Audio Comments as a Tool in the Teaching of Writing
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Introduction

Research in rhetoric and composition has documented the benefits of audio comments for students and instructors alike, including greater comprehension of teacher comments (Anson), improved student-teacher relations (Mellen and Sommers), student preference (Sipple and Sommers), and grading efficiency (Warnock). To bring these benefits to Penn State Berks, the investigator collaborated with the Center for Teaching and Learning to develop a method for embedding audio comments within students' papers through the use of Adobe Acrobat software.

Project Design

The investigator piloted Adobe Acrobat comments in two courses: English 30T: Honors Composition (Fall 2008) and English 232W: American Literature from 1865 (Spring 2009). Students in both courses participated in a study designed to assess students' attitudes toward audio comments. The study asked students to take a 10-question survey administered at the mid-point of the semester and a 14-question survey, which included discursive questions, administered at the end of the semester. In English 30T, 9 of the 19 students completed the study (with several declining because they were not yet 18 years of age); in English 232W, 9 of the 14 students completed the study.

Learning Outcomes

Given the small sample size, survey results are not statistically significant. The following tables reflect findings of particular interest; the complete survey data, including discursive comments, can be found in the Appendix.

Figure 1: English 30T End of Semester Survey Results (Fall 2008)

Response*	Audio comments were easy to understand.	Audio comments helped me to revise my papers.	Audio comments are conducive to my learning style.	Audio comments promote learning among college students.
Strongly Agree	88.9%	88.9%	55.6%	33.3%
Somewhat Agree	11.1%	11.1%	44.4%	66.7%
Somewhat Disagree	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Strongly Disagree	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

* Percentiles reflect the total number of responses to each question and exclude "I don't know" answers.

Figure 2: English 232W End of Semester Survey Results (Spring 2009)

Response*	Audio comments were easy to understand.	Audio comments helped me to revise my papers.	Audio comments are conducive to my learning style.	Audio comments promote learning among college students.
Strongly Agree	66.7%	75.0%	22.2%	71.4%
Somewhat Agree	33.3%	25.0%	55.6%	14.3%
Somewhat Disagree	0.0%	0.0%	22.2%	14.3%
Strongly Disagree	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

* Percentiles reflect the total number of responses to each question and exclude "I don't know" answers.

As indicated, students in English 30T show a more consistent preference for audio comments. This disparity likely derives from the difference in course objectives and student population. Enrollment in English 30T requires a qualifying placement score and tends to attract highly motivated honors students who are committed to their development as writers. A survey of American Literature with an upper-level writing component, English 232W enrolls students at all class years. It satisfies requirements in many majors, including American Studies and Professional Writing; it also attracts students who simply need to fulfill their W requirement.

Scholarly Outcomes

National Conference Presentations

Rose, Jeanne Marie. "Can You Hear Me Now?: Riding the Sound Wave in Composition." Conference on College Composition and Communication. San Francisco, CA. March 14, 2009.

---. "WPA Perspectives on Instructor Comments: The WPA as Teacher." Council of Writing Program Administrators. Minneapolis, MN. July 17, 2009.

Regional Conference Presentations

Rose, Jeanne Marie. "The Teaching-Tutoring Continuum." Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association. York, PA. March 28, 2009.

---. "Assessing Audio Comments." Schreyer Assessment Institute. Penn State Berks. May 11, 2009.

Publication

Rose, Jeanne Marie. "Anchored Audio Comments: Another Option for Talking to Students." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*. (500-word pedagogical column; forthcoming in March 2010 issue on 21st-century literacies)

Recommendations
Based on project findings, the investigator makes the following recommendations to instructors considering the use of audio comments.

1. Consider using audio comments with groups of students who are invested in their development as writers, such as honors students or students enrolled in upper-level courses in their chosen field of study.

2. Maximize the use of audio comments for formative rather than summative comments. Students are more likely to listen to comments if they must synthesize and apply them to subsequent revisions; anecdotally, several students reported that they did not listen to comments on graded papers.

3. Treat audio comments as one tool among many, which may be implemented at the instructor's discretion. Because the process is not particularly portable and because faculty members at Penn State Berks share offices, recording audio comments can become logistically difficult.

4. Remain mindful of students' technological resources and technological literacies. Students may need some coaching as to how to retrieve comments from the Angel site and how to activate comments.

Conclusion
Consistent with previous scholarship on audio comments, this study shows that audio comments have strong potential for fostering student learning at Penn State Berks. Like any instructor feedback, however, audio feedback is most effective when it is part of an integrated learning process in which students either apply that feedback to subsequent assignments or view it as part of their ongoing intellectual development.

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Works Cited

Anson, Chris M. "In Our Own Voices: Using Recorded Commentary to Respond to Writing." *Writing to Learn: Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines*. Ed. Mary Deane Sorcinelli and Peter Elbow. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997. 105-13. Print.

Mellen, Cheryl, and Jeff Sommers. "Audiotaped Response and the Two-Year-Campus Writing Classroom: The Two-Sided Desk, the 'Guy with the Ax,' and the Chirping Birds." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* 31.1 (2003): 25-39. *ProQuest*. Web. 4 June 2009.

Sipple, Sue, and Jeff Sommers. *A Heterotopic Space: Digitized Audio Commentary and Student Revisions*. Miami University of Ohio, 2005. Web. 28 May 2009.

Warnock, Scott. "Responding to Student Writing with Audio-Visual Feedback." *Writing and the iGeneration: Composition in the Computer-Mediated Classroom*. Ed. Terry Carter and Maria A. Clayton. Southlake, TX: Fountainhead Press, 2008. 201-27. Print.