Using Macros to Comment on Student Papers
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A macro is a tool that allows you to save a string of commands (like inserting a file into a comment) into 1- or 2-keystrokes, enabling instructors to provide a great deal of feedback with a short characters A macro system for grading allows you to create rich feedback files for a series of common issues, and then with a few short keystrokes, call that whole file into a comment you have inserted into a paper.

Macros increase efficiency, save time, raise your quality of life during the semester, and give students more information and feedback about their work, among other benefits. My focus here is on using macros as a tool for grading student writing, and on the ways that the overall quality of feedback can be enhanced while avoiding the rote application of grading rubrics.

A "pre-technology" analog might be the numbered "rubric" some teachers used…they would distribute a sheet telling you what each number meant that was marked on your paper. With technology, we can easily skip the number and just insert the entire feedback point very quickly.

How easy is it to set up macros? Pretty simple, since the two hardest parts are 1) constructing the comments and 2) keeping track of the location of the macros and comments (macros are now usually stored by Word in the Normal template for your documents, but can also be associated with a single document only if desired).

Why Use Macros?

More consistent feedback. Handwriting and energy diminish over time grading a stack of papers, so comments are sometimes inconsistent (some developed, some short) or illegible. Using a macro to call a file into a comment provides the same consistent feedback over time in readable text.

Stop wasting time. Writing the same comments over and over is a substantial waste of time, and frankly many students make the same mistakes over and over, so why rewrite the same comment 50 times a semester?

Provide examples and rich resources. Normally writing comments on papers there is little incentive to include URLs, textbook page number references, and other specific resource information. Macros make this quick and easy.

Focus on important stuff. Instead of spending a large portion of grading time correcting and commenting on recurring student errors, use macros for these common issues and focus grading time on argument quality and conceptual development.

Adapt on the fly. Once you run a macro to call a file into a comment, it drops you at the end of the comment so you can type more of a specific application to the paper, delete a portion of the comment that doesn't apply, and adapt the more general comment into something that is tied to the student's topic.

Help clarify issues in your own mind. A very real subsidiary benefit to creating rich feedback files is that it requires the instructor to identify resources, provide a clear example or two, and articulate how they want to approach the issue with students. For me, this was helpful for my grading consistency even without the time savings.

How Do I Start?

In general: 1) Create a series of feedback files in a folder that will always stay in the same location, 2) create a series of macros using the Macro tool, and 3) create an easy reference for which keystrokes call which files.

Create Feedback Files
1) After grading a stack of papers, go back through and jot down the ten (or so) most common comments you have written on papers. Make choices about which comments could use developing in some depth and are frequent enough to justify using a macro.

2) Take each comment you have selected and type it up into a developed paragraph using MS Word (other word processors also have this feature, but here I will only focus on Word). Apart from the direct comment you might just write in the margins of a paper, you can also include other information: References to readings with page numbers,

examples, or other resources. Save these files in a consistent location. I name the file starting with the two letter code I set below to call the macro. See example comment, Appendix 1.

Create Macros to Call Files into Comments
3) Once you open a new Word file, you can record a macro by selecting View > Macros > Record a Macro.
Naming: Name your macro using short two-letter codes or names that are easy and quick to type. See Appendix 2.
Location: I store macros in the Normal.dotm, which is the default styles/settings template when you open a new Word document.

4) Select *Insert > Object drop down arrow (small white box on full expanded ribbon) > Text from file.* Browse to the folder for the files you created and saved above. Select the file you want and Click *OK.* Now position your cursor at the end of the comment file

5) Select *Macro Stop Recording* on the *Tools* menu (usually a square "stop" button) and you are done.

6) To run a macro while grading an electronic copy of the student paper, select text needing comment and insert comment. While in comment, view macros (Alt-F8, or View > Macros > View Macros), select the one you want to insert, click Run. In my use, this is Alt-F8, the two letters, Enter.

7) For easy access, you can insert "view macros" and "record macros" (and "insert comment"!) buttons in the quick tool bar... use the drop-down arrow at the end of the blue quick tool bar above the ribbon... make it display "All Commands" instead of "Popular Commands," then locate the above buttons by title and use the arrow to move them onto the tool bar.

Create a Quick Reference Guide
8) A couple of ideas for tracking the macros... First, create an abbreviated list separated into clear areas for reference while you grade. Second, open a new file and run every macro in order so you have a complete printout of your macro texts.

For hard copy grading, as you grade, mark key words on the papers, and run the appropriate macros to compile a set of thoughtful comments to print out and attach to the end of the paper. Since the macro drops you at the end of the general comment you may also add a specific comment at that time.

Issues and Options

1) Losing the "Normal" template due to overwrites and updates. This erases all of your macros... not a happy feeling. Having had this happen once, now when I revise or record a number of macros I make a copy two ways:

-locate your normal.dotm file... Usually in this location where username is your username:
C:\Users\user name\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft**Templates**.
After you have created a full set of macros, make a copy of the normal.dotm file, maybe normalmacros.dotm? If the normal template is ever overwritten or updated by accident, you will always be able to browse to this location and copy and rename the normalmacros.dotm back to the normal.dotm and then restart Word.

