

BLE Online Assessment & Feedback Case Study

Using Panopto for formative assessment

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Summary:

Students on the BSc Geology at Birkbeck are required to produce descriptions of rocks so that, by the end of the course, they are able to describe rocks in detail. This practical aspect of the course is experiential, and continuous formative feedback throughout the course encourages and supports students in their development and ensures they become competent with these descriptions. This is an essential outcome of the course as 50% of the final exam is based on the student's ability to write descriptions of rocks. Furthermore, it is important that they become confident at providing descriptions verbally because the degree culminates in a viva with a professional geologist.

Previously, students would produce written descriptions and submit them for formative assessment. This had the disadvantage that only the marker and student would see the work and, obviously, this did not give students practice in talking about the rock. Therefore, the assessment was changed to enable students to record their verbal commentaries using Panopto (recording software licenced by the institution). These recordings were then uploaded to a shared Panopto folder so that all students on the module could access them. This gave students experience in providing verbal commentaries and also allowed for them to see how their colleagues on the module had approached the task.

Implementation:

The tutor, who had used Panopto previously, provided students with detailed instructions about both the task and the video platform, Panopto. Students downloaded the Panopto software onto their own computers. They then opened the images of rocks that the tutor had given them, added their verbal commentary and then uploaded them to a single Panopto folder that served for all students on the module so that everybody could access, and learn from, the commentaries. The tutor and his colleagues provided formative feedback.

As the task was for formative assessment, students were allowed to take as long as they liked to prepare. The tutor did not want to add pressure by applying a

deadline but encouraged a three-week turnaround. Generally, this preparation time took around two weeks. Many students reported feeling anxious and 'outside their comfort zone' given the prospect of other students hearing their descriptions. Some dealt with that anxiety by writing down the entire script for the video but then said that they would be more extemporaneous next time. No particular time limit was given for the videos and the longest one was about 8 minutes.

Evaluation:

Overall feedback:

- Overall, students reported that the assessment made them feel more confident and comfortable describing rocks.
- Distance learners reported more satisfaction than face to face.
- Students reported that they were more organised in writing their observations because they knew that they were going to be recorded.
- Students reflected on the difficulty of describing what they were seeing and said that they had made notes about what they would do differently next time.
- Some students said that they enjoyed making the recordings, despite their initial anxieties.
- Students reported that the formative nature of the assessment made it less stressful.
- Students said that they would feel more comfortable if they did it again.

Individual comments:

- One student didn't upload anything but then saw what others had done and thought it was fantastic.
- Another student was very nervous and reluctant to participate, but then reported that carrying out the task has helped her gain confidence in public speaking.
- Another student who showed signs of struggling with English academic language reported that she would prefer to write down her answers. The public nature of the recording made it stressful for her.
- A very able student reported that it was extremely difficult and the most challenging task she had undertaken for a long time. It made her nervous.
- Another student reported that they found it very difficult because they had never done it before but felt that they would enjoy it more the next time they did it, and that it would help with public speaking.
- A student said that it encouraged them to be more concise and to be more thoughtful about what they were saying. They also liked it

because it was a 'different way of learning'

- A student, who did not upload her own contribution, found it very valuable. She was able to recap without having asking basic questions which she would find embarrassing. She also thought that learning from different students who are at the same level as her helped her learn from a different angle. She reported feeling greater confidence and understanding about producing descriptions and will upload her own next time.

Benefits and Challenges:

Overall, students could see tangible benefits and it helped their confidence although many reported feeling anxious about the assessment.

For the tutor, the preparation for this assessment was extensive and meticulous, focussing on the desired learning outcomes. A detailed, step-by-step set of instructions was written for students and headings were provided to help them structure their descriptions. Most students found the technicalities straightforward although the step-by-step instructions Steve provided were very important.

The Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences has distance learners as well as face-to-face, and one advantage of this initiative is that it is inclusive for distance learners.

Take-Aways:

- Once the initial work has been done, the workload is manageable for the lecturer.
- It may push students outside their comfort zones with the resultant discomfort and resistance.
- The tutor in this case has always given lectures to students on how to organise and present their rock descriptions, but he thinks that the recording requirement makes students take it more seriously and take responsibility and ownership of their descriptions
- This exercise may also be useful for group work. For example, students could work in groups to generate the commentaries and/or give feedback on other groups' work.
- As well as providing the students with valuable experience, the tutor reports that it will inform his teaching practice as it requires students to engage in reflection.
- Students generally have a shrewd idea of academic ranking within the class and the statistics (albeit very small at this stage) suggest more views were made of the contributions from the 'top' students.