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Abstract: Skills in being able to interact with accounting information systems (AIS), are increasingly seen as critical components of undergraduate accounting courses in Australia. In an AIS subject developed at a tertiary institution, students were required to use a written practice set to acquire the necessary skills to use MYOB, a common, computerised accounting information system for small business. Following evaluation of, and reflection on, the learning process, there were indications that students did not sufficiently comprehend the written instructions provided as part of the practice set. To remedy this problem, onscreen-action-capture tutorials were developed using a cognitive apprenticeship approach to skill development. A full cohort of students will commence use of the tutorials in 2007. However, some preliminary issues and constraints have arisen which require resolution and need to be addressed. This paper represents the first interim stage in a study that will be progressed once the onscreen-action-capture tutorials have been rolled out to a full semester cohort, and appropriate student evaluation and reflection has taken place. In the interim, future possibilities for on screen-action-capture tutorials are now being contemplated; potentialities which were not recognised at the start of the project, but which have emerged as a result of the project.
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Using onscreen-action-capture tutorials to enhance student learning of MYOB software

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ABSTRACT

Skills in being able to interact with accounting information systems (AIS), are increasingly seen as critical components of undergraduate accounting courses in Australia. In an AIS subject developed at a tertiary institution, students were required to use a written practice set to acquire the necessary skills to use MYOB, a common, computerised accounting information system for small business. Following evaluation of, and reflection on, the learning process, there were indications that students did not sufficiently comprehend the written instructions provided as part of the practice set. To remedy this problem, onscreen-action-capture tutorials were developed using a cognitive apprenticeship approach to skill development. A full cohort of students will commence use of the tutorials in 2007. However, some preliminary issues and constraints have arisen which require resolution and need to be addressed. This paper represents the first interim stage in a study that will be progressed once the onscreen-action-capture tutorials have been rolled out to a full semester cohort, and appropriate student evaluation and reflection has taken place. In the interim, future possibilities for on screen-action-capture tutorials are now being contemplated; potentialities which were not recognised at the start of the project, but which have emerged as a result of the project.

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INTRODUCTION

Accounting information systems (AIS) are a critical component of most undergraduate accounting courses in Australia. Indeed, studies in AIS are compulsory for universities seeking to gain or maintain course accreditation from the professional accounting bodies CPA Australia and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia (CPA Australia and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia 2005). While students typically begin learning accounting principles using manual based systems, they must also understand modern forms of accounting practice using computer-based systems. Strong generic computing skills are imperative, as are highly developed skills in using computerised AIS software, since these are the skills and systems that will be utilised when students experience accounting in the business world. Yet, the traditional use of written instructions for computerised practice sets caters to a very narrow learning style and has limited appeal to today's technology literate students. The main objective of the project outlined in this paper was to engage students in their learning of an AIS, enhancing their understanding of the functions of an AIS and reinforcing the basic principles of accounting learnt earlier during the accounting course. The research question that was framed was: "How can we assist students to learn accounting principles more effectively using AIS software, so that these skills can be readily transferred to relevant real world contexts?"

At the authors' university, both conceptual and practical skills in AIS systems are taught in a core second year subject, 'ACC200: Accounting Systems'. ACC200 is offered internally across multiple campuses, as well as by distance education (DE). Enrolment figures vary, but a typical semester averages 130 internal students and 100 distance education students. The DE cohorts comprise students located in Australia and overseas serviced directly by the university, as well as offshore students taught by our partner institutions overseas.

The subject content provides students with an overview of, and exposure to, computerised AIS. An important component is the mastery of practical skills in MYOB, arguably the most common AIS software used in small and medium enterprises in Australia and the software which most students will typically encounter in their professional careers. All students are required to complete a practical MYOB exercise as part of their assignment work, as well as sit an examination which comprises 70 percent of their total assessment mark.

Due to the significant amount of other technical content taught in the subject, MYOB practice sets have been traditionally utilised to help students master the requisite MYOB skills. Internal students are able to take part in additional hands-on tutorials using the software, whilst distance education students rely solely on written instructions accompanying the practice set. While a number of distance students are working in an accounting environment, and commonly use computer-based accounting software, a significant number do not. These students struggle at times in learning the concepts and skills required to master MYOB, particularly in the absence of demonstrations and hands-on sessions.

In past semesters, there have been a large number of online forum postings from distance students, of which the following is typical:

'Has anyone else had the problem when going to "open your company file" in MYOB that when you look at the list of files that the icon for Galaxy is not displayed in version 13 of MYOB . . . I am not the most computer literate person but I have tried all I know.'

