

# Getting the Wax Out: Audio Feedback in the Composition Classroom

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*This paper was completed and submitted in partial fulfillment of the Master Teacher Program, a 2-year faculty professional development program conducted by the Center for Teaching Excellence, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY, 2009.*

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## Introduction and Background

A common perception of today's students is they are technologically savvy and are always on the cutting edge of the latest and greatest trends. Though this may be accurate for a majority of students in their non-academic lives, some students still don't classify themselves as proficient in using "new" technology in the classroom. With this in mind, I set out to see just how comfortable I could make my students in the Composition classroom by introducing audio feedback on the essays. By getting the wax out of their ears – a new way of reaching students by opening up communication channels obstructed by years of exposure to traditional classroom feedback methods – I hoped to reach these members of the "internet generation" and help them become better writers.

The struggle with introducing "new" technology into the classroom often creates a site of resistance for students as to what society considers normal or "modern" for an educational experience. As David Harvey reminds us in The Conditions of Post Modernity, "to be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – and, at the same time, threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are."<sup>1</sup> And for many of my students, the ideas of doing something as radical as providing audio feedback on essays is certainly novel, but disrupts the normal way they expect teachers to behave.

In this project, the shift towards the digital audio comments as another option for Composition students to receive feedback shows Harvey's promise of modernity and encourages rapid introduction of "new" technologies in the classroom. Naturally, this questions whether any technology that enters the classroom environment, downloadable digital audio comments included, truly may be classified as "new." To a limited degree, they can, but their permanence may be short lived; the importance of the "newness" for my students is not with the novelty of the endeavor itself, but with its residual effect on what (future) generations of students will consider "normal" for a college writing class.

Instructor-recorded audio comments have the potential to be educational multipliers when combined with traditional approaches to evaluating student writing. This project highlights both the capabilities and challenges with using mp3 recording technology in the classroom. The main idea behind using recorded feedback is to *augment* the student's ability to interact with common methods of instruction such as lectures and hand-written comments on student writing. My

research premise is that using digital recordings gives the teacher a variety of opportunities to engage aural learners, as well as encourages active participation in the educational process through user-friendly, common technology that most students already embrace. What I see as the bottom line: audio comments and digital media enhancement of normal pedagogical methods help students understand teacher feedback and facilitate the teaching of writing.

### Methodology

I conducted my research over 5 consecutive semesters of plebe English courses (EN101 and EN102). For this study I primarily used the Blackboard course management system to store and distribute students' audio comment files. By using Blackboard, I had the required server space to host audio files such as lectures and comments on student papers. As a planning guideline, a four-section class requires about 25 GB of server space to provide comments to all students. For each iteration, my students submitted their papers electronically through Blackboard. They received my feedback via an attached mp3 file they could download to their own computers and play. They also were able to electronically access their final paper grade using the "My Grades" function.

I provided audio comments for each student in my section on one graded homework essay (HWE) each term. After reading each essay in detail and making written annotations on the paper copy, I re-read the essay a second time and verbalized my feedback as a digital mp3 recording. I did not read my written notes verbatim, but attempted to give a more complete analysis of the student's writing than would be found on a standard set of handwritten essay comments. I recorded comments for student essays using NCH Swift Sound's RecordPad program and I aimed to give the student at least 2 minutes of audio comments at a minimum. I did not record more than 5 minutes of comments for any one student.

To evaluate the success or failure of my audio method, I conducted a blend of surveys, student free-responses, essay evaluations, and numerical (scaled response) assessments. I also conducted a small group sensing session with 5 selected students where I evaluated their writing both before and after hearing my audio comments. During the session I listened to their focused feedback about the process. As a further assessment method, I kept notes in my instructor journal that chronicled my anecdotal evidence and personal feelings about the success or failure of my project. As the evaluation of writing is subjective and the nature of each subsequent classroom assignment was drastically different, I did not evaluate the student's numerical (graded) performance from assignment to assignment as an indicator of the project's effectiveness.

### Project Results

Over the past five semesters I have conducted this project, I have observed a variety of responses to my endeavor. The overwhelming majority of students have responded positively to audio comments; my students have embraced the "new" technology and the idea that their teacher was

so technologically savvy that he could record mp3 files for each of them. The specific results of my research appear below, with my comments. My assessment, recommendations, and discussion of my results appear in the conclusion section. For the full raw data of this project, please see Annex B through Annex G.

Many of my responses came directly from student anonymous surveys. Primarily, I used the USMA course-end feedback system to ask my students to “*describe your opinion of .MP3 (audio) comments for HWE#4. Questions to consider for your response → Did you like the (why or why not)? How do they contribute to (or detract from) your improvement as a writer? Are they easier (or harder) to understand?*” Below is a list of my most telling responses that cover the breadth of the responses I received (see Annex B for a list of all responses):

Positive comments:

- I think using MP3 is a very innovative way to give feedback; none of my teachers have done this before. It feels more personal to hear the comments in your voice than to have to just read it off the paper.
  - Lets me listen to it [the recording] over and over and save it permanently
  - I can listen while I read. I can pause the file
  - You say much more stuff and go into more detail
  - This is better because I have trouble reading your handwriting – it [the recording] says more
  - Awesome. Absolutely loved the audio comments, volumes better than written comments.
- Though it is harder to hear from the instructor directly, it is good to be able to take such feedback at face value.

