



**Software tools**  
which can support working with  
essay-type assignments

# Software tools which can support working with essay-type assignments

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# 1 Introduction

In Chapter Six of the Literature Review of this project it was stated that;

“E-learning technology already has a very important role in teaching and learning. Assessment of student learning and evaluation of instruction are of critical importance and can and need to be supported by e-learning technology and strategies (Buzzetto-More & Alade, 2006). Good assessment, especially of formative nature, is complex and substantial effort is required in this area. E-learning technology makes high-quality formative assessment practical by removing some of the constraints limiting higher uptake (Committee on the Foundations of Assessment, 2001). E-learning technologies and approaches can assist in the assessment cycle for formative assessment of student work (Blayney & Freeman, 2004). In brief, this cycle contains stages for the exchange of documents, for communication, for producing artefacts addressing the assessment tasks and for writing feedback. E-learning technologies can assist in all these stages.”

This section explores a range of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools that can support the provision of formative assessment. The literature review which accompanies this project has informed the choice of tools. The aim was to provide a clear comparison between the types of technology available at the different stages of the assignment process. The technologies have been placed in one of three categories.

- Generic office software: such as Word processors and Spreadsheets
- Learning Management Systems such as Blackboard and Moodle
- Specific assessment tools: such as tools designed to tackle one or more assessment styles or issues

The assignment marking process can be divided into seven sections (see Table 1):

1. It starts with supporting students with assignments such as clarifying what is good performance and allowing students to discuss the assignment goals and marking criteria so they understand them.
2. There is the submission of assignments which can be by a variety of electronic tools.
3. The preparation of marking is about getting the assignments and organising them. Many of these tasks can be automatic or semiautomatic.
4. The marking stage is where the lecturers use their professional judgement to prepare feedback. There are a variety of tools to help the lecturer with marking but they all require the expertise of the lecturer.
5. Keeping records includes recording and analysing marks and feedback, then transferring marks to other systems such as a central database.
6. Releasing results and feedback is when the lecturer provides the feedback and the marks to the students, facilitates discussion of the feedback and provides opportunities for the student to act on the feedback.
7. Using assignment experience for future teaching is the final phase. This will be when the lecturer reflects on the process to provide further teaching for the students or to refine the activity for future student cohorts.

Table 1 outlines the way each class of assessment tool maps onto the stages of the assignment process. A description of specific tools then follows with a table of how each maps to those stages. Finally we describe the features, advantages and disadvantages of a range of assessment tools.

We completed this description of tools in June 2007. Other tools are available but are not described because they are only available to people at departments or institutions. Further tools are likely to be available but information about these was not accessible at the time of writing.

**Table 1**  
**List of key stages and issues in assessment processes**

<b>The stages of the assignment marking process</b>	<b>Generic office software</b>	<b>Learning management systems</b>
<b>Supporting students with assignments</b>	Supports writing of assignment specification. Can email students about assignment.	Facilitates the delivery of assessment activities. Provides a common resource to explain goals and assessment rubrics. Integrates online discussions into course so students can discuss the assignment.
<b>Submission of assignments</b>	Supports writing of assignment documents in generic formats. Students can email assignments	Manages the electronic submission of assignments.
<b>Preparation of marking</b>	Lecturer can email assignments to markers.	Allows groups to be set-up. Have a user profile that equates to a 'Marker'. Assignments can be assigned to markers.
<b>Marking</b>	Feedback and marks can be added to assignments.	Minimal support for document mark-up within the system.
<b>Keeping records</b>	Lecturer can keep records using these tools but minimal support.	Extensive support for result aggregation storage. Often able to perform statistical profiling. Can be integrated with other ICT systems.
<b>Releasing results and providing feedback</b>	Lecturer can email marked assignments to students	Supports delivery of results generally through both email and web access.
<b>Using assignment experience for future teaching</b>	Minimal support for this stage.	Some provide rule-based profiling for effectiveness profiling. Rich source of information held in the system.

### **Specialised assessment tools**

It is not possible to give a generic description for the specialised assessment tools. They are designed to address either specific assessment issues or provide an end-to-end solution. See individual tool descriptions below. Typically, specialist tools provide more support for the marking tasks. They can also have good support for the assignment submission, preparation, return and record keeping processes.