In such cases, the questions posed by students relate to instructions that are clearly outlined in the MYOB practice set, indicating that sufficient comprehension of the instructions is not taking place. As a result, a large amount of time, for both student and lecturer, is spent on addressing such routine questions, rather than on developing higher-order thinking related to the application of these skills in different and diverse environments.

Written instructions appeal to the highly visual learner; however, they are much less appealing to learners who learn best by hearing material or taking part in activities. Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) and Prensky (2002) highlight differences in today's students, compared to students of around 20 years ago. Prensky uses the term 'digital natives' in talking about today's students, who he claims want to receive information rapidly and prefer graphics over textual material. He warns against assumptions that the same methods that worked for teachers when they were students will work for their students today.

The study described in the current paper was designed to investigate alternative ways of teaching accounting principles through the use of AIS software, specifically MYOB. The cognitive apprenticeship model of learning was used as a framework for the development of a series of activities that take students through the process of applying accounting principles in a real world context, using the software.

Following the principal investigator's teaching philosophy of providing innovation by utilising the latest technology to facilitate a more authentic learning experience (Bransford et al, 1990; Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Cognition and Technology Group of Vanderbilt, 1990; Harley, 1993), an onscreen tutorial was developed that would appeal to a wider range of learning styles, and be accessible to both internal and distance student cohorts. A number of authentic activities were designed to follow the tutorial, so that students could practice their growing understanding of AIS in a scaffolded environment.

This paper commences with a discussion of technology-mediated learning and the cognitive apprenticeship approach. The action research methodology adopted for the study is then described, detailing the lecturer's work and reflections. Finally, various constraints encountered are outlined and a summary of the outcomes achieved to date in the project is provided.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Apprenticeship is a well-recognised method for helping novices to learn practical skills to an expert level (Rogoff and Lave, 1984). The notion and practice of apprenticeship is common in fields such as mechanics, medicine and carpentry, as well as in traditional learning. The expert 'shows the apprentice how to do a task, watches as the apprentice practices portions of the task, and then turns over more and more responsibility until the apprentice is proficient enough to accomplish the task independently' (Collins, Brown & Holum, 1991:p.2). In the apprenticeship model, 'providing instructions' becomes the first step in a much more holistic learning design.

Collins, Brown and Newman (1989) take the apprenticeship idea one step further and use the term cognitive apprenticeship to describe the way an expert can induce novices into expert ways of *knowing*, *thinking* and *reasoning*.

Stockhausen and Zimitat (2002) describe the first stages in this learning process:

'After observing an expert execute an activity (modelling), the learner tries the task with expert guidance (coaching). Whilst coaching, the expert provides reminders and feedback (scaffolding), which are gradually removed (fading) as the task is performed independently and with increasing proficiency. Coaching includes careful sequencing of instruction from simple to

complex; increasing the variety of examples and practice contexts, proceeding from global to specific skills.'

Several studies have shown the value of cognitive apprenticeships in enhancing student learning (Cash, Behrmann, Stadt & McDaniels, 1996; Snyder, Farrell & Baker, 2000; Glazer, Hannafin & Song, 2005). There is particular value in the social aspect of the apprenticeship design. Tasks are situated in real-life contexts and so the learner is exposed to the various demands that are normally encountered by the expert. There is also expert-novice collaboration, and cooperation amongst students to solve a problem. Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) note that when learning is not situated in authentic environments, knowledge and skills tend to become more abstract and less meaningful.

The modelling stage is crucial to the apprenticeship approach. In this stage, the expert should demonstrate a task so that students 'can observe and build a conceptual model of the processes that are required to accomplish the task' (Collins, Brown and Newman, 1989, p.481). Yet, as noted in the introduction to this paper, this task demonstration has been problematic in ACC200, with written instructions proving to be unsuccessful as a means of illustrating and developing practical MYOB skills for distance students.

Technology-mediated learning, or TML (Webster & Hackley, 1997; Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Piccoli et al., 2001), is widely seen as offering opportunities to bridge the gap between the internal and distance (external) student experience, fostering a higher level of engagement in distance education courses. TML can be defined as an environment in which the learner's interactions with learning materials, peers, and/or instructions are mediated through advanced information technology (Chou, 2005). It encompasses computer assisted learning (such as multimedia simulations), computer mediated communication (such as discussion boards, blogs and wikis), and managed learning environments (such as those offered by WebCT, Sakai and Moodle).

