

Quality Code for Higher Education

Guidelines for marking the work of students whose Disability affects their ability to produce written English

BACKGROUND

1. The Single Equality Act states that Colleges have a responsibility to ensure that disabled students are not treated less favourably than non-disabled peers and that reasonable adjustments are made so that disabled students can demonstrate their abilities. This applies to all aspects of learning, teaching and assessment within the College. The College has produced College Guidelines and Procedures for Alternative Examination Arrangements for students with learning difficulties or disabilities, including medical conditions which give more information about the nature of alternative examination arrangements and the impact of different impairments on students in examinations. These marking guidelines should be read in conjunction with the above documents and can be found in Section 6 of the College Quality Code.
2. These students are entitled to use the College's disability declaration cover sheets to alert markers to their difficulties. The cover sheets ask the students to state the nature of their disability and markers are then expected to use the following guidelines when marking this work –
3. Students' work should be marked in accordance with the learning outcomes for the module. Learning outcomes and assessment criteria should be stated clearly in module handbooks. Students should be aware which learning outcomes are being assessed in any piece of assessed work or examination.
4. Punctuation, grammar and presentation should only be assessed when they are terminology pertaining to the subject area being taught. Where these elements are assessed they should not be assessed under examination conditions with the exception of foreign languages.

Extensions to Coursework Deadlines

5. Departments are asked to consider requests for extensions to coursework deadlines from disabled students. Students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) often take longer to produce written work than their peers as their reading speed can be slow and problems with working memory, structuring and organising information may make the process of writing itself much slower.

Extensions may be a way of compensating for these difficulties on particular occasions but should not be used for every piece of assessed work as this results in the student being persistently behind. Students should work with their tutor to plan, schedule and prioritise to minimise the risk of 'falling behind'.

6. Students with visual impairments may take longer to read information and to produce written work. Students with other disabilities may experience particular difficulties in relation to their disability e.g. pain, an epileptic seizure which may mean that they are unable to complete work on time.

STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Marking exam scripts of students with specific learning difficulties

7. Students with SpLDs may be eligible for additional time in examinations. For example, students have more time to read the questions and plan their work but this will not improve sentence structure, grammar or punctuation.
8. Correct spelling of technical terms may be a justified learning outcome for some modules e.g. where it is vital to spell technical terms correctly as in nursing or pharmacology. Where this is highly relevant this may be assessed under exam conditions but students must be aware of this criteria. Where correct spelling is a part of the marking scheme, a percentage of marks not exceeding 5 percent should be allocated to this.
9. If a student's exam script is illegible suggest to them that they contact the ALS team to look at options such as the use of a computer in future exams.
10. Focus on the clarity of the argument, rather than on details of expression.
11. Attempts should be made to separate marking of transcription errors and marking of content. However, while sympathetic treatment of assessed work submitted by students with SpLDs involves disregarding errors of spelling and grammar, the communication itself must be effective.
12. If academic standards are to be safeguarded, sympathetic treatment cannot extend to written expression so poor that coherence and intelligibility are in question.

Marking of written assessments by students with specific learning difficulties

13. Be aware that many students with SpLDs will have experienced negative reactions to their written work throughout their educational careers. Therefore, consider using two different pens, neither red: one for the material, and one for spelling and other language aspects. Red ink has highly negative associations for some students; a two-colour approach makes the different categories of feedback clear.
14. Correct selected spellings only (e.g. technical vocabulary) and let the student know this.
15. Correct spelling of technical terms may be a justified learning outcome for some modules for students to achieve e.g. where it is vital to spell technical terms correctly as in nursing or pharmacology. Where correct spelling is a marking criterion a percentage of marks not exceeding 5 percent should be allocated to this.
16. Write comments legibly, many students with a specific learning difficulty struggle to read handwriting.