Negative comments:

- I prefer the written comments simply because they are right there on the paper. I do not have to cross reference different sources to get both comments and to see exactly what the comments are talking about in my paper.
- you talk too fast
- I didn't understand what part you meant (in the paper) sometimes
- My computer wouldn't play it right. And no volume also.

Neutral comments:

- I liked because for once my paper was clear instead of full of ink and mistakes, but I would rather have my teacher identify the errors in my essay on paper because I can fix it.
- They were an interesting idea that had its ups and downs. On the up side you didn't have to worry about bad handwriting, but it is nice to have something tangible to look at.

Numerically, I received a total of 36 responses, with 24 positive comments, 5 negative comments, and 7 classified as neutral (couldn't find the comments on Blackboard, or didn't care either way). With 67% of students responding in a positive manner, this shows a certain preference for audio over written comments. What these responses also highlight is that some students are much more comfortable with “traditional” written comments – certainly one

manifestation of the problems with “new” technology I addressed the introduction. However, these responses don’t allow me to link student opinion of audio comments directly to writing performance.

Another set of data points I used to evaluate the effectiveness of audio feedback is more quantitative in nature. I conducted a survey (see Annex C) where I asked cadets to rate their satisfaction with audio comments as a form of essay feedback. Prior to giving the optional survey, I told the cadets (orally) that “satisfaction” should include how well the comments helped them do better on their next essay or how well it made them feel about their abilities as writers. I asked the question “*Rate your overall satisfaction with audio comments on your essay*” and used the following scale: 5 – very satisfied; 4 – satisfied; 3 – neutral; 2 – dissatisfied; 1 – very dissatisfied. I received 29 responses with ratings ranging from 2 through 5. The mean score was 3.93 with the standard deviation of .78. Here, the data expresses a clear student interest in the benefits of audio feedback; however, the correlation isn’t as strong as I would have hoped. The mean fell just short of the “satisfied” rating, and though it was still more than one standard deviation away from “neutral” it did not give a clear indication that a majority of students were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied.”

The next method I used to determine the effectiveness of my audio feedback project involved two methods of soliciting spontaneous responses from students - directed and non-directed. For the directed method, I gave cadets one minute (per question) to respond to a set of questions I posted on a PowerPoint slide. I asked students “*What is the biggest advantage of listening to audio comments on your essay*” and “*What is the biggest disadvantage of audio comments on your essay.*” For each question I received 28 responses, the most popular answer types I have paraphrased below. Please see Annex D for a complete list of responses:

Biggest advantage of audio comments:

- Feeling a connection to the teacher (*credibility*)
- Lots of information in only 5 minutes (*utility*)
- Easier to read and understand than handwriting (*practicality*)

Biggest disadvantage of audio comments:

- Hard to find, play and access (*accessibility*)
- Can’t “see” the problem and the solution side-by-side (*familiarity*)
- Too much to take in all at once (*retention and application*)

Most of the common cadet responses were similar to the types I received on the USMA Course end Feedback system. Here, I noted that the delivery method of the question (impromptu one-minute spontaneous response) seemed not to make any difference in the quality of my responses. One thing I noticed about the responses here was that I didn’t ask the question the way I intended. The students provided very pragmatic responses to the basic like/dislike question, but rarely responded in a way that let me know how they chose to use my comments to improve their writing. If I were to do this again, I would change my questions to force cadets to name specific lessons learned (almost like a back brief), and then repeat the exercise at the end of the semester to determine if the audio comments made any difference in writing performance or concept retention. One positive to come out of this method is that it allowed me to develop a list of 6

categories (*credibility, utility, practicality, accessibility, familiarity, retention and application*) that are essential considerations for teachers when planning to use audio comments as student feedback. I address these 6 criteria in some form in the conclusion section.

For the non-directed method, I gave cadets a 3x5 note card and asked them to tell me one thing that liked or disliked about the course. I put no limits on their responses. Over 5 iterations, I received about 350 responses, and only 7 responses (about 2%) related to audio comments (see Annex E for complete responses). This tells me either a) audio comments weren't as new\exciting\interesting\memorable to my students as I thought they would be, or b) the writing process and the subject material were of much more importance to my students than was the method of feedback I used. Though the non-directed response method didn't yield much usable data for me in terms of the effectiveness of my project, I did learn what was valuable to my students in terms of course content. I also took away at least one intangible item, specifically that the students were willing to share my comments with friends and family. As a believer in the collaborative writing process, I see this a positive step in helping the students develop as writers.