For demonstrating hands-on skills, one form of TML, onscreen-action-capture technology, has been found to have a positive effect on students' learning in online environments (Wang, 2006). Onscreen-action-capture technology imitates a face-to-face, hands-on computer demonstration. The technology 'captures' what is displayed on the computer screen, including any actions, and converts this into a video file that can be streamed or downloaded over the internet or placed on a CD-ROM. Audio files, such as comments on what is happening on the screen, can also be recorded with the video through the use of a microphone attached to the computer.

Using onscreen-action-capture technology has a number of advantages. While written instructions only appeal to the highly visual learner, onscreen-action-capture technology, accompanied by student participant involvement in activities, supports the three main learning styles: visual, auditory and kinaesthetic (Rogers, 2000). Visual learners learn best by using their sense of sight, and are influenced by colour, graphics and movement. Auditory learners learn best by hearing the material, while kinaesthetic learners learn best by activity or 'doing things'. As these learning preferences are largely biologically determined and are resistant to change, it is important to support all styles of learning (Wild and Quinn, 1998). Such technology also appeals to Prensky's (2002) description of the needs of today's student for graphics in preference to text, allowing students to easily visualise the processes that are being demonstrated and construct their own mental models (Phillips, 1997),

In the apprenticeship approach, modelling is followed by coaching, whereby the student begins to assume a greater role and the expert acts more as a colleague than as a supervisor. The student's learning is 'scaffolded', in that they receive support to help them carry out the task. This support is gradually withdrawn, or faded, as the student's level of knowledge moves towards expert status.

Wang (2006) emphasises that building an online community and interactivity among participants are important aspects to consider. For example, students can be encouraged to

answer each other's questions through a separate forum concerned with the practical tasks. He also states the importance of providing positive encouragement, consistent and frequent feedback, the inclusion of step-by-step notes to support the tutorials, increased student-to-student interaction and student application of skills to practical contexts – all of which are supported by the cognitive apprenticeship model.

In regard to the final stages of the process, Stockhausen and Zimitat (2002) state that:
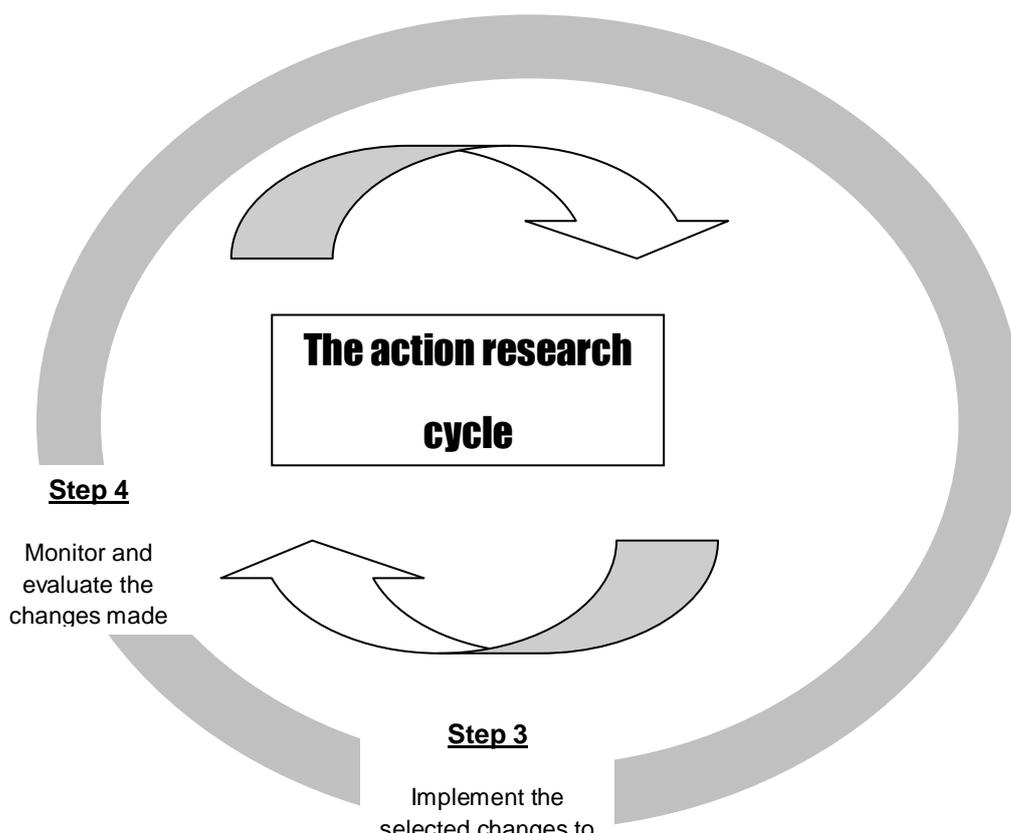
'Novices are encouraged to think about their actions and justify their decisions (articulation), analyse their own performance (reflection) and try out different strategies and observe their effects (exploration). As students gain more self-confidence and control, they move into a more autonomous phase of collaborative learning, where they begin to participate consciously in the culture.'