## **2 Generic Office tools which can support working with essay-type assignments**

Generic software has the advantage that staff and students often already know how to use them and have them available. All institutions provide access to generic office software to staff and to on-campus students. Off-campus students and students who choose to work off-campus, typically have access to generic office software.

Generic software has a number of limitations for the marking and management of assignments. These include a lack of specific functions that have been designed using assessment theory. This means that the markers need to customise the software. Markers therefore need to be particularly familiar with the assessment theories as the tools themselves provide no guidance. Further, the inherently time consuming activity of formative assessment is liable to restrict commenting and interaction with co-markers. Quality of marking and opportunities for teaching and learning may suffer as a result.

Open Source products are available that have similar features to the commercial products listed below. They may provide a cheaper option.

## 2.1 Microsoft Word

- Word processor
- Text editing and document formatting. Similar features are available in other brands of word processors.

### **Features:**

The lecturer can use Word to write the essay task description; scoring rubric; general feedback; add comments on essays and students may use it to write their assignment. An important feature for assessment is the provision of adding comments to assignments. One method is to use text of a different colour to the student text. This will highlight the markers comments. An easier way is to use the track changes and comments functions. The comments function allows the use of audio files.

### **Advantages;**

User friendly in that comments can be placed beneath essay text and linked by highlighting relevant passages. Track changes and comments functions allow comments to appear adjacent to reference points aiding clarity for reader. The comments function allows the use of audio as well as text.

### **Disadvantages**

The format of the submitted student file is changed when using these systems so it is possible to inadvertently change some of the students work. As this system is closely linked to the assignment structure it is not possible to highlight outside it in order to make higher level comments. Audio comments can make file sizes large. Staff and students who use Word will have to buy a licence although many organisations will already have licences.

### **Availability**

Commercial software suppliers. Software licence required. Guidance on using MS-Word mark-up tools is available at

<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/word/CH063555981033.aspx>

## 2.2 Adobe Professional

- Publishing tools
- Operating system independent document sharing and management. Similar features are available in other brands of publishing tools.

### Features

Allows marker's comments to be placed directly into Portable Document Format (PDF) documents.

### Advantages

Text box comments are visible next to their contexts in the essay. The essay format is unchanged. Comment summary pages can be added allowing for higher level feedback if necessary. The PDF viewer software is free and widely available.

### Disadvantages

To add comments to a submitted document, the PDF writer software has to be configured correctly to generate files that can be modified. For example it is possible to lock PDF documents which would prevent anything other than reading the documents. This could confuse less technically able staff or students. The Adobe PDF writer software requires a software licence, yet other PDF writer tools are freely available.

### Availability

Adobe is a commercial software supplier. A software licence is required for products capable of changing PDF documents. A free PDF document viewer is available. Guidance on the use of Adobe Professional for document markup is available from [http://help.adobe.com/en\\_US/Acrobat/8.0/Professional/index.html](http://help.adobe.com/en_US/Acrobat/8.0/Professional/index.html) - section 'Review and comment'. Third party tools for marking up PDF documents are widely available, e.g. <http://www.pdfannotator.com/> or <http://www.cutepdf.com/>.

## 2.3 Microsoft Excel

- Spreadsheet
- Formula and calculation tool. Similar features are available in other brands of spreadsheets.

### **Features**

Allows for recording and tracking of assignment details, class lists and other assignment information.

### **Advantages**

It can be customised to link to other systems allowing automation of some tasks. As with Word and PDF software, generic comments can be 'banked' and pasted as required. Also individual student sheets can be produced summarising scores linked to rubrics, overall comments and marks. Good support for emailing of feedback and marking detail (mail merge). Supports numerically focussed assignments. Excel provides comprehensive sorting and filtering tools.

### **Disadvantages**

Natural tabular format generally needs re-structuring to meet specific needs. Not a strong candidate for the preparation and submission of essay type assessments.

### **Availability**

Commercial software suppliers. Software licence required although many organisations will already have licences.

## 2.4 Email

- Communication
- Facilitates the receiving and sending of electronic documents

### **Features**

Allows for electronic submission of assignments (including a wide variety of file types and attachments) and marker feedback to students.