-macros are created and edited in something called VBA Editor... when you edit a macro (View Macros > Edit) you are able to actually edit and change the macros (e.g., inserting directory changes... see below), and you can save a copy of your macros by going to File > Export and saving the .bas file in a memorable and safe location. Then it only takes a moment to run the VBA Editor and File > Import that file if you lose macros.

2) Losing the folder location so macro returns "cannot locate file." Sometimes when the macro records your keystrokes inserting the file, it doesn't actually change folder locations so it doesn't record you entering the macros folder (and location). When this happens, running the macro when Word isn't already opening from that folder will yield errors. Simple fix is to insert the change directory command into all of the macros:

-View macros (Alt-F8, or View > Macros > View Macros), select Edit and enter the VBA Editor, and insert directory information into macros that lack the change directory command. In the image below, macro f0 has a correct change

directory statement entered, but macro f1 does not. Simply copy the first f0 change directory statement, move to the second f1 macro, insert cursor and enter to create a new line above the selection line and paste. Then hit the save Normal button and you are done.


```vba
Sub f0()
'
' f0 Macro
'
'
    ChangeFileOpenDirectory "c:\users\smuir\desktop\macros"
    Selection.InsertFile FileName:="F0ThesisCanonsEffect.docx", Range:="", _
        ConfirmConversions:=False, Link:=False, Attachment:=False
End Sub
Sub f1()
'
' f1 Macro
'
'
    Selection.InsertFile FileName:="F1Outline.doc", Range:="", _
        ConfirmConversions:=False, Link:=False, Attachment:=False
End Sub
```

3) Student paper infrequently reject macros. There have been occasions when student foreign language settings, security settings, and use of other formats (PDF) make it difficult to use macros directly. In those instances, I use a blank open Word document to enter the macros and then copy and paste directly into the PDF comment.

There is an investment of time and energy into getting this up and running, and saving copies of the normal.dotm template once you have a full set of macros is a good idea to prevent the frustration of losing all the work. Despite these challenges, students greatly appreciate the rich feedback, and I spend more time on their substantive analysis than on the smaller details of writing. Technology can't solve every problem, but in this instance it has helped my grading load and my students get more effective and detailed feedback.

Appendix 1: Sample Feedback File on APA References

This is generally what an APA reference looks like (for a newspaper article online):

> Brody, J.E. (2007, December 11). Mental reserves keep brain agile. *The New York Times*.
> http://www.nytimes.com

Note the first name as initial only, the date format and location, lower case title, source provided in italics, the retrieved from URL, and the use of Hanging Indent formatting.

This class requires you to use the APA Style Manual (7th edition). Be sure you use the correct format from the style manual, and that you format consistently throughout your paper. There is a great online resource available to you about the APA Style:
https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_style_introduction.html

Appendix 2: Sample List of Macros Arranged by Area

Comm 300 Macro List, Spring 2020

Methodology
MC–need canon focus
MN–canon mixup better structure
ML–avoid list
MD–descript, not criticism
MT–dev. theory

MX–context needs work
MA–Arg vocabulary
MM–metaphor theory
MY–ethos dynamic
MH–dev. ethos elements
MP–pathos elements
MR–arrangement impact
MF–effects weak
MS–answer "so what?"

Outline
OM–too many main points
OF–outline format
OL–laundry list subpoints
OW–no one without a two
OS–subpoints belong
OT–titles clear
OV–outline vs. paper differences
OD-too many details
OQ–leave quotes out of outline

Paper Requirements
PA-Abstract not preview
PE-Thesis explanation CAFK
PH–specific R thesis
PO–outline for paper?
PS–paper short
PT–insert paper titles

Quick Encouragement
KW1-improved
KW2-gotten better
KW3-excellent improvement
KW4-great improvement

Quotation/Citation
QF–full sentence quotes
QL–long vs. short quotes
QT–use varied transitions

QC–proper citations
QG-using titles for citations
QP–quote needs page/par
QM–citations must match references
QO–overciting
QB–citations leave out book/article titles

QA–APA for references
QR–reference all sources
QD-correct speech reference
QS–must reference speech
QI–title, not source first
QE–make titles lower case

Writing
TA–awkward writing
TR–proofread

TC–stream of consciousness
TF–sentence fragment
TP–passive voice
TS–self reference
TT–tense changes
TI–It's vs. its

TU–use e.g.s
TV–vague assertions

For Revision
F0-include thesis
F1–fix outline
F2–develop context
F3–put in full paper titles
F4–get quote and citation format right
F5–develop elements of ethos
F6–flesh out argument analysis
F7–make pathos specific
F8–beef up effect
F9–fix references
G1–draft paper rubric