Another form of non-directed (spontaneous or unsolicited) response came from student e-mail. Originally, I never considered e-mail to be a source for my data but as the responses in Annex F show, some of my students affirmed the non-tangible aspects of receiving audio comments - the dedication of the teacher (and student) and the possibilities this feedback method has for writing improvement. Of all my data, I prize this feedback the most because it came from students who wrote to me weeks or months after I gave them my audio comments. Certainly, this could be a result of procrastination; but in the busy West Point environment, taking the time after the fact to send a short e-mail demonstrates the positive emphasis these students placed on this method of teacher feedback, and validates the implementation considerations of *credibility* and *retention* I proposed earlier.

As a final measure of audio comment effectiveness in the Composition classroom, I selected a group of 5 students to participate in a two-part small group "sensing session" comprised of audio feedback, paper revision, and a group discussion of how audio feedback helped or hindered their writing process. The results (see Annex G) show that most students do favor this method of feedback both for the practical aspects (portability and accessibility) and for the "cool" factor it provides. A common response from sensing session members was that the comments alone were not enough; comments need to be paired with written feedback, and ideally, include a follow-up AI session to complete the loop. One student in particular raised a concern that I suspected from the start of this project – audio comments are very unfamiliar and many students are out of their comfort zone when they don't get to "see" something written on the paper. The amount of red ink on a graded paper remains a standard of excellence or failure for some students, prized above direct oral feedback from the teacher. Perhaps the most unique and personally-satisfying benefit of audio comments that came out of this session was the role these comments play in student motivation. Several cadets valued my comments because they amounted to "personal attention" to their individual concerns. They enjoyed it when I gave them praise, and even though their essays may not have been successful, it gave them hope that they could become better writers (see Annex G, question 3).

**Conclusion: Suggestions, Concerns, and Observations**

I specifically will refrain from offering a blanket statement that audio comments are the be-all and end-all for improving student writing. While this “new” technology seemed to work well for most students, there was some dissatisfaction and this method is certainly not for all types of learners. Overwhelmingly, my students found this type of feedback to be a very positive experience and good way to help them along their journeys towards becoming better writers. What I want to offer here is a selection of observations from my research and my instructor journal, as well as suggestions for teachers to consider if they wish to use audio feedback in the classroom. I have included resources for teachers and some practical considerations (Annex A). I also have voiced some of my own pedagogical concerns and those I’ve heard from other writing teachers about problems with integrating “new” technology in the classroom. Though these concerns may give pause to those considering audio feedback, I list them here merely to give the worst-case scenario or to present a way to deal with issues that may arise. From my experience over the last three years, these concerns are very minimal and when handled by an experienced teacher who puts students first, usually resolve themselves in a way that makes teachers and students feel as if they’ve accomplished something. Ultimately, I see audio comments as an effective tool for *augmenting* traditional forms of instructions such as written feedback and one-on-one meetings with students on their writing.

□ **My suggestions for use in the classroom – why audio comments are an effective teaching tool:**

**a. Using audio comments as feedback:** Tell the students in advance that they will receive audio comments on their papers. Direct the student to listen to the comments twice. First time through, the student should pay attention to the instructor’s overall impressions. The second time through is so they can listen for specific details. The second listen gives the students time to process the paper mentally (first listen), and then follow along with the teacher’s comments on while reading the paper. For students you suspect won’t listen to your comments, you can also include the student’s grade somewhere within the recording.

**b. Using audio comments in AI:** For writing conferences, have the student listen to the comments and then write down what they understand to be the strengths and weaknesses of the paper. Have the student bring a “transcript” of what they heard to the conference and “back brief” you about your comments. Time permitting, both you and the student can listen to your comments together while looking at the paper, pausing the audio file at specific points to talk about key issues.

**c. Making your comments “live:”** Like your lectures, your comments are a chance for your students to see another side of you. They hear your inflections, your sighs, your hopes, and your

frustrations with their writing. Often times, comments like “needs work,” “explain,” “I do not understand where you’re going here” or “poor thesis” written in red in the margins of the student’s paper don’t tell the whole story and certainly have the disadvantage of students viewing them as distant and dispassionate comments that they will easily forget. By recording meaningful audio comments, you capture your immediate reactions to the student’s product in a manner that lets you be yourself and that conveys your sincerity; most students will believe your assessment as credible, even if they disagree, because your comments have the feel of a face-to-face discussion. One word of caution – students can tell if you’re being genuine so don’t overreact (positively or negatively) or be demeaning. Remember that your students may share your comments with friends, classmates, and even parents. And with digital mp3 files, sharing is only a mouse-click away (see comments, Annex E).

□ **Potential problems – items to consider when implementing audio feedback:**

**Technological concerns**

**a. File size.** Most email systems have a limit on the file size for attachments (usually 1MB or less). Though compressed, mp3 files usually average 1.5-4MB. This makes e-mailing the files as an attachment virtually impossible for many systems, thus generating the need for server space to store them.

