experience the transformative power of digitally showing and telling when responding to students’ texts.
References