Assessment that allows students to use their new knowledge and skills independently in a new, authentic environment, to expert level, is a key to allowing students to demonstrate their expert status.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed for reflecting on and evaluating the principal investigator's experiences in the design, development and implementation of the ACC200 onscreen action capture tutorials is that of action research. Action research is a method of inquiry that is participative, grounded in experience and action oriented (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). The method emphasises the importance of solving practical real life problems, and is longitudinal, emphasising gradual learning and improvements (Gronhaug & Olson, 1999). Action research is a systematic research method that has proved particularly beneficial in improving aspects of educational practice (Hand, Sanderson & O'Neil, 1996).

Action research is undertaken through a series of cycles and reflections, foregrounding understanding and learning and is often depicted as incorporating five stages (Paisey & Paisey 2005), as illustrated in Figure 1.

The action research cycle

Step 4

Monitor and evaluate the changes made

Step 3

Implement the selected changes to

...action research cycle (modified fr... 2005)

First, question fr... assumption... ...em' that needs to be addressed ...titutes a 'problem' is dependent ... nvolved. What is a problem to one teacher may not be necessarily so to another. In this project, the problem was how to engage today's 'digital native' students in an innovative manner, appealing to their individual styles of learning, and thereby enhancing learning of, and learning outcomes in, an AIS subject and associated applications software. The research question framed was: How can we assist students to learn accounting principles more effectively using MYOB software, so that these skills can be readily relevant real world contexts?

In the second stage of the action research cycle the current situation is reflection undertaken in order to determine how teaching could be changed in improves learning outcomes for students. In terms of the ACC200 subject, undertaken into alternative methods of delivery to the written practice set, particularly those using technology mediated learning. It was decided that the use of on screen-action-capture tutorials, modelled on cognitive apprenticeships, could deliver improved learning outcomes for ACC200 students. A number of software programs that use onscreen-action-capture technology were evaluated, including Camtasia Studio, Shockwave Director and Adobe Captivate, three of the leaders in this field, with Cox (2004) noting that Camtasia Studio is easier to use, has the same functionality and is lower cost than its competitors.

In the cognitive apprenticeship approach, learning should be based on an authentic case study, and so a series of onscreen-action-capture tutorials were developed using Camtasia based on a spare parts company. Distance education students now have an option to use the onscreen-action-capture tutorials for initial learning, and once they have mastered the introductory MYOB concepts, they can undertake the written practice set and finally develop expert mastery of the MYOB skills required to complete their assignment task. As well as the above options, on-campus students also have the continuing benefit of face to face sessions in the computer laboratory.

In the third stage, the selected changes to teaching should be implemented. The on-screen capture tutorials have been developed, and a CD-Rom containing the tutorials will be distributed to students, both internal and external, at the start of Semester 1, 2007. These tutorials model some of the common actions required in order to use the MYOB software, including:

- **Setup details**
  Creating a new file and selecting an appropriate template
  Entering company information and calendar details
  Printing trial balance, general ledger reports and financial statements

- **General Ledger**
  Setting up and editing a chart of accounts
  Entering opening account balances
  Preparing general ledger journal entries
  Rolling over to a new financial year
  Printing general ledger reports including Income Statement and Balance Sheet

- **Cash Payments**
  Processing a purchase
  Processing a payment
  Printing reports including cash payments journal and bank register

- **Cash Receipts**
  - Processing a sale
  - Processing a receipt
  - Printing reports including cash receipts journal and bank register

- **Bank Reconciliation**
  - Perform a bank reconciliation including printing of reconciliation report

- **Business Activity Statement**
  - Print GST cash detail report
  - Complete all details for BAS statement
  - Print Business activity statement

As a support to the tutorials, the online forum (discussion board) will be the focus of a range of community-building activities throughout the semester. Sub-forums will be set up to enable students to provide feedback and advice to each other while progressing to expert status.

