

Online Marking: an Institutionally Supported Approach

The following short paper outlines the benefits of standardised online marking, and outlines two models which the institution will develop going forward: the intention being that departments interested in developing online marking now will be able to make informed and future-proof choices.

Context

The submission, processing, marking and returning of assessment and feedback is a lengthy and administratively heavy process. Naturally, this has therefore been an area where departments have developed local ways to manage this process: some manual, others automated or technology-assisted. Increasingly, and particularly in light of set maximum turnaround times for marking (21 or 28 days for campus and distance programmes respectively), departments have been looking at ways to move many of these process steps online: so that students submit, and markers mark, work 'electronically' (ie. not on paper).

It makes sense for the institution to acknowledge and support departmental efforts in this area, and in particular to provide guidance to departments looking to develop online marking methods currently and in the future. At an institution-wide symposium on online marking in Nov 2011, it was suggested that one or (ideally) more fully supported models of online marking be developed.

The Models

Working within the bounds set by three key systems (BlackBoard – the learning environment, SITS – the student record system, and Turnitin – the online plagiarism check), we have explored a number of approaches, talked in detail to all of our suppliers, and examined approaches in other institutions. What became abundantly clear is that there is not, and will not be in the medium term, an automated link to enable marks to be moved from BlackBoard to SITS; even with future implementations by Blackboard of assignment handing features, without this key link we cannot look to Blackboard to provide the end-to-end online marking process.

We therefore turned to the work developed through Sunrise and Systems Thinking to build an assignment handling system within SITS. Initial tests within the schools of Archaeology and Ancient History, Management, Museum Studies, Education and the MSc in Forensic



Science (1680 assignments in total) have proved successful, and the system is suitably flexible (in terms of workflow) that we have developed two models on it which we can support confidently going forward.

Both models assume that students will be working and studying within Blackboard up to the point of submission, but will then move (seamlessly, from a student perspective) into the SITS assignment handling system. From a marker perspective we surveyed the dominant models already in use, and have settled on an approach which uses GradeMark, and an approach which allows a range of offline techniques (such as adding comments in a Word or PDF document, or providing audio feedback).

Both models are described in Appendix A.

What's Not Included

The models are designed to cover summative assessed work which can be submitted as a file or files: this includes essays, project reports, audio and video files, etc.

What it cannot cover is assessed work which is created within Blackboard or another online environment itself (for example: blogs, discussion boards, MCQs): in these cases final marks must be downloaded from Blackboard and uploaded into SITS. Any *formative* assessment does not need to be recorded in SITS and so can take place in or outside of Blackboard as appropriate.

Current Status

Model 2 is currently working in the initial test departments (although there is a manual upload step around the delivery of documents to and from Turnitin). Model 1 and a fully automated Model 2 are awaiting the release of a Turnitin/GradeMark 'building block' which will be integrated with SITS in due course. There is currently no definite timescale for this and it is not expected before the start of the 2013/14 academic year. The risk is that the Turnitin-SITS integration doesn't get built in a timely fashion, but it is a far lower risk than waiting for Blackboard-SITS integration (and there are alternative plagiarism checks/tools we could turn to if Turnitin-SITS ultimately fails).

The SITS assignment handling system rollout is currently on hold, whilst the initial departments refine the processes, and the wider integration issues get resolved. Rollout will continue once the process works well for various sized cohorts, subject to Registry workload and, more significantly, the institution priorities determined for SITS development.

Support and training around these models will be built up over the coming year, in tandem with development.



So what can departments do now?

Despite the lack of immediate rollout, departments can – now – make an informed and supported choice.

Those who are interested in developing online marking now can use these models as a guide – ensuring that any methods and skills they develop will be fully integrated and supported in the future. Colleagues may therefore safely explore/develop the use of:

- Turnitin and GradeMark (currently integrated and useable within Blackboard: the features/look will not change when integrated with SITS in Model 1)
- ‘Offline’ techniques such as using the *comment* or *track changes* feature in Word; written or audio comments within a PDF file; audio feedback; electronic mark/feedback sheets, etc. (as long as they produce a file or files on a computer, these will be easy to integrate with Model 2 when the SITS assignment handling system is available to the department).

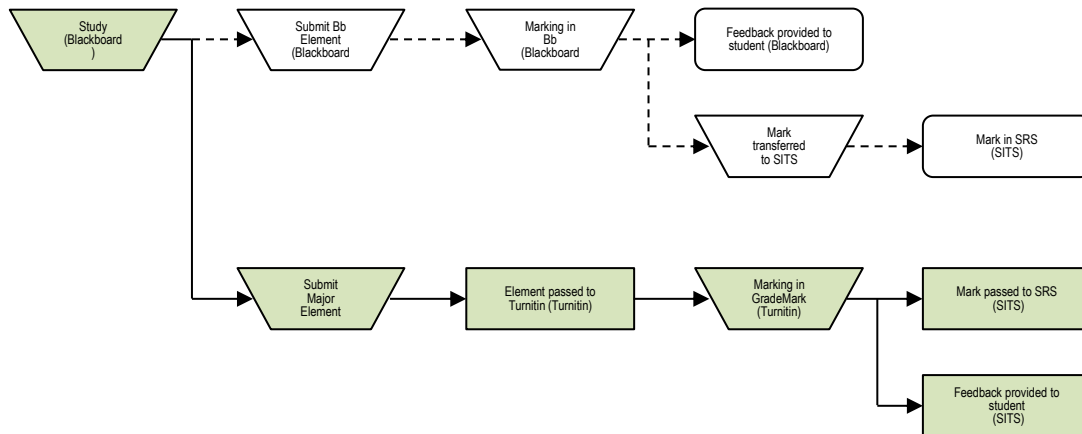
Training in the use of Turnitin and GradeMark is already offered by IT Services through guided learning sessions (contact staffdev@le.ac.uk) and advice on the choice and integration of online marking techniques, in line with these models, is available from the Course Design and Development Unit (contact cddu@le.ac.uk).

Appendix A

Model 1: Online Marking using GradeMark

This model will provide a fully automated/online end-to-end assignment handling system. Students will submit their work to the SITS system, it will be allocated to markers, and markers will pick up the work and mark it within GradeMark. The mark will then be passed directly from GradeMark through any moderation or second marking processes, into the SITS student record. Students will pick up feedback directly on their work through the SITS Student Home. Students and markers will receive email receipt/confirmation at appropriate stages.





Model 2: Flexible Online Marking using a variety of online/offline methods

This model will provide a mostly automated end-to-end assignment handling system, with built-in flexibility. Students will submit their work to the SITS system, it will be passed through a Turnitin plagiarism check, then allocated to markers. Markers will download the work, mark it using any offline method (eg. comments in Word) then upload the marked work, feedback and marks into the SITS system, where it will be passed through any moderation or second marking stages before being entered in the SITS student record, and returned to the student. Students and markers will receive email receipt/confirmation at appropriate stages.