**b. Server space.** At least 50 GB of disk space is probably sufficient for a class of 100 students. There needs to be some vehicle for data accessibility using an academic management program like Blackboard. Potential problems occur when network administrators cannot allocate sufficient server space for sustained operations (for example, a course 1500 students a semester, 2 semesters per year). Not only is this a cost issue (hiring IT professionals and buying hardware) but an integration issue as well; without a close relationship between the department(user) and the IT professional, this system will fail. In the case of West Point, Mr. Patrick Gill is a dedicated Blackboard administrator who keeps disk space open and performs routine system maintenance and entertains special requests on a daily basis.

**c. Recording software.** With numerous different sound recording programs on the market, it is hard to choose one standard. Departments need to constantly purchase upgrades or renew licenses for these programs. Much like with the Windows monopoly which keeps producing different operating system versions, sound software constantly changes when technology advances. It becomes a budgetary issue when departments have to choose whether to continue to pay for current software programs, switch programs, or quit paying for the capability altogether.

**d. File format.** Though .wav (“wave”) files take up less space, this is not a universally-accepted format. Many media players will not recognize this type of file. The mp3 file is the industry standard for non-encoded audio files and most media players and PCs can read this type of file with no additional software.

**Pedagogical concerns**

**a. Tech-resistant students/traditional learners.** Not all of today's students have the technological familiarity which teachers stereotype their generation. Often, many of those students who have not had access to laptop computers or iPods/media players prior to coming to college many initially have difficulty understanding *why* an instructor would bother to record comments. They are often resistant to trying this method because it is an extra step they view complicates their learning, or stresses their unfamiliarity with technology – problems compounded by introducing these technologies in the classroom.

Another observation from my classes is that the students who have difficulty accessing podcasts or media files tend to feel “stupid” compared to their classmates, especially if they have to ask for help. Some see using technology or submitting papers to Blackboard as just another “haze” that takes them away from their comfort zone, especially those who tend to thrive in a traditional didactic atmosphere much like they experienced in high school.

**b. Institutional resistance.** A possible site for resistance to audio comments lies within the (academic) “academy.” Certainly, adopting a course standard of providing digital audio content may be outside the goals of a given department. Like students, teachers who are comfortable with the way they've always taught lessons and provided feedback may see little value in introducing new ways to augment the learning process, simply because they believe their students are receptive to their present methods of instruction and feedback.

Additionally, using digital audio comments (or podcasts) requires additional lesson preparation time. Based on my experience, I have spent about 15 extra minutes on each student paper because I first have to read the paper through before I record comments. With practice this may be feasible for many using only one read-through. But initially, this is a rough transition and does multiply the time required to complete grading.

**c. Assessing impact of comments on the writing process.** The biggest obstacle to implementing mp3 file feedback to students is assessment: what do the students get out of this? Like with most innovations or augmentations to traditional forms of teaching, without teacher attention and commitment this method will fail. Worse yet, teachers will not use it effectively because they see audio feedback as an easy (read: lazy) way of quickly grading papers.

The true assessment of students' abilities to understand and apply their teacher's comments comes through their demonstrated improvements in the quality of their writing. I believe that most undergraduates will remember audio comments long after the marked-up essay finds its final resting place in the trash can. Though some students may listen to the comments only once, many students remember key ideas or themes about ways to improve their writing. I can remember more than one occasion when I had a student say “I remember that you *told* me to do ‘x’ next time, and that was my focus on this new essay.”

As mentioned previously, assessing the effectiveness of audio comments hinges on student-teacher commitment and preparation. The back-brief (see suggestions section above) seems to work well because it holds students accountable not only for their work but for their subsequent improvement. When a teacher stresses active listening and taking notes, it is harder for students to “forget” the audio comments because they know in advance that they must participate collaboratively with their teacher in the process of becoming a better writer.

<b>Final Thoughts</b>
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Audio comments on student essays are certainly novel and have the potential to produce good associations in the student-teacher feedback chain. At worst, audio feedback could be an annoyance and a source of discomfort to students who expect to “see” written comments on their essays; but at best, it adds another human dimension to student feedback that allows the teacher to express more complex comments, detailed evaluations, and candid assessment that can only further the educational experience in the composition classroom (see student emails, Annex F).

Some students and teachers alike have always been at odds with technological advances, but its place in the classroom is rapidly becoming part of the “normal” college writing experience – something we all will be forced to accept in the coming decade. A good reason to support (and use \ implement) audio comments or other tropes of technology in the classroom comes from Dante Tanzi. Tanzi, a researcher of audio technology and its role in society, writes that these new internet-based technologies such as downloadable .mp3 files “testify to a transformation of social and communicative action, involving a musical language” that is not simply an invention of a new form of experiencing audio content but a “search for different ways of understanding each other.”<sup>2</sup> Hopefully, we as teachers can look towards this technology to further our understanding of our students, and find new, more effective ways to help them meet their needs and grow as writers.