The fourth step in applying the action research approach is the need to monitor and evaluate the selected changes that were implemented. This can be done in a variety of ways, including staff discussions, keeping notes of meetings, student evaluations, observations, interviews, questionnaires and keeping diaries, including reflections on the learning process (Hand 2001).

As the onscreen-action-capture tutorials will not be implemented for a full cohort until next semester, full evaluation of their effectiveness is not yet possible. A pilot questionnaire has been developed (a copy is attached in the Appendix), and will be administered to all students undertaking ACC200 next semester in both internal and distance education modes to determine which particular learning method they used and to gather their perceptions on the effectiveness of that learning mode.

Fifth, the changes that have been implemented should be reviewed, and their effectiveness reflected upon. The practical experience of how the new teaching methods affected the learning outcomes of students must be considered (Reason & Bradbury, 2001), and where changes in process or method could result in improvement, action should be taken to initiate a further action research cycle.

The information from the questionnaire will be carefully reviewed to determine if any further changes should be made to improve learning outcomes. Particular note will be taken of what material students engaged in to learn the MYOB concepts, and whether this proved beneficial to their learning, from the student's perspective, based on a learner-centred approach. It is anticipated the cycle of practice improvement and reflection will continue throughout the life of the subject.

PRELIMINARY ISSUES AND PERCEPTIONS

Instructor resistance to change can often be the biggest impediment to moving to any form of new learner centred environment (Dunbar 2003). All lecturers and tutors involved in teaching ACC200 have been kept informed of the use of the onscreen-action-capture tutorials and their intended use next session. This should assist in a smooth transition to the use of these new tutorials, although not all lecturers have at this stage indicated their support for the innovation, and their attitudes may have an important bearing on the actual use of the tutorials.

There are some technical issues that have had to be dealt with as part of the project. In order to overcome the problems of remote geographic students, in particular, it was decided

not to put the onscreen-action-capture tutorials online, but to use CD-Roms instead. Whilst this limited flexibility in that students would not be able to access the tutorials online at any time, it ensured that the tutorials could be used by a broader range of students without disadvantaging those with slow internet connections and also ensured that large file sizes did not create problems for those students with limited bandwidth. As the rollout of broadband continues and the funding of digital divide projects financed under programs such as Broadband Connect (The Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, 2006) continues, it is envisaged that internet connectivity and speed issues will be less problematic in the future. If it is decided to relocate the tutorials to an online location in the future, the file size issue will need to be revisited. Further, if it is believed that the MYOB skills would be beneficial to students not undertaking the ACC200 subject, and they would like to undertake the onscreen-action-capture tutorials of their own volition, the administration involved in sending out CDs to such students not involved in the subject would be onerous. Simply being able to access the tutorials online would make it far easier for students not enrolled in ACC200 to access the tutorials.

Another technical issue encountered concerned the duration of the onscreen-action-capture tutorials. Whilst the software enabled the student to fast forward, rewind and pause the tutorial when required, preliminary trials indicated that it was harder to maintain concentration in the longer tutorials. In addition, breaking the tutorials into shorter specific segments also meant that the specific skill or technique the student was wishing to gain could easily be located without having to navigate through the fast forward and rewind functions of the player.

As there will be a choice of learning materials for students in terms of written practice sets and the CD-Rom for distance students, and the written practice set, laboratory sessions and the CD-Rom for internal students, it is important that students understand what is expected of them and the advantages and disadvantages of each form of learning material. These details will be made explicit in the subject outline.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

Perceptions to date indicate that the onscreen-action-capture tutorials will enhance student learning. There are certain limitations that need to be addressed, as well as a raft of opportunities that can be explored. The university's adoption of the Sakai learning management system should allow better integration of the onscreen-action-capture tutorials into other aspects of the subject curriculum so that it will be perceived less as an 'add on' and more as one facet of the overall delivery strategy. The continual improvement in internet connection speeds across the globe should facilitate a move from CD-Rom to an online version of the tutorials in the not too distant future. The ability to move materials online also results in a more consistent learning experience for different cohorts, whether they are internal on campus students, studying by distance onshore, or through partner institutions offshore.

This paper represents the first stage in a study that will be progressed once the onscreen-action-capture tutorials have been rolled out to a full semester cohort, and appropriate student evaluation and reflection has taken place. Further analysis will provide evidence as to whether the cognitive apprenticeship approach implemented through the use of onscreen-action-capture tutorials has proven more effective in the learning process than the traditional practice set.

