

Annexe 1

Guidelines for marking and feedback for students with specific learning difficulties (SpLDs)

NOTE:

The term “student” includes apprentices on degree apprenticeship programmes

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This annexe provides practical guidelines and information to support individual markers to implement marking and provide appropriate feedback, as an anticipatory reasonable adjustment for students with dyslexia and/or other Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs), whilst maintaining academic standards.
- 1.2 Students experiencing dyslexia are currently the largest sub-group of students disclosing a SpLD at the University of Liverpool. Dyslexia causes difficulties in learning to read, write and spell. Short term memory, mathematics, concentration, personal time organisation and sequencing may also be affected.
- 1.3 The British Dyslexia Association explains that Specific Learning Difficulties (or SpLDs) affect the way information is learned and processed. They are neurological (rather than psychological), usually run in families and occur independently of intelligence. They can have significant impact on education and learning and on the acquisition of literacy skills. SpLD is an umbrella term used to cover a range of frequently co-occurring difficulties, more commonly:
- Dyslexia
 - Dyspraxia
 - Dyscalculia
 - ADD/ADHD
 - Auditory Processing Disorder
- 1.4 The British Dyslexia Association defines dyslexia as a specific learning difficulty which mainly affects the development of literacy and language related skills. It is likely to be present at birth and to be lifelong in its effects. It is characterised by difficulties with phonological processing, rapid naming, working memory, processing speed and the automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual’s other cognitive abilities. It tends to be resistant to conventional teaching methods but its effects can be mitigated by appropriately specific intervention, including the application of information technology and supportive counselling.
- 1.5 These guidelines apply to those students who have been formally assessed by a specialist assessor e.g. Educational Psychologist. Students also need to have been identified and recommended for specific support i.e. reasonable adjustments are required and recorded as such on Banner. Arrangements for identification and access to these assessments are made by Disability Advice and Guidance (DAG).
- 1.6 The Equality Act 2010 requires reasonable adjustments to be made by institutions in order to alleviate or remove the effects of a ‘substantial disadvantage’. In practice this means we should do things differently if the usual way would substantially disadvantage a disabled person. Or it might mean providing additional services or equipment. Marking guidelines is an example of an anticipatory reasonable adjustment.
- 1.7 What is deemed to be reasonable depends on the individual circumstances of the case, including how important the adjustment is, how practical it is and the financial or other resources of the institution. It should be noted that it is the financial resources of the institution as a whole and not the budget of an individual department or service area that is applicable in this regard.

Advice is also available from the Liverpool Guild of Students

- 1.8 The work must communicate the student's ideas and demonstrate their knowledge effectively in writing; whilst fulfilling the assessment criteria that have been set within academic standards. Marking of assessments associated with professional and clinical programmes with fitness to practise considerations (i.e. those where assessment measures performance against clinical or professional criteria) should take account of these guidelines as recommendations only and relevant areas should implement the guidelines as and when appropriate.
- 1.9 Appropriate marking is an anticipatory reasonable adjustment recommended to some students, such as those with Specific Learning Difficulties, as they have difficulties with written expression; following the guidelines for marking will help these students to develop. For this reason, work from this group of students should be flagged to the marker.

2. Guidelines for Marking

- 2.1 When marking assessments completed by students identified as experiencing a SpLD, the marker is encouraged to maintain awareness of difficulties faced by students and implement marking as outlined below:

2.2 Marking considerations:

- 2.2.1 For many students experiencing SpLDs, in particular dyslexia, there is a continued difficulty with presenting work in the standard academic format. This is due to the ways in which dyslexia affects the student. Although each student will have individual support needs, there are often common characteristics amongst the work of those experiencing dyslexia. Markers should be aware of these considerations which include:
- a) Omitted words or punctuation
 - b) Evidence of slow reading skills/slowness to answer written questions
 - c) Excessive or misplaced punctuation
 - d) Repeated information or phrases
 - e) Unsophisticated language structure – in order to avoid grammatical errors many students experiencing dyslexia adopt simplified language structures which do not necessarily denote unsophisticated thinking
 - f) Simplified vocabulary when writing
 - g) Difficulties with sequencing or word-finding may produce a stilted style of writing which may not match the student's oral performance in seminars and other activity.
- 2.2.2 When grading work, markers should mark primarily for content, ideas and critical thinking. Where spelling, grammar and punctuation do not form part of the assessment criteria, and the intended meaning of the coursework is clear and presented coherently, marks should not be deducted for inaccuracies in the use of English language.
- 2.2.3 If academic standards are to be safeguarded marks cannot be allocated to written expression which is so poor that the marker is unable to decipher the meaning of the text, or the meaning is ambiguous.
- 2.2.4 Where technical accuracy in written expression is deemed to be a competence standard for a programme, this must be specified in the marking criteria and marks awarded accordingly for all students.
- 2.2.5 Marking should not penalise poor handwriting, which is a common trait for many students with SpLDs.