## ANNEX A – Common Terms and Teaching Resources

### □ Technical Terms:

- Podcasting - a media file distributed by subscription (paid or unpaid) over the Internet for playback on mobile devices and personal computers.
- mp3 file – audio file format that uses data compression to make the files smaller in size
- Sever – user-accessible data storage computer
- iPod – digital audio music player that allows for “portability”

### □ Resource Requirements:

- for “hosting” podcasts (a tangential application of mp3 technology)
  - server space that students can access via the internet or internal Local Area Network (LAN). USMA currently uses Blackboard and (potentially) has the capabilities to host a podcast on a similar public resource (i.e. public server similar to the one which hosts the USMA homepage.)
  - [http://www.apple.com/education/products/ipod/itunes\\_u.html](http://www.apple.com/education/products/ipod/itunes_u.html)  
This is a link to iTunes University, a “free” service of Apple Computer that lets schools host podcasts. This site is “public” and claims to work with links imbedded in Blackboard. This is another alternative to using Blackboard or another USMA resource. You can also post your student’s comments here.
- for digital audio comments (mp3 files)
  - PC/laptop with headphone/microphone capability and internal sound card (usually standard) or iPod with USB/PC cable
  - Headset with voice-activated microphone.
  - Sound recording software. I use NCH Swift Sound’s RecordPad to record, play back, and edit my mp3 files. I used both in the trial mode with a 14 day test period (recommended as a first step) and then in the fully-licensed version, each yielding great results and perfect functionality.

### □ Examples of audio comments:

Source directory URL (USMA internal):

<\\USMAEDU\Apollo\eng\Userdirs\cs1333\Audio Comment Examples>

- Detailed comments – CDT Custer
- Average comments – CDT Cook with paper, prompt included (.pdf file)
- Minimal comments – CDT Schoeneman
- Podcast selection – “Organizing a paragraph” companion slide included (.ppt file)

**ANNEX B – Raw Data: Selected Student Feedback AYs 2006 (Spring) - 2009 (Fall)  
(AMS Course end Feedback System)**

**E3. Describe your opinion of .MP3 (audio) comments for HWE#4. Questions to consider for your response → Did you like the (why or why not)? How do they contribute to (or detract from) your improvement as a writer? Are they easier (or harder) to understand?**

*There were 14 responses.*

1. In some ways it is easier because the audio has more dimension than just writing corrections. However, is more difficult to look back to specific parts of our assignments and see what we did well or what we botched.
2. I really did like them. I thought that the comments were good and it was easy to listen to the comments while reading my paper over. I believe that if this technique was applied for all four papers, I could have done better as a writer.
3. The audio comments I think were good in the sense that I can hear what your thoughts are directly from the source. And plus it makes it easier to just listen to comments rather than looking the essay itself over.
4. yes, they helped
5. I liked it because it was good to hear exactly what MAJ Platt had to say, however, it detracted in that I was not able to specifically see his comments and circling.
6. I liked it a lot because it made it feel like we were meeting with you. They are easy to understand and allow us to comprehend your thought process as you made the comments. I think they should be kept.
7. I prefer having my essays written on.
8. I think that it was very helpful. It is a lot easier to know what the teacher is thinking and what his comments meant when they are said and not written.
9. I liked the audio comment because it walked me through my essay with the strengths and weaknesses. It is easier to understand, and it was easier to follow along my essay. I think the audio comments were more effective for me.
10. The audio comments were a welcome change. I like how MAJ Platt dissected my essay and gave the pros and cons of it.
11. They were an interesting idea that had its ups and downs. On the up side you didn't have to worry about bad handwriting, but it is nice to have something tangible to look at.
12. I have not yet been able to find my audio comments yet.
13. I really like it. I think with this the instructors could say everything he wanted. It's easier to talk than to write everything down on the essay itself.
14. I don't recall the audio comments for HWE#4.

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**E3. Describe your opinion of .MP3 (audio) comments for HWE#4. Questions to consider for your response → Did you like the (why or why not)? How do they contribute to (or detract from) your improvement as a writer? Are they easier (or harder) to understand?**

*There were 12 responses.*

1. I got the same value out of them as I did the written comments on the hard copy of the paper so if that is what the department wants than it is fine by me.
2. They were harder to use because I liked having the comments directly next to my writing.
3. the audio comments on HWE4 helped some being able to hear what is wrong. but most of the time the written comments are where the mistakes are and that helps a lot
4. I liked because for once my paper was clear instead of full of ink and mistakes, but I would rather have my teacher identify the errors in my essay on paper because I can fix it and.
5. I think they helped a lot more than any other review I got. peer review didn't really help me at all.
6. Awesome. Absolutely loved the audio comments, volumes better than written comments. Though it is harder to hear from the instructor directly, it is good to be able to take such feedback at face value.
7. I thought it was really cool. It saves time for both the cadet and instructor. The instructor probably can say things and more things than if he/she wrote it
8. I don't remember any audio comments for HWE#4.
9. The audio comment is a great way to hear your instructor critique your paper. We usually didn't get to cover my papers 1 on 1, especially with time constraints. This was a great way to hear how you could better develop your paper.
10. This was a great way to grade our papers!
11. Yes, I enjoyed the audio comments and I am much more audio than visual. It was easy to feel your perception of my paper and the reasons you had in grading my work.
12. I prefer the written comments simply because they are right there on the paper. I do not have to cross reference different sources to get both comments and to see exactly what the comments are talking about in my paper.