### **Advantages**

Students appreciate submitting their assignments electronically as they can work on the assignment right up to the submission date. People are already familiar with email so there is no learning curve. Supporting students with assignments via electronic feedback, including web links to resources, is effective. Ongoing formative assessment may be easily managed by means of instant communication. Electronic record keeping is facilitated. Post assessment communication may further support teaching and learning.

### **Disadvantages**

The responsibility for administration is with the lecturers. They are responsible for: organising class lists, dealing with bounced emails such as those that return because student inbox is full or the assignment exceeds the file size limits, and separating and storing student emails about the assignment. Also email addresses students actually use are often not available to staff. For actual commenting on student work email is limited in its function as the comments are not closely linked to the student work.

### **Availability**

Most tertiary institutions have an email system already available. In addition there are many free email systems. Commercial suppliers will sell licences for email software.

### **3 Learning Management Systems which can support working with essay-type assignments**

One of the most significant categories of generic eLearning software is the Learning Management System (LMS). Since the different LMS allow people to do similar things the features, advantages and disadvantages of LMS' are provided as a single entry. Giving credit to the central role of LMS in e-learning the discussion of LMS describes their core general features in addition to the assignment specific features.

A number of reviews which allow for the comparison of the features of LMS' are available via the Internet, for example at <http://www.edutools.info/>. Alternatively, a Google search with key words like 'Learning Management System comparison' will provide links to suitable information.

#### **3.1 Learning Management System (LMS)**

- Blackboard / WebCT / Moodle etc

##### **Features**

LMS are setup on an institutional basis. They organise students in groups according to their enrolments in classes or courses. This provides students, lecturers and teaching assistants or markers with a shared platform for document exchange and communication. Common uses of LMS are to provide students with access to teaching material, to communicate with the class and facilitate discussion among students, and to assist assessment in form of quizzes and assignments. Students need to be informed before enrolment of the use on an LMS for the course so they can ensure that they have the required level of access to a computer and the internet.

##### **Advantages**

Assuming that the LMS are available on an institutional level, the individual lecturer has the advantage of an electronic work and communication space that their institution provides and guarantees and to which all students enrolled, and only these, have access. Electronic exchange of documents and messages means instant delivery to anyone, regardless of time or location. This is important for distance students and also internal students, who might not always be able to attend face-to-face settings. LMS can be used on various levels, from just making material available to more involved learning designs, for all types of courses from pure distance to blended and face-to-face.

##### **Disadvantages**

As with any system an initial investment to familiarise oneself with its tools is required although most institutions offer in-house training and support.

##### **Availability**

Most tertiary institutions have a LMS already available. It is possible to install a LMS (like Moodle) oneself yet this will require considerable effort for setup and maintenance of student data.

### 3.2 LMS continued

- Content pages

#### **Features**

All LMS offer a feature that allows the lecturer to make documents available to the students enrolled in the course. These documents can be of various electronic formats (word processing, spreadsheets, audio, video, web pages, etc) and can be arranged in folders and labelled with headings. The lecturer can control details like the availability of documents on a time basis. The documents can contain details on course formalities, lecture material, assignment specifications or any other material.

#### **Advantages**

Providing documents electronically gives all students access to course material in a timely and location independent fashion. The lecturer does not need to print the material, distribute it to individual students or deal with students who have lost their copies. As access is restricted to students enrolled in the course the material is protected from unauthorised access.

#### **Disadvantages**

There are no inherent disadvantages.

### 3.3 LMS continued

- Communication Tools

#### **Features**

All LMS offer a range of communication tools. Discussion boards are used for asynchronous communication, usually among the whole class. The lecturer or a member of class post a message other can respond to in their own time. These messages can be private or directed at the whole class. The lecturer can setup various discussion forums and can control finer details, like access restrictions based on group membership. Chat rooms provide a venue for synchronous discussion, relying on users being 'online' at the same time. Again, the lecturer can control various parameters. Another form of asynchronous communication is offered by LMS internal email systems. Each student has their own LMS email address that is to be accessed from within the LMS and is used like any other email system.

#### **Advantages**

The communication features of an LMS allow the lecturer to stay in contact with all class members at any time, and, most importantly, facilitate exchange of ideas and discussion among class members. As students often change their personal email addresses an LMS email address ensures that the lecturer can reach each student.

