Bio:

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Special Issue Papers: Paperless 2014

Responding to extended writing electronically: Tricks, traps and tips

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Introduction

Technology-enhanced marking not only saves time but also saves paper. This article aims to share a system for responding electronically to extended writing. Although many teachers use correction codes and concise comments, research (e.g., Hyland & Hyland, 2006) shows that students who are working alone frequently ignore or misuse such pithy comments.

“Correction” policy

The first step is to select a policy for responding to writing. This may be affected by institutional or departmental requirements. One such policy could be based on the perceived cause of the mistake. Mistakes can be categorized as slips, errors and attempts (Edge, 1990). Slips are simply identified for writers to correct themselves. More detailed guidance is provided for errors via the insert comment function while the track change function is used to provide the correct form for attempts. Rather than only focusing on areas for improvement, praise can provide a motivational boost for some writers and when used in the form of a compliment sandwich, helps sugar the pill.

Five useful features in Microsoft Word

This integrated system drawing eclectically on two core features in Microsoft Word 2010, namely: track changes and insert comment and three...
lesser-known cool features: autocorrect, spike and fillable forms. Descriptions and examples of how to use these features are given below. These features are also available in Mac Word although the shortcut codes may differ.

**Track changes**

Type Ctrl+Shift+E to start track changes. Any changes made to a document after this will be highlighted in a new colour and any deletions will be tagged as can be seen in Figure 1. The student is then able to see which words have been changed and can choose to accept or reject those changes.

**Insert comment**

Type Ctrl+Alt+M to insert a comment. Write comments in terms that your student can understand (see Figure 2 for an example). Clear, concise and generalizable comments are the most useful, but should you find that you tend to reuse tried and tested phrases, consider using the autocorrect function.

**Autocorrect function**

Microsoft automatically corrects common typographical errors, such as the inversion of
consecutive letters, e.g., “thsi” is replaced with “this”. This autocorrect function can be harnessed to convert any shortcut code into a sentence. By adding codes and corresponding comments to the autocorrect function, detailed unambiguous feedback can be generated in a few keystrokes (Bower and Greaves, 2000). For example, by setting autocorrect to replace “.gpt” with “When referring to past events or states, use past tense.” this sentence can be generated in only four key strokes. One caveat here is to choose codes that are unlikely to occur naturally. One way to achieve this is to begin each code with a period. To add entries to the autocorrect function, click on: File>Options>Proofing>AutoCorrect Options.

Spike

Spike is like the standard cut-and-paste feature, but more powerful since it can cut multiple extracts and then paste all the cut extracts in one click. The extracts are pasted into the document in the order they were cut. If words were cut, they could form a sentence, whereas if sentences were cut, they could form a paragraph. It is essentially a multiple-cut-and-single-paste feature. This tool is most suitable when it is necessary to provide personalized feedback to students in the form of a paragraph. First, in order to create a coherent final paragraph, decide the purpose or topic of each sentence (e.g., opening comment, strengths, weaknesses, recommendations, closing comment), then create a list of sentences grouped by purpose. To use spike, highlight each sentence to be cut using Ctrl+F3. Repeat this multiple times until all the required sentences have been collected. By typing Ctrl+Shift+F3, all the sentences can be pasted at once to form a paragraph. The main caveat here is to remember that as spike cuts rather than copies, it is prudent to create a backup document to prevent accidental loss of the list of sentences.

Fillable forms

Fillable forms are an excellent way to give formative or summative feedback on a piece of writing as shown in Figure 3. They particularly lend themselves to justifying grades with reference to assessment criteria. In order to enable the creation of fillable forms, first it is necessary to add the Developer tab. To do this, choose File>Options>Customize ribbon, and then select the Developer tab and click okay. To add a fillable form to a document, select the appropriate icon from the Developer tab, and add alternative entries into the list by using the Properties feature. The most easily used functions are Check Box Content Control and Drop-Down List Content Control.

For the more technically savvy or just the more adventurous, macros can also be used to automate repetitive tasks. The macro feature can record a sequence of keystrokes and mouse movement, save them and then automate the whole sequence through a hotkey. Although macros cannot respond to students’ writing, they can reduce the time taken to respond by greatly reducing the number of keystrokes.

Responding to extended writing electronically can bring about a number of benefits. Extended detailed responses can be generated in minutes using these features. Students appreciate the detailed responses and assume that the teacher spent a vast amount of time personally responding to their writing. Although effective use of technology can save the teacher time, students still need to read, reflect and act on the feedback for learning to occur.

References

Use a class blog to start your paperless classroom

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Abstract

The potential of a paperless classroom cannot be achieved unless a context is created for collaboration and sharing of paperless content. A class blog is perfect for fulfilling this role. A class blog is free and easy to use and, more importantly, it gives students and teachers the opportunity to create and share paperless content. In addition, most blogs have a comment function, which allows students and teachers to interact with their audience. To capitalize on smartphone ownership and encourage students to participate in real-time conversations, the author experimented with the micro-blogging software, Posterous® Spaces. This paper will share a brief report on experiences using the software at three Japanese universities, describe how students participated on their mobile devices, and reflect on questions and feedback received during the presentation at the 2014 Paperless: Innovation and technology in education conference.

Introduction

Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in a homogenous setting like Japan provides one’s students with very few opportunities to practice communicating in English outside of the classroom. However, the development of the Internet and computer assisted learning technologies has created opportunities for students to gain valuable experience interacting in their second language. The challenge for teachers is to find tools that enable these potentials to be realized. This paper is a reflection on the incorporation of the blogging platform, Posterous Spaces (<www.posterous.com>) into five university-level EFL classes. It will present student perceptions of the blogging experience, report on how students utilized their electronic devices, and discuss audience questions and feedback during the oral presentation of these findings.

Blogs in the EFL classroom

Bakar and Ismail (2009) identified three types of blogs generally found in the EFL teaching context. These include:

1. The tutor blog, which acts as an online notice board for teachers or tutors (e.g., teachers share reading texts or websites for personal study).

2. The learner blog, whereby students are responsible for designing and maintaining their own website which includes a regularly updated blog section.

3. The class blog, which involves the whole class working on a shared, online publication.

This specific study sought to evaluate the implementation of a class blog component. Figure 1, provides a summary of the author’s motivations to start a class blog.

This study was undertaken between September 2012 and January 2013 in EFL classes taught by the author at three private universities in Tokyo.