As the development and delivery of the onscreen-action-capture tutorials evolves, so have (and will) the experience of students, subject coordinators and developers of tutorials. The action research method that has been adopted encourages a cyclical approach to reflection which should ensure a continuous improvement in teaching practice.

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APPENDIX -

ACC200 Pilot survey

The purpose of this survey is to find out something about the effectiveness of different media to help you to learn accounting procedures using MYOB. The information is used by your subject coordinator to revise ACC200 and further improve the delivery of this subject for future students. Your help will be very much appreciated. The information provided will also be used for research purposes as indicated on the Information Statement. If you wish to undertake the survey, but do not wish your results to be used for research purposes, please indicate this below:

I agree with my survey results being used for research purposes: Yes/No

On average, the survey should take only five to ten minutes to complete.

Thank you for your time and co-operation.

1. I used the following resources to learn MYOB (circle **all** resources used)
   Computer lab tutorials   ACC200 MYOB demonstrations (CD-Rom)   Practice set

2. I studied ACC200 . . .   on-campus   distance

3. I studied through . . .   Bathurst   Orange   Wagga   Dubbo   Albury

The following questions relate to your confidence in using MYOB after completing ACC200 (please circle the correct answer).

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Tend to disagree	Tend to agree	Agree	Strongly agree
4. I can prepare a General Journal entry	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I can process an invoice using the Sales Command Centre	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. I can process a payment using the Purchases Command Centre	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. I know the different procedures in MYOB for recording a cash sale, versus a sale on credit	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. I don't always know which report to use	1	2	3	4	5	6

	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. I can't prepare a Bank Reconciliation using MYOB	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. I can complete a BAS statement using MYOB	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. When I am given a transaction to process I can always choose the correct Command Centre to use	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. Overall, I feel confident in using MYOB	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. I feel confident in applying these skills in a work environment, if required	1	2	3	4	5	6

The following questions relate to your experiences in learning to use MYOB.

14. If you attended **face-to-face tutorials**:

		1	2	3	4	5	6
a.	I found the tutorials useful	1	2	3	4	5	6
b.	I found the demonstrations easy to understand	1	2	3	4	5	6
c.	I could recall the relevant tutorials required to complete an MYOB task	1	2	3	4	5	6

15. If you used the **ACC200 MYOB demonstration CD-ROM**:

		1	2	3	4	5	6
a.	I found the CD-Rom useful	1	2	3	4	5	6
b.	I only used the demonstrations if I became stuck	1	2	3	4	5	6
c.	I found the demonstrations easy to understand	1	2	3	4	5	6
d.	I could easily locate the specific demonstrations I needed to complete a task	1	2	3	4	5	6
e.	I was able to access all demonstrations	1	2	3	4	5	6
f.	The presenter was interesting	1	2	3	4	5	6
g.	The audio was clear	1	2	3	4	5	6

16. If you used the **Practice Set**:

		1	2	3	4	5	6
a.	I found the Practice Set useful	1	2	3	4	5	6
b.	I only used the Practice Set if I became stuck	1	2	3	4	5	6

c.	I found the Practice Set easy to understand	1	2	3	4	5	6
d.	I could easily locate the specific instructions I needed to complete a task	1	2	3	4	5	6

Now please complete the following questions.

17.	I found learning MYOB difficult	1	2	3	4	5	6
18.	I was satisfied with the instruction provided for MYOB	1	2	3	4	5	6
19.	I enjoyed learning MYOB	1	2	3	4	5	6
20.	I used the forum to ask questions of my lecturer and other students when I became stuck	1	2	3	4	5	6
21.	Reading the questions of other students posted on the forum helped me with my own problems	1	2	3	4	5	6
22.	I was satisfied with the amount of support provided when I had problems	1	2	3	4	5	6

Please circle your most correct response:

23.	I would prefer to learn MYOB through . .	Computer lab tutorials	ACC200 MYOB demonstrations (CD-Rom)	Practice set	Other

Please comment:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please tell us a little more about yourself. (Circle the correct answer)

24.	I am . . .	Male	Female		
25.	I am . . .	17-24	25-32	32-40	41+
26.	My proficiency with MYOB prior to studying ACC200 was . . .	Nil	Poor	Fair	Excellent
27.	My workplace uses . . .	MYOB	Quicken	Other (list)	NA

28. Please add any further comments you may have regarding your learning experiences with MYOB while studying ACC200.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for your help in completing this survey. Your responses will help us to improve our delivery of ACC200 for future students.