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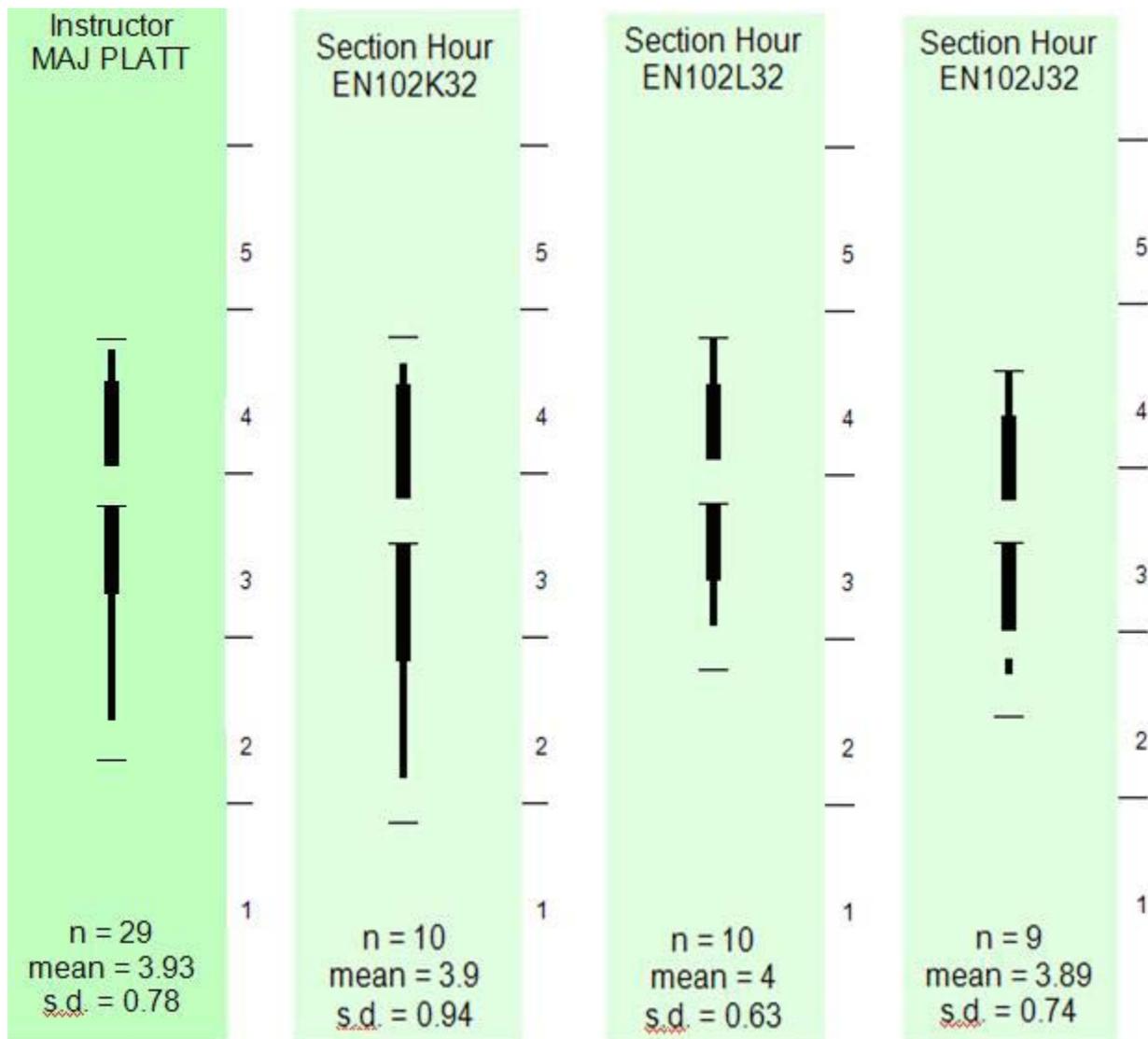
**E3. Describe your opinion of .MP3 (audio) comments for HWE#4. Questions to consider for your response → Did you like the (why or why not)? How do they contribute to (or detract from) your improvement as a writer? Are they easier (or harder) to understand?**