- 2.2.6 During feedback students should be made aware of the focus of marking. For example, if the marking is purely for use of ideas this should be stated; markers should then make clear that comments on spelling, punctuation and grammar are to support skills' development and have not resulted in a mark penalty. Without this information students may be under the impression that there are no errors in their work or that Appropriate Marking has been implemented.
- 2.2.8 A common perception is that students with SpLD have difficulties with written language only. However, some students may also experience difficulties with spoken language, due to weaknesses with short-term memory, when reading aloud from notes and/or with organisational skills. Therefore, as with written work, when marking oral presentations where learning outcomes and competence standards relate to content rather than style of presentation, markers should:
- Mark for content rather than the fluency of the presentation
 - Use positive feedback which is informative and constructive
- 2.2.9 Authentic assessment is one of the Liverpool hallmarks and is represented in a wide range of assessment types. Appendix 1 to this Annexe provides examples of how the Appropriate Marking Guidelines can be applied to specific assessment tasks.

2.3 Feedback considerations should include:

- 2.3.1 Sensitivity towards individuals and their work. Many students will have experienced negative reactions due to their difficulties throughout their educational lives. Constructive criticism that is sensitive to the student's difficulties can help individuals to progress.
- 2.3.2 Provision of clear explanations of what is required and what is wrong. Simply stating that a point needs developing does not tell the student how to change their work. Students with dyslexia may find direct constructive comments about their work particularly useful.
- 2.3.3 Provision of examples of how points can be developed, which will be beneficial to students with SpLDs.
- 2.3.4 Consideration of the use of an alternative to red pen corrections as this colour has negative associations that students with SpLDs will have encountered in their past.
- 2.3.5 Typed feedback and comments on a separate sheet as, even if feedback is positive, students may have difficulty reading handwriting.
- 2.3.6 Provision of a friendly and confidential setting to provide feedback to students. It should always be assumed that the student does not wish other students on their course to know of their SpLD and comments about a student's support needs should never be made in a public setting.
- 2.3.7 Consideration of verbal feedback in addition to written comments.
- 2.3.8 Consideration of setting comments against marking criteria and competence standards.

3. Additional Impact of SpLDs

- 3.1 Students may also have additional recommendations for practical support during assessments and examinations e.g. extra time or the use of a PC and/or specialist software. When considering additional support for such students it is important to clarify that this provision does not remove the difficulties which the student experiences. Rather the additional support compensates for some of the characteristics of SpLDs, e.g. dyslexia and processing speed when reading, but does not compensate for all. In some cases, assessed work is likely to be word processed (and spell-

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checked). Some problems are likely to remain in the student's work after spell-checking has been performed. This may include:

- Homophone substitutions (e.g. there/their, where/were, effect/affect)
- Phonetic equivalents (e.g. frenetic for phonetic)
- Incorrect word substitutions (e.g. distance for disturbance)
- American spellings (e.g. color for colour)

3.2 Students may proof read work several times over but due to their SpLD, will often not be able to identify incorrect use of words.

3.3 The majority of students experiencing SpLDs can, with careful teaching and guidance, learn to present coursework such as essays and reports in an appropriate academic format. However, students experiencing SpLDs will often continue to have difficulties with logical sequence of ideas and with moving smoothly from one point to another.

3.4 DAG can offer a consultation service for students to meet with an external Study Skills Tutor to help identify support strategies within these areas. Academic and support staff should encourage students to visit the Team for this and other related support.

4. Adjustments for students with Dyslexia or other SpLDs

4.1 Evidence to support a SpLD diagnosis comes in a number of formats but nearly always as an Educational Psychologist Assessment or in some cases an Occupational Therapist's Assessment (e.g. for dyspraxia). This assessment, which provides detailed findings of tests that have been performed to clarify if a SpLD is present and if so, a description of the difficulties, is offered with recommendations on how best to support the individual.