17. Word processed feedback is preferable.
18. It is important that it be made clear to students with specific learning difficulties whether they have lost marks because of a lack of subject knowledge or because of failure to communicate their ideas about the subject sufficiently clearly.
19. Do not say 'please use the spell-checker.' The student is probably using it a lot, and choosing the wrong options. Tutors to provide specific feedback to the student. The tutor should also discuss the students approach to proofreading, as further support might be required.
20. Although assessed work, other than unseen examination scripts, is likely to be word-processed and spell-checked, you should be aware of the limitations of a spell checker and of other assistive software resources. Many problems remain in students with a specific learning difficulty' work even with the benefit of assistive software resources and spell-checking including:
 - homophone substitutions (e.g. there/their, effect/affect, course/coarse)
 - phonetic equivalents (e.g. fernetic for phonetic, homerfone for homophone)
 - incorrect word substitutions, (distance for disturbance)
 - American spelling (e.g. colorful, fueling)
21. When marking on ideas alone, make this clear on the script.
22. When offering written feedback avoid using innuendoes or nested/double negatives; students with a specific learning difficulty often find it hard to 'read between the lines'.
23. If a student spells phonetically, misses out word endings or has very poor handwriting, try to detect the sense of the text. Fast reading can also make it easier to find the holistic thought patterns which the student may have been trying to convey.
24. Be clear about specific problem areas, so that the student can see a way forward and seek further help.
25. In addition, avoid penalising wherever possible:
 - Long paragraphs that look like single sentences but are actually made up of an undifferentiated string of simple sentences linked by conjunctions
 - Short sentences that lack links with those that precede and follow
 - Sentences where it is possible to see that prepositions have been omitted or mistaken, e.g. 'of' in place of 'on'
 - Sentences that change direction mid-stream: this may be because the student has realised that the sentence requires the use of a word that they cannot spell and so needed to rephrase the sentence to avoid a spelling error
 - The use of a repeated sentence structure
 - Apparent preference for simple words rather than the more complex academic terms. This may reflect the student's difficulties with rapid word retrieval or with spelling and often creates a false impression of an immature understanding of the topic
 - Repetition of ideas, often using slightly different phrasing. This may be because the student is not certain the point has been clearly made and has had a second (or third) attempt

Marking presentations of students with SpLDs

26. Students with SpLDs often have very strong verbal abilities. However, they may have difficulties finding the correct word or pronouncing words. It may be appropriate to allow additional time for presentations for students with SpLDs. When marking presentations concentrate on what the student said rather than errors on visual aids.

If students are required to read aloud as part of the assessment ensure adequate preparation time is allowed as reading aloud on the spot can be very difficult for lots of students with SpLDs.

VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS

Marking exam scripts of visually impaired students

27. Students with visual impairments may be eligible to receive additional time in examinations to allow them to read the question and to proofread their work. In accordance with the DSA needs assessment students with visual impairments may present their work poorly and marks should not be deducted for this. They may also miss errors when re-reading their work as a result of their visual impairment and consideration should be given to this when marking.
28. Correct spelling of technical terms may be a justified learning outcome for some modules e.g. where it is vital to spell technical terms correctly as in nursing or pharmacology. Where this is highly relevant this may be assessed under exam conditions but students must be aware of this criteria. Where correct spelling is a marking criterion a percentage of marks not exceeding 5 percent should be allocated to this.
29. If a student's exam script is illegible suggest to them that they contact The ALS team to look at options such as using a computer or an amanuensis in exams.
30. Students who use Braille may make grammatical errors when producing written English as the structure of Braille is different from the structure of written English. Marks should not be deducted for poor grammar in written exams.

Marking assessed work of visually impaired students

31. When producing coursework students with visual impairments should have access to technology that will enable them to overcome their difficulties. However, reading and writing can be a time consuming process when using this technology so requests for extensions should be viewed sympathetically. Extensions may be a way of compensating for these difficulties on particular occasions but should not be used for every piece of assessed work as this results in the student being persistently behind.
32. Students who use Braille may make grammatical errors when producing written English as the structure of Braille is different from the structure of written English. Feedback should be given electronically so that the student can convert it into Braille. Persistent grammatical errors should be highlighted once and explained.

Marking presentations of visually impaired students

33. Needs of students with visual impairments vary considerably when giving presentations. Please contact The ALS team for advice.

HEARING IMPAIRED STUDENTS

Marking exam scripts and assessed work of hearing impaired students

34. Students who have developed hearing impairments as adults will not have difficulties producing written English relating to their hearing impairment. Students who were born deaf or who developed a significant hearing impairment at a very young age may have difficulties with the structure of written English as the grammar and syntax of British Sign Language is very different to that of English, and they may have no auditory memory to support their acquisition of English. The latter group of students are entitled to use disabled students cover sheets.

The latter group of students is usually allocated additional time in examinations. This means students have more time to read the question but this will not improve sentence structure, grammar or punctuation.

35. Focus on the clarity of the argument, rather than on details of expression. Use different coloured pens (neither red), one to comment on structure, spelling, grammar and linguistic expression and one to comment on content.

36. Do make constructive comments about both the factual content and the use of language. Explain what is required or what is wrong.

37. If possible, discuss the piece of work with the student. Talk through the errors in the course work and explain why the corrections are necessary. An interpreter may be needed to facilitate this. DSA funding or department to fund as required.

38. Check the student's level of understanding of the technicalities of language, presentation, and mental health.

Marking presentations of hearing impaired students

39. Needs of students with hearing impairments vary considerably when giving presentations. Please contact The ALS team for advice.