*There were 10 responses.*

1. I believe it is a good idea, but pen to paper works just as well.
  2. Much better than writing I couldn't read.
  3. I found them very nice - Being able to hear my teacher's voice inflection and honest thoughts was refreshing...but I really like comments on my paper for posterity.
  4. Easier to understand, I still can't understand Major Platt's scribbles...
  5. I still have questions about some of the opinions however it serves the purpose
  6. I liked them A LOT!! They are a lot easier to understand and gather information from than written comments. Strongly suggest you continue that.
  7. I think using MP3 is a very innovative way to give feedback; none of my teachers have done this before. It feels more personal to hear the comments in your voice than to have to just read it off the paper.
  8. i liked it because i can't read your handwriting at all
  9. They were fine and just as good as written comments. A little weird to listen to an instructor voice in my headphones, but pretty effective. They do help me to know more generally where my paper could be improved.
  10. I liked it because I can't usually read what you write on my paper so it helped me to know what you wanted me to change.
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## ANNEX C – Statistical Data from Survey Question

### Q1. Rate your overall satisfaction with audio comments on your essay



Answers:

- [5] Very Satisfied
- [4] Satisfied
- [3] Neutral
- [2] Dissatisfied
- [1] Very dissatisfied

**ANNEX D – Raw Data: Cadet Free Response Questions****Question 1. What is the biggest advantage of listening to audio comments on your essay?**

1. It really seemed the same as written comments.
2. You can better understand and internalize what the teacher says. It is particularly beneficial to have the teacher walk through the essay with you (as in the audio) rather than read comments that don't always fully encompass the teacher's criticisms of your work.
3. Sometimes the written comments are a bit illegible. Was able to understand exactly what the instructor wanted, rather than trying to interpret vague, hard to read written comments.
4. It's easier to follow along and you won't miss anything
5. I could understand where my paper went wrong, and what you would have liked to see in my paper.
6. I liked how much you could say. I could take 5 minutes and get far more information than I could by reading the comments on the paper. It was almost as if we were looking over the paper together.
7. I could understand it.
8. I'm an auditory learner
9. I can't remember receiving audio comments on my essay. I did get written comments which were usually very clear and specific about what I did wrong and what I needed to improve.
10. I hear the emphasis on what you were talking about
11. understand what we did wrong and how to fix it
12. I like the comment better on the essay, because I can see both the comments and the essay.
13. Have not listened to any, could not find them
14. I would then know not to make the same mistakes
15. Hearing may be better for someone who is an oral learner.
16. all writing errors addressed
17. You could be blunt.
18. It was easier to understand the instructor viewpoints because of the ability to judge his tone.
19. Gave me chance to really feel connected with the person recounting my essay. Gave me all kinds of suggestions that I could use that wouldn't quite have fit in written word
20. I was able to hear your reasons why in a complete reflection of what my entire essay had or didn't have. It was something different and made me pay attention more.
21. It was nice to have something new.
22. I guess it was a bit more personal as it felt like the instructor was talking to me on a one-on-one level.
23. You can hear where more emphasis is placed as far as needs for improvement.
24. They could be longer since they were spoken and not written.
25. you could hear your instructors thoughts about your writing
26. easily accessible
27. You get the advantage of hearing what your teacher expects and thought from your instructor himself, without the issue of trying to decipher his handwriting.
28. You can listen and see the mistakes at the same time.

**Question 2. What is the biggest disadvantage of audio comments on your essay?**

1. You can't ask the recording questions.
2. Not really understanding where I went wrong because I didn't follow along with the audio commentary. I like seeing it written/marked down on paper.
3. I do not get to see the actual grammar and spelling mistakes I made.
4. I liked them.
5. Hard to find
6. Again, I can't remember receiving audio comments on my essay.
7. I have to actually listen
8. Get tired of listening
9. Can't see what my mistakes were.
10. n/a
11. We don't get audio comments till the end of the year.
12. Can't see how the correction should be.
13. Better in person, no discussion possible
14. none that I conceived.
15. The student is not able to retain all the comments from the instructor.
16. Have no marks for little grammatical and structural mistakes.
17. none
18. Had trouble accessing it at first.
19. They were not always so easily accessible. There was no physical copy, so unless you logged into blackboard, it was virtually impossible to hear the comments.
20. Specific problems with more simple corrections that are needed can be easily overlooked. The audio was like hearing a general critique rather than a more specific analysis.
21. You did not get to see the problems on the essay (grammar) and all of the things that you can write right next to a problem.
22. you could reread it our keep it for later.
23. hard to follow
24. You have to use a computer and it is based on whether or not you can actually get an internet connection.
25. quality
26. I can't see it underlined in the text.
27. Might take some time getting around to actually listening to those comments.
28. They are not concrete and cannot be referenced as easily as hard copies of comments on an essay. You have to listen to them over again to find specific flaws in the essay.

## **ANNEX E – Raw Data: Cadet Response Cards**

At various points in the semester, I give cadets a 3 x 5 note card on which I ask them to write comments about the subject material, my teaching, the classroom environment, or any subject (in general) that relates to the course. Here are the applicable responses that address audio feedback on papers:

Positive -

1. Like the mp3 comments. If you do it again, please make the volume louder and not so close to the mike (sic)
2. I like the comments for the personal essay (HWE4) and they helped me figure out why I'm writing like such a dumbass.
3. Keep doing the audio comments
4. I like the audio comments but I don't like the essay it was too hard. Keep the argument essay.