4.2 Once a student is in receipt of evidence of a disability, the student may be entitled to apply for a Disabled Students' Allowance Strategies and Needs Assessment via their funding body e.g. Student Finance, Research Council, NHS. The assessment identifies accessibility equipment, non-medical human support e.g. specialist dyslexia tutor and in some cases further recommendations, all of which will help the individual student to work on a par with their non-SpLD peers.

4.3 As well as students arriving at University who have a diagnosis, many others will visit DAG during the course of their studies to ask for support and consideration of accessing a full Educational Psychologist's assessment.

4.4 Any member of staff who believes a student may be experiencing a SpLD should sensitively encourage the student to visit or consult with DAG.

4.5 All students experiencing SpLDs and who hold proof of an assessment that recommends or supports the recommendation for Appropriate Marking and who have requested support via DAG, should have the facility to have their examinations scripts, class assessments and any other work for assessment identified. This identification should highlight that the student requires consideration of marking and this should be flagged up as "appropriate marking required" rather than labelling someone as SpLD or dyslexic.

4.6 For University examinations the central Examinations Team will identify any such examination scripts. For any other departmental tests and assessments, the academic School/Department will need to make this identification.

4.7 All markers/assessors of work should be informed by their academic Department of these guidelines.

Appendix I – Examples of how to apply the Appropriate Marking Guidelines to specific summative assessments (taken from the School of Psychology).

All marking should be conducted in line with the University of Liverpool's Code of Practice on Assessment.

Exam essay

The assessment provides students with the opportunity to write an essay in response to a question under exam conditions.

When grading work, markers should mark primarily for content, ideas, critical thinking, and providing focused responses to the question, without penalising the student for specific weaknesses of expression, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure and spelling. Marking should not penalise poor handwriting, which is a common weakness for many students with SpLDs.

Omitted words or punctuation should not be penalised too much for essay exams but issues with sequencing the essay into a logical structure should, as this is fundamental to an essay.

Exam short answer question

The assessment provides students with the opportunity to provide short answers to a number of questions under exam conditions.

When grading work, markers should mark primarily for content, ideas, critical thinking, and providing focused responses to the question, without penalising the student for specific weaknesses of expression, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure and spelling. Marking should not penalise poor handwriting, which is a common weakness for many students with SpLDs.

Simplified vocabulary should not be penalised too much for short answer exams as long as the responses presented are thoroughly described and focused on the question. Any statistical terminology should be accurate and reporting of statistics should be thorough.

Qualitative report

The assessment provides students with the opportunity to write a method, results, and discussion section of a qualitative grounded theory report.

When grading work, markers should mark primarily for content, ideas, critical thinking, and ability to present theory and literature in a style that is suitable for an academic audience without penalising the student for specific weaknesses of expression, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure and spelling.

Omitted words or punctuation should not be penalised too much for qualitative reports but issues with sequencing the report into a logical structure should (particularly given the guidance provided on structure – sections, subheadings within sections). Omitted words should be penalised when referencing quotes as they have had clear guidance as to how to do this.

Simplified vocabulary when writing should not be penalised too much for qualitative reports as long as the themes presented are thoroughly described and the theory presented is coherent and grounded in the data.

Public engagement blog

The assessment provides students with the opportunity to develop skills in disseminating research findings in a style and format that can be accessed and understood by members of the public.

When grading work, markers should mark primarily for content, ideas, critical thinking, and ability to present information and arguments in a style that is suitable for a non-academic audience (e.g. avoiding use of specialist technical language) without penalising the student for specific weaknesses of expression, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure and spelling.

Omitted words or punctuation should not be penalised too much for public engagement blogs but issues with sequencing ideas into a logical structure and use of overly technical language should.

Position paper

The assessment provides students with the opportunity to develop skills in presenting a persuasive argument.

When grading the work of students with SpLDs, markers should mark primarily for content, ideas, critical thinking, and ability to present a persuasive argument (e.g. one that convinces the audience that the opinion presented is valid and worth listening to) without penalising the student for specific weaknesses of expression, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure and spelling.

Omitted words or punctuation should not be penalised too much for position papers but issues with sequencing ideas into a logical structure and issues with developing a convincing argument that is supported by evidence should.