#### **Disadvantages**

If used appropriately there are no disadvantages to using these communication features. What is required from the lecturer is to choose the most appropriate communication mechanism for a specific aspect of a course and to monitor the communication.

### 3.4 LMS continued

- Quizzes and Surveys

#### **Features**

All LMS offer tools for the testing of student knowledge and for eliciting feedback in form of multiple choice or short answer questions. Quizzes are prepared from question and answer sets. They can be setup as training exercises or for grading purposes. Surveys can ask for student opinions on specific aspects of a course. In contrast to quiz questions survey questions will not have pre-defined answers. Quizzes and surveys within LMS are setup in similar ways and the lecturer has numerous options for specifying details like availability and repeat access.

#### **Advantages**

The technical aspects of setting up a quiz or survey with the help of an LMS are easy. The lecturer can focus on developing the questions and administrative details, like who should have access and conclusion period, are taken care of by the LMS. The lecturer can setup large repositories of questions and instruct the LMS to randomly select questions from various categories. Quizzes, especially ones based solely on multiple choice questions with predefined answers and feedback, can be used for self-study and formative purposes. The advantages of surveys are that it is easy to canvas student opinions and suggestions.

#### **Disadvantages**

Developing good questions for quizzes and surveys is challenging yet this lies in the nature of quizzes and surveys and does not stem from the use of an LMS.

As with any form of surveying it can be difficult to motivate participation. The lecturer will need to use this tool sparingly and integrate it well into course design. In a survey the lecturer can usually not see the answers of individual students. This will have to be communicated to the students to ensure they will give their opinions honestly.

### 3.5 LMS continued

- Assignment tools

#### **Features**

All LMS offer assignment tools. The lecturer sets up an assignment by providing a task description and parameters for submission dates and possibly extension periods. The students submit their electronic assignment documents via the LMS. The lecturer accesses the assignment document via the LMS, by viewing them either directly in the LMS environment or by downloading the documents to their own computer. The lecturer can return electronic copies of marked assignments to the students via the LMS and/or can provide feedback to the students via the LMS. The LMS keeps track of all submission details and marking comments and results. It provides statistics on marks and the marks can be exported in common file formats ready for upload into other institutional systems.

#### **Advantages**

Using electronic exchange of documents is faster and more reliable than posting and distribution of paper copies. Deadlines are controlled by the LMS reducing the administrative effort and allowing students to make full use to the time until the deadline. Using an institutionally provided LMS means that the institution is responsible for data security and backup, releasing the individual lecturer of these tasks. Most assignments are produced in electronic format and electronic submission reduces the need for printing. Some document format can only be submitted electronically. Receiving assignments in electronic form is the precursor for the use of more sophisticated tools to support handling and marking of assignments.

#### **Disadvantages**

Electronic assignment documents require the marker to either read on screen or to print. The willingness to read on screen will depend on length and type of document, the quality of the screen available and personal preference.

## 4 Specific assessment tools which can support working with essay-type assignments

Specialise marking tools are designed to support lecturers with the marking and management of assignments. The tools will have some form of scoring rubric and frequently used comments. They would automate some of the steps such as generating the summary sheet. They may also offer lecturers the ability to extract all of the comments so they can be used to inform further teaching or evaluate the marking process.

### 4.1 Electronic Feedback Software

- Combination of spreadsheet and word processor
- A bespoke set of templates that use both MS-Word and MS-Excel. Extensive use of Visual Basic used to build these sheets

#### Features

Brings together the tools available in a word processor and facilitates the collation of many aspects of the assessment marking process using a custom Excel workbook

#### Advantages

Provide a consistent marking framework. Enables relatively advanced features of MS-Word and MS-Excel to be used without having to design a solution yourself.

#### Disadvantages

Users must have MS-Office installed and be proficient in the use of the Word and Excel applications.

#### Availability

Available by registering at <http://www.ljmu.ac.uk/cis/software/feedback.asp>

## 4.2 Questionmark Perception

- Assessment management tool
- This tool set includes support for short answer and essay type questions. Automated marking is not supported for these assessment types. Support for managing the delivery, marking and feedback of results is provided.

