

## Benefits of Online Submission and Marking of Assessments

Online assignment submission (e-sub) and marking (e-mark) “may well surpass the old manual system and soon become the accepted method for dealing with student assessment” (Bancroft, Hynd, Dal Santo & Reye c.2007 p.2). The traditional manual system of assignment submission and marking no longer satisfies the needs of the modern day student or lecturer, and is highly resource intensive (Bancroft et. al. c.2007). This report aims to address the benefits of e-sub and e-mark in a university, provide examples, and offer some tips for successful implementation.

Early 1990s ideals of the “paperless office” now seem further away from reality with office consumption of paper growing “substantially in recent years” (Moss 2004 p.6). Paper consumption has a “direct connection with global warming” as paper comes from trees that sequester carbon dioxide (National Wildlife Federation, 2008). As bodies of research and education, Universities have the opportunity and responsibility to be leading innovative changes and educating the wider public about the ramifications of over-consumption of paper. Many American colleges are implementing “programs to reduce the need for paper hard copies” (PSR 2008 p.38).

In addition to the resource efficiency benefits that we are writing this article to promote, e-sub and e-mark has numerous other benefits, addressed below:

- Turnaround and feedback. Lengthy turnover of assessment material and untimely feedback hampers the quality of a students’ education (Li & Irby 2008). Students appreciate the faster turnaround of e-mark assessments (Jones & Jamieson 1997). Timely online feedback has been proven to open up channels of dialogue, which both assists a pupils understanding of the subject and allows a teacher to understand where and why pupils are being confused (Li & Irby 2008). Furthermore, through the speed of typing and unlimited length of comments in word documents, assessments marked online allow more personalized and in depth attention to be given to specific learning problems and needs (Duran, Kelly & Keaten 2005).
- Transparency. No loss of assessments and “an audited trail of assignments” (Tsang 2004 p.4). The advantage here is an increase in openness and transparency in the assessment submission and marking process.
- Plagiarism detection. Plagiarism by students is seen as an “increasing problem” perpetuated by the use of the internet (Evans 2006 p.87), so it makes sense for tutors and lecturers alike to utilise the technological benefits of both e-sub and e-mark of assessment material. Through the use of electronic plagiarism detection services, “detecting electronic plagiarism now appears to be almost as easy as committing it” (Evans 2006 p.90). Furthermore, these services do not undermine students’ trust in the way that it was originally thought (Evans 2006).
- Convenience. Individuals (students and teachers alike) constrained by work, distance and/or families are no longer discriminated against in a flexible e-sub and e-mark model. Research has found that distance students find e-sub and e-mark experience “excellent and nearly always positive” (Jones & Jamieson 1997).
- Other potential benefits include “enhancement of student retention rates.” (Tsang, 2004, p.4).

### Case study of e-sub and e-mark in practice:

Queensland University of Technology (QUT) implemented e-sub and e-mark after 12 years of using a traditional manual system. Bancroft et. al. (c.2007 p.5) found there to be “reluctance on the part of teachers” to use the new, online system. This reluctance was a result of “preconceived ideas about the difficulty of online marking”, including the conception that they will need to print a hard copy of the students’ work (Bancroft et. al.

c.2007 p.5), thereby increasing workload. However, this was shortly overcome by the use of electronic mark sheet templates, inserting comments, or printing a hard copy when necessary. QUT is increasingly adopting the e-sub and e-mark system across campus driven both by student and staff demand for convenience. In fact, teachers commented on how much time they saved in marking (some suggest up to 30%) by not having to deal with bundles of paper assignments, not to mention the convenience of being able to access files and mark from home" (p.7). Additionally, lecturers at QUT are successfully using automatic marking tools. Overall, Bancroft et. al. (c.2007) found several more advantages to students and staff when using the new, online system as opposed to the old, manual system of assignment submission and marking.

### Tips for implementing e-sub and e-mark successfully:

- Use the "Track Changes" function on MS Word. Go to View > Toolbar > Reviewing. This will open up a toolbar above the document. The second icon from the right is a paper and pencil with a star in the corner. Click this, and the student will be able to see the changes and comments you have made to their document. Or:
- Simply type in a different colour to the student's text. Or:
- If using MS Word, go to Insert > Comment and type your comment.
- Students don't mind where comments on e-submitted assignments appear (i.e. at the start, at the end, or dispersed throughout the paper), as long as the comments are distinguished from their text (Tsang, 2004).
- Send a criteria sheet. Bancroft et. al. (c.2007) found that students liked to see their results weighed up against set criteria, and found this method of viewing results very convenient. "The criteria sheet may be in the form of a check list of features required in the assignment" (Bancroft et. al. c.2007 p.6-7).
- Ensure you have correct lighting and posture. To avoid eye-strain, never read off a computer screen in a dark room. Additionally, adjust your seat and screen height so that your eyes are level with the top of the computer screen, as it is easier for your eyes to focus downwards (Roderick, c.2002).
- Take eye breaks often - to avoid eye fatigue, try focusing on the most distant object you can see, or cupping your closed eyes in the palm of your hands. Blink regularly! Visit <http://www.thirdage.com/features/tech/ouch/index03.html> for some ideas and tips on how to exercise your eyes properly.
- If printing a document is essential, opt for recycled paper, print double-sided, and put it in a paper recycling bin when finished with it.

Comment [B1]: It's easy!

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Note: All references were sourced, read and cited on-line.