



## **Video Feedback for Multilingual Learners in Higher Ed**

by [Lee Friederich](#)

### **Rethinking Written Feedback**

While many college instructors labor over making written comments on their students' essays, research shows that written feedback is not as helpful to students as we might hope (Sprague, 2016). Entreating instructors "to see these comments through the eyes of college students," Sommers (2006) explains that our comments run the gamut, ranging from "papers returned with bewildering hieroglyphics—dots, check marks, squiggly or straight lines" to "papers with responses that treat students like apprentice scholars, engaging with their ideas, seriously and thoughtfully" (p. 248). Citing Clements' 2006 study, Sprague (2016) points out that once students sense comments will not be useful, they may "ignore many of the remaining comments and become frustrated" (p. 23). Responding to research that questions the usefulness of our written comments, instructors are exploring alternate methods of providing feedback, including "cold-read" conferencing, in which instructors read the student work for the first time during the conference, and video feedback. Unsure the cold-read technique would allow me to pick up the patterns of difficulty my students so often have, I gravitated toward the video format.

### **Checking Multilingual Students' Comprehension of Written Feedback: Classroom Practice**

I hesitated when it came to providing video feedback to my multilingual students, knowing that many of them are better readers than listeners. However, considering the difficulty even native speakers have deciphering written feedback, I put this hesitancy aside, especially after watching my students struggle one day as I circulated among them as they read marginal comments I had made in the comment function Microsoft Word, comments I had thought were clearly written and very direct. Indeed, I could see that my multilingual students, whose exposure to the rhetorical conventions of formal composition in English was so limited, appeared to face much more difficulty in negotiating the meanings of my written feedback than my native-English-speaking students. Even trying to keep comments as simple as possible, there is something "lost in translation" in marginal comments on student papers for multilingual and native speakers alike.

## **Adding Value Through the Sound and Scrolling Functions of Video: The Virtual Presence of a Reader**

In fact, when surveyed, the majority of my multilingual students said that my video feedback was easier to follow and “more comfortable” than written feedback. As one student wrote, video feedback was best “because it is like your [*sic*] with the teacher.” Confirming Sprague’s (2016) notion that video feedback diminishes the “perceived distance” that students so often sense in written feedback, my student associated the video with our previous conferencing (p. 23). I found that not only did video feedback convey my reassuring voice, but it also allowed me to scroll through the text to connect the dots to show larger patterns of rhetorical missteps, becoming a focused mini-lesson, tailor-made for the individual students. The visual quality of video allows the instructor literally to show the student what he or she is talking about. Transforming the text as I speak, I can demonstrate how to use parentheses or what a quote within a quote looks like as I narrate what I am doing. If students want to review their video (and I have found that most do), they simply rewind and watch again.

My student’s comment about presence in video feedback brings to mind Sommers’s (2006) notion of “the power of feedback” in which she refers to her student’s comment that “without a reader, the whole process [of writing] is diminished” (p. 251). Pointing to the tonal misinterpretation that so often comes with written feedback, Sprague (2016) cites White’s (2006) study that found “most students read written comments in a scornful voice regardless of an instructor’s intention” (Sprague, 2016, p. 25). Creating the virtual presence of a reader, video commenting can be seen as a step toward creating the dialogic partnership that Sommers (2006) champions, a relationship that “develops its own language and meaning” between student and teacher, a “possession passed from giver to receiver...something that is kept in motion, moving back and forth” (p. 255) between them. In my next round of video feedback, I will keep the conversation moving, asking students to make their own video back to me, asking questions and confirming what they will be working on as they rewrite.

## **Making a Screencast Video: Best Practices**

### **Consider Global Issues**

Best practices for making a screencast video first require that we consider the largest global issues of rhetorical form in college writing, including

- thesis
- supporting arguments
- detailed examples and quotations
- a thought-provoking conclusion

### **Include Some Written Feedback**

I briefly sketch a few notes responding to these aspects of the essay, walking a fine line for making the notes useful to both the student—as reminders of what I mention in the video—and

myself as I make the video. Above all, I try not to overwhelm the student with too many written comments.

### Choose the Platform That Works for You

There are many screencast platforms to choose from. I started with the program [Jing](#), with its 5-minute time limit, in large part because I wanted to become more concise in my feedback (and, to be honest, save some time, knowing I was spending too much time on written feedback). However, because I usually ended up needing just a few more seconds to conclude my video, I have since moved on to [Snagit](#), which does not have a 5-minute cutoff. Snagit still allows me to aim for a short timeframe of perhaps 6 minutes without having to stress about a 5-minute timeframe. Another advantage of Snagit is that, because videos can be shared privately (as “unlisted”) on YouTube, you can make use of YouTube’s analytics, which can confirm that students are watching the videos, even showing how many times a student has watched. One helpful tip for Snagit is using a frame size around the scrollable text of 640 x 360, so that the video conforms easily the YouTube frame. Both Snagit and Jing (and many helpful tutorials about screencast technology) can be found on the [TechSmith](#) website, which also supports platforms for more elaborate, even editable, screencast videos, such as Camtasia. See Appendix A for basic instructions on how to make a screencast video in Snagit.

### Concluding Thoughts About Using Video Feedback for Multilingual Students

According to my YouTube analytics, most of my multilingual students watched their videos at least two to three times, compared to usually only once by native speakers. Video feedback becomes a way of not only starting and continuing a conversation, but also a way of rewinding, replaying, and renegotiating meaning as needed, which in turn benefits students’ long-term learning. What is especially heartening to me is that students at all levels of English in my diverse class of international, refugee, and native-English-speaking learners spoke positively of their experience of receiving video feedback. Finding my worry that multilingual learners “may not understand me” completely unfounded, I too am swayed by the humanizing quality that video lends to the feedback process, the give and take so necessary to the growth of student writers.

### References

- Sommers, N. (2006). Across the drafts. *College Composition and Communication*, 58(2), 248–257.
- Sprague, A. (2016). Restoring student interest in reading teacher feedback through the use of video feedback in the ESL writing classroom. *Ohio Journal of English Language Arts*, 56(1), 23–27.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Making a Screencast Video in Snagit: Some Very Basic Instructions**

1. Snagit can be purchased for about US\$50 on the [TechSmith](#) website.
2. Once you download and open Snagit, you will have a red button appear to the right of your screen. (It slides out from the right side.)
3. Open the document you would like to use in your screencast video (i.e., the student essay).
4. Press the red button to the right to set up your video.
5. Set the orange frame size to 640 x 360 and hit Enter on your keyboard, then move the frame over the beginning of the student essay—you can adjust a little to accommodate your student's margins.
6. Press the video (vs. the still camera) link.
7. Press the big red button to start recording (in 3 seconds).
8. As you record, you should be able to scroll up and down using the grey bar on your Microsoft Word document.
9. Use the pause and stop button when needed.
10. After finishing, you will be taken to an area where your Snagit videos are stored. Save your video to your own file.
11. Go to YouTube to upload. (You will need to start a free YouTube account if you do not have one.)
12. Hit the upload arrow at the top of the site to upload your video. (Just choose the file from your own files.)
13. Set video to “unlisted” or “private.”
14. When video is finished uploading, hit “done,” and your link will be produced to email to the student (or place on the feedback page of D2L, etc.)