### Features

Allows lecturers to author, deliver, and report on various assessments question types such as short answer and essays. It is used mainly for automated assessment using questions such as multiple choice and matching. Questionmark has a tool that allows lecturers to mark essay type assignments. The tool is based around a marking rubric and allows comments within the student work as well as overall comments. It supports marking teams as well as individual markers.

### Advantages

Will integrate with LMS. Focuses on assessment. Provides choices of assessment types. Manages assessment from setting to reporting and includes tools for marking essay type questions including automated searches for assessor specified keywords. Manual marking of assignments is supported.

### Disadvantages

A licence is required to use this product.

### Availability

Commercial software suppliers and at <http://www.questionmark.com>. Software licence required. Other systems are available such as Respondus <http://www.respondus.com/>

### 4.3 GradeMark

- Online essay type assessment marking tool.
- Powerful tool for essay type assignments submitted online.

#### **Features**

Supports custom marking rubrics and original document markup. Online (paperless) submission and marking. Integrated with TurnItIn plagiarism software.

#### **Advantages**

Paperless grading. Original document format and content is not changed. Marking can be performed against custom rubrics. Multiple ways of seeing the feedback. Simple re-use of comments.

#### **Disadvantages**

Only available as part of the TurnItIn plagiarism detection system

#### **Availability**

Commercial software. Software licence required.  
<http://www.turnitin.com/static/grademark.html>

## 4.4 Assessi

- Specialist tool for marking and management of assignments.
- An online marking tool that helps academic staff provide rigor and consistency in the assessment of assignments.

### **Features**

Assessi allows for assessment that is transparent, secure, personalised and easy to use for students and staff. It facilitates the entire design and development process including formative and summative assessment. Assessi allows assignments to be in various formats such as images, pdfs, flash and quicktime movies and zipped files. It also allows for live or broadcast assignments to be marked and can be used with hardcopy assignments.

More information is available from the URL below Go to Section 6-1 in the article by Nick Laird and Grant Baxter:  
[http://www.auc.edu.au/conf/conf05/pdf/AUC\\_Conf\\_2005\\_Proceedings.pdf](http://www.auc.edu.au/conf/conf05/pdf/AUC_Conf_2005_Proceedings.pdf)

### **Advantages**

Assessi is a flexible tool that allows a marker team to build common understandings. Markers can give more comprehensive feedback because the marking criteria are well defined and it is easier to give feedback than traditional approaches. Assessi acknowledges the complexity of a design process.

### **Disadvantages**

The development and testing has been in a design studies department but Assessi should be applicable to other subject areas.

### **Availability**

Available to staff at Otago University. Assessi was developed and deployed in a Mac OS X environment.

## 4.5 WebCTConnect

- Assessment marking and management tool
- An online tool that works with WebCT V4.1 to support the marking of assignments and the filing of assignments, marks and comments. It also supports group assignments and marking teams.

### Features

WebCTConnect works with WebCT. It extends WebCT's ability to support the marking and management of assignments with the following features: downloading class lists, assignment definitions and assignments to the lecturer's computer; managing group assignments and marker allocations; setting up of a marking scheme; commenting on assignments in relationship to the marking scheme; exchanging of marking information between markers and lecturer; creating of a summary sheet for each student; efficient upload of marks, comments and commented assignments to WebCT.

### Advantages

A scoring rubric is a key feature of WebCTConnect. This is a fundamental part of successful essay marking. Using WebCTConnect it is possible to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the class as a whole. This can be done by reviewing the feedback and looking at the distribution of comments and marks across categories in the scoring rubric. The features in WebCTConnect such as the use of frequently used comments, and the tools to help manage a marking team will save lecturers time.

### Disadvantages

WebCTConnect has only been tested with WebCT 4.1. It is freely available but does not come with any support.

### Availability

WebCTConnect is designed to work with WebCT Campus Edition Version 4.1. It is available from <http://www-ist.massey.ac.nz/marktool/> but currently only configured for use at Massey University.

## 4.6 MarkTool

- Assessment marking tool
- An online tool to support the marking of assignments and the storage and comparison of comments to help future teaching.

