Stimulating rich and reflective feedback in students’ written assignments

Peer Review

Learner workload

Instructor workload

Class size ~65

CONTEXT

This 3rd-year intensive summer course in the domain of animal behaviour consisted of a mix of online content and 5 days of face-to-face teaching, and covered conflict-resolution approaches. Specifically, students looked at causal factors and interventions to deal with barking dogs, undergoing both a formative and summative assessment of a written assignment.

The motivation to start using Peer Review came from wanting to enable students to easily provide detailed feedback on each other’s work, while at the same time reducing the workload of the instructor. Additionally, the instructor found it equally important that students learned from each other’s perspectives, emphasising that each student had a different approach and intervention that could be used to fix the problem.

CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT

Learning objectives

• Students can produce a written report based on the course content
• Students can critically evaluate their own work, and that of their peers

Learning activities

In this summer course, students produced a 1000-word written report, and submitted it using Peer Review. Next, they gave feedback anonymously to three other students, meaning each student ended up receiving three anonymous reviews of their work. The rubric used for this feedback included five criteria items, based on assignment content, and on writing and referencing quality and style. They then had a chance to revise their report before a final submission. This final deliverable was graded by the instructor.

Learning activities, according to Bloom’s Taxonomy, were mainly at the level of:

- Evaluate
- Understand
- Apply
- Analyse
- Create

Assessment of learning outcomes

There was both a formative and summative aspect to the Peer Review activity. 5% of the grade came from the three reviews that each student gave, 5% came from the three grades the they had received, and a further 5% was based on their final report.

Quote from the instructor

I was really positively surprised with the Peer Review and how well it went with this 3rd-year class.

Notable outcomes

• Students generated constructive, detailed and actionable feedback for their peers which actively contributed to improved final versions of their written work.
• The instructor noted that even with their limited previous technology know-how, they were able to set up an effective learning activity with minimal support from their learning technologist.
• Students benefited from having 3 reviews as it provided a more comprehensive evaluation, also reducing the need for the instructor to modify peers’ grades: “When there was an outlier, there were 2 [other reviews] which were very similar.”
• Writing all three reviews took students on average 10 minutes to complete, and they left around 30 comments in total. For the peer-review part of the activity, students spent on average 30 minutes. This reflects the critical level of feedback generated.
• Feedback from students was that the Peer Review activity was both useful and effective when asked whether the activity contributed to their learning objectives, every student responded positively.

Quote from a student

Once I peer-reviewed others’ work, it made it easier to criticise my own work against the rubric.

The role of the instructor

• The instructor provided detailed instructions in the Peer Review activity, mentioning the writing assignment brief (including word count, reference style, etc.), indicating how many reviews each student needed to complete, and also making clear the deadlines and grading format.

• The instructor also prepared students for the activity with a powerpoint explaining the rubric, as well as how to give constructive feedback.

Added value of technology

All feedback reviews given and received by students were downloaded as an excel file, and able to be analysed per assignment. The instructor also noted that this Peer Review setup saved a large amount of time, so everything can be processed in one interface.

Feedback and Reviews

The University of Adelaide

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