Negative –

1. I don't understand why you have the mp3 file but it was ok. Please write on the essays next. I have trouble reading your writing.
2. I didn't like the audio file. I can't tell what your (sic) talking about.

Neutral –

1. Sir, you try to (sic) hard, but the mp3 file was good. My brother got a good laugh. Sir, I'm going to re mix it!

**ANNEX F – Unsolicited Student E-mail**

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Major Platt,

I just wanted to say thank you for going over my paper with the audio comments. It is really nice as a student to hear your thought process. I know you write it down on paper usually, but it was nice to hear it this way. For some reason it clicked better with me what you were looking for and how I could have been thinking differently while writing or editing my paper. I hope this is something that the English department continues to use. See you in class.

Very Respectfully,

CDT Hauck  
A-2 2011

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Maj. Platt,

Sir, I just wanted to give some instant feedback from your audio feed. I like the audio but the only problem is that the audio is very laggy and it gets all the way through your comments but it takes random stops in the middle and it's kind of frustrating. But I really liked the audio before getting the paper back because it seems a lot more personal like I was actually sitting down with you going over it.

Very Respectfully,

Cadet Pvt. Matthew Greene  
USCC Class Of 2012 (USMAPS Class of 2008)  
3rd Regiment F Company  
*Go F-Troop! MOUNT UP!*  
**GO ARMY DRUMLINE!!!!**

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MAJ. Platt,

Thank you for this audio feedback. I think that it is a really good idea. If at all possible could I get one of these after other papers?

Very Respectfully,

CDT. PVT. Vanderhoof 12

## ANNEX G – Results from Small Group Sensing Session

### Focused sensing session questions – Audio feedback on essays

In a small group sensing session of 5 students, I assessed their reactions to my audio comments. I directed each student to read their essay once (with written comments), and then listen to my comments while following along with the written version. After the students had time to listen to the comments, I met with them later in the week to hear their thoughts on the process. Below is a list of question used for the sensing session, along with the group’s responses; not all students responded to each question directly. I have paraphrased all responses, with direct quotations indicated. I have omitted duplicate (cross-over) responses and placed similar responses under the most appropriate question number:

#### 1) *Which do you prefer – written or audio comments – Why?*

- I really like both together. It’s easier to hear and see together.
- Audio comments because “you can tell me so much more” and its “like AI.”
- I’m still a “fan of written comments.”

#### 2) *What are your general impressions of audio feedback?*

- Really “cool” - I’ve never had any teacher do this before.
- This must take a lot of time. “Could we get this for every essay?”
- It’s OK. I’m more used to teachers writing on my papers. Usually I don’t read all of my teacher’s comments, but I will listen to your entire message to me.
- Sometimes it’s hard to follow because of the rough breaks in the edits and also that I have trouble hearing your description of where exactly my error was.

#### 3) *Tell me a situation in which audio feedback works better than written comments.*

- I can listen to it more often. “I think I will listen to it before I write” or before other assignments are due.
- When you say “good things” about my writing it makes me feel better that I can “do OK” in English class even if my grade isn’t that good.

- I like to listen to it (the mp3 file) when I talk to you in AI or I even will use it to give to Mr. Irwin at the CEP so he can hear what you say I need to work on.
- I can't read your handwriting half the time.
- I'll listen to them on a trip section if we have internet access, because you haven't sent us your comments before we left. One of my teachers scanned our essays and e-mailed them to us.

4) *Tell me a situation where written comments are preferable.*

- I know this is really “new technology and cutting edge teaching stuff” but I still like to see what you write. I know you're trying something new, but I really would like written comments – or both together.
- When my computer is down. These files are big and hard to e-mail.

5) *Comment on how audio comments make you feel as a student. For example, Do you they feel more personal? Does this mimic a one-on-one AI session? Do they make it harder or easier to “connect” with my analysis of your writing?*

- I like that you take the time to tell me so much more about my writing.
- It's easier to hear your attitude when you speak as opposed to just reading comments. I don't “feel you, sir” when I read written comments but I know you emphasize when you speak to me.
- I still say that I need both written and oral feedback together to make sense of what you want me to do.
- This helped me a lot because I can pause it and listen to parts of it again. It reminds me what I need to do next time to get better.
- Just like AI – but I don't “have to go all of the way over to Lincoln Hall” – its quicker.

6) *Do these comments, when paired with written feedback, make you feel as though you better understand my expectation of good writing\areas for improving your writing.*

- Yes. Do this all of the time.

7) *Would you recommend this type of feedback to other teacher? To other students?*

- Yes. Most definitely yes.
- “I want my history teacher to do this too, because I can’t read his writing”
- This is really good for all teachers. I think I could use it for Chemistry too, especially for advice on problem sets – like audio AI.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> David Harvey, The Condition of Post Modernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change, (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1997) 10.

<sup>2</sup> Dante Tanzi, "Observations about Music and Decentralized Environments," Leonardo 34.5 (2001): 434.