### **Features**

MarkTool focuses on the marking of assignments rather than the management of them. MarkTool supports lecturers with the following: definition of a marking scheme; commenting on assignments with graphical reference areas; relating of comments to marking criteria; maintaining of lists of frequently-used-comments; summary sheet with all comments; separation of comments and marks; extraction of all comments across all assignments for a task. MarkTool can be used with WebCT 4.1 and WebCTConnect or can be used independently.

### **Advantages**

One of the key advantages is that it allows the marker to comment directly into the assignment without altering the layout of the student work. The advantages of marking assignments that were listed for WebCTConnect will apply for MarkTool. These include the emphasis on the scoring rubric, banks of frequently used comments and separating the comments from the assignment to allow for multiple uses of the feedback such as an analysis of all the feedback.

### **Disadvantages**

Microsoft Windows only application. MarkTool requires that the assignments are in PDF format. If the management support provided by WebCTConnect is not available some items will not be available such as class lists.

### **Availability**

MarkTool is available from <http://www-ist.massey.ac.nz/marktool/>

## 4.7 Creative Technology- Markin

- Assessment marking tool

### Features

The process of marking a single piece of work using Markin has three stages: Following receipt of work as a file, the marker imports the student's text into Markin either by importing it or copying and pasting it.

The marker is then able to mark the text using annotations, comments, and grades. The marked work is then exported in a format suitable for the student and then sent to them.

When several pieces of work have been marked one can use the program's comprehensive statistics analyser to collate and compare marks from different students, or from different pieces of work by the same student.

### Advantages

Uses rich text format. Allows re-use of annotations and comments. All marking is done on a computer.

### Disadvantages

Microsoft Windows only application. Changes the original format of the submitted work. Text only – graphs, diagrams and images cannot be included.

### Availability

Commercial licence required. Available from <http://www.cict.co.uk/software/markin/index.htm>

## 4.8 Markers Assistant

- Assessment marking tool

### **Features**

An application that focuses on the management of the assessment cycle. It facilitates the development of a marking schedule or rubric and the distribution of assignments to multiple markers. Once marked the individual markers' files are merged into the database. During marking comments can be added to the submitted work. Post marking moderation aids the quest for improved quality in marking. When results are returned to a student, only the comments that are associated with areas where the student has lost marks are provided to them.

### **Advantages**

End to end management of the assessment process. Reduced time and effort is reported in case studies. Improved marking quality. Targetted feedback was seen as beneficial by students involved in an evaluation of their experiences following the use of the tool. The tool can handle assessments which require the submission of multiple files. The student requests for assessment reviews were handled much more quickly with the tool.

### **Disadvantages**

Microsoft Windows application only. Does not allow markers comments' in the body of the student assignment.

### **Availability**

Available at no cost from <http://www.surreal.com.au>

## 4.9 Penmarked

- Tablet PC based prototype marking tool

### **Features**

Penmarked uses a Tablet PC to both view and then mark the submitted work using 'digital ink'. Markers view the assignment, which can be textual, graphical or any combination, on the screen of a Tablet PC and then annotate the work using the device's stylus. Penmarked is a custom application written to run on a Tablet PC running Windows XP Tablet.

### **Advantages**

Allows markers to 'write' directly onto the submitted work whilst maintaining the original document format. Marked up work is saved and/or printed in PDF format. Can handle textual or graphical submissions.

### **Disadvantages**

Prototype product. Requires that markers have access to a suitable Tablet PC.

### **Availability**

Research prototype product. Not commercially available. More information from

<http://crpit.com/confpapers/CRPITV50Plimmer.pdf>

## 4.10 Aropā

- Peer assessment tool
- Web based tool to support students reviewing each others work.

### **Features**

Aropā is a tool to support peer assessment where students review and possibly rate feedback. Aropā allows students to upload assignments, then allocates assignments to student reviewers, who then enter reviews. Aropā makes these available along with a grade. It also allows discussion of the reviews. The students use a grading rubric that the lecturer prepares. Aropā allows anonymous reviewing as well as allowing the student reviewer to see who wrote the assignment. It also has an online survey feature.

### **Advantages**

Aropā allows students to work on feedback and learn more about their assignment after they have completed their assignment. The tool appears to give the peer assessment process more credibility as it structures the students tasks and gives anonymity.

### **Disadvantages**

Good processes are needed to train students in the value of peer assessment and the techniques it demands. Installing the software requires specialist skills.

### **Availability**

Aropā is available from John Hamer at [J.Hamer@cs.auckland.ac.nz](mailto:J.Hamer@cs.auckland.ac.nz). More information is available at <http://www.cs.auckland.ac.nz/~j-hamer/>

## 4.11 My Drop Box

- An integrated package to support on line teaching and learning.

### **Features**

A suite of online tools which allow for the online submission, marking, management, and return of assignments. It also includes checks for plagiarism. The tools in the suite are called: Course Management Toolset, Safe Assignment, Re:Mark, and Peer Re:Mark. Peer Re:Mark is a system for peer review and team collaboration.

### **Advantages**

The Drop Box Suite combines its products into one e-learning package such that training times are minimised and its practical function is user friendly and efficient. My Drop Box can be integrated with institutional learning management systems. A standalone version is available for use without a learning management system. An extensive help system is available.

### **Disadvantages**

The standalone version only includes some specific My Drop Box products.

Requires licensed registration before download is possible.

### **Availability**

Available online once registration and fees are submitted.

<http://www.mydropbox.com/>

## 5 Summary of tools

Table 2 provides an overview of selected tools and how well they are able to support different aspects of online interaction for lecturers, markers and students. Seven aspects of practice are considered. These are presented in the top row of the table. The tools are scored against these aspects as either *fully supported* (2); *partially supported* (1); or *not supported* (0). The tool names are in the left column.

The purpose of the table is to direct the reader to tools that are likely to be appropriate and warrant a more detailed investigation of attributes and functionality. A decision on tool use will have to consider the specific assessment situation, the institutional environment and personal preferences.

The process of determining these ratings has involved a significant amount of subjectivity. This is particularly true for the general-purpose tools as there are an almost infinite number of ways of combining their features to meet a specific assessment need. The ratings therefore come with an attached caveat: it has not been possible to consider every possible use of a tool.

Do not let this table constrain your experimentation. Please view it as a guide based on the tool use the authors have been able to observe and as a challenge to you to discover new ways for using these tools in support of your assignment practice.

**Table 2**

Summary of how effectively the tools support the various stages of the assignment marking process

Key: 2 = Fully Supported 1 = Partially Supported 0 = Not Supported

Tool name	The stages of the assignment marking process						
	Supporting students with assignments	Submission of assignments	Preparation of marking	Marking	Keeping records	Releasing results and providing feedback	Using assignment experience for future teaching
Word ( <i>Microsoft</i> )	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
Adobe Professional	1	0	1	1	1	1	0
Excel ( <i>Microsoft</i> ) Spreadsheet	0	0	1	1	2	1	0
Email	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
Learning Management Systems	1	2	1	1	1	2	1
Electronic Feedback Software.	0	1	2	2	2	2	1
Questionmark Perception	1	2	2	1	2	2	0
GradeMark	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Assesi	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
WebCTConnect	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Mark Tool	0	0	2	2	0	0	2
Creative Technology Markin	0	0	1	2	2	2	2
Markers Assistant	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Penmarked	0	0	2	2	2	1	1
Aropā (peer assessment)	0	2	2	2	2	2	2
My Drop Box	2	2	2	2	2	2	2

## **6 Conclusion**

Lecturers providing high quality feedback are one of the most important aspects for teaching and learning. The marking of assignments can be the only time that students get individual feedback. The use of electronic tools to assist lecturers provide feedback and help manage the process can help improve the quality of the feedback and save time.

These tools acknowledge the requirement for humans to be involved in the assessment process. The tools support the automation of routine tasks including the efficient delivery, management and return of assignments. They allow the harvesting and reporting of associated data. The use of electronic submission of assignments allows new opportunities for the feedback on assignments. These include the ability to: structure feedback using good educational practice, better manage marking teams, evaluate feedback, and detect plagiarism. They allow for the ability for users to submit a wide variety of artefacts other than written documents.

Specialist tools have considerably extended scope, supporting lecturers with sophisticated and highly flexible suites. These systems may easily be integrated with existing learning management systems and can consequently be tailored to fit a wide range of requirements.