



Coursework and assessment marking for students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD)

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Eligibility for Marking Guidelines

Students registered with the Disability & Dyslexia Service (DDS) with a specific learning difficulty (dyslexia and/or dyspraxia) are eligible for the marking guidelines (also known as green stickers) to be applied to their coursework and assessments.

Information on which students are eligible can be found on the Dashboard or via your School/Department DDS Network Member.

Marking Criteria

Consider carefully what the candidate is being marked for: facts; knowledge; ability to reason; original thought. To some extent, markers should “look behind the text” and ensure that they do not unwittingly mark a candidate down for lack of skills which they would agree on reflection to be irrelevant.

When spelling, punctuation and grammar are considered an important part of the brief, it is important to let the students know in advance, to allow them to consider the extent of the checking and proof-reading strategies they will have to employ.

Possible challenges	Reasonable adjustments
Spelling and grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unless spelling and grammar are an integral element of the course outcomes, you should ignore the kind of spelling / grammar errors, such as homonyms / homophones that cannot be picked up from spell checkers / grammar checkers. • If poor spelling does not affect the knowledge being shown, a candidate should not be penalised. If however, spelling is crucial to the subject, such as chemistry, or, for example, the correct presentation of names and dates in history, then errors should be penalised.
Sentence structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Punctuation may be erratic. • Long paragraphs that look like a single sentence but are composed 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 • Clumsy/illegible handwriting: this is often an indication of the student's graphomotor difficulties rather than merely rushing to complete the paper and these difficulties are likely to be exacerbated under pressure

Essay structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essays can be unstructured. • It is likely that showing a structured train of thought is part of the marking criteria, in which case markers could be justified in penalising the student for disjointed work. • 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. • -f the point of the essay is purely to present an accumulation of facts, this might not be so important.
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Marking Assessments

Difficulties with the written word may show up much more clearly in exams than in coursework as students may be unable to spot any errors of grammar or spelling. The allowance of extra time is helpful for students, although this will not necessarily enable students to overcome reading and writing difficulties. For most students, despite the allowance granted, the stress of examination pressure exacerbates difficulties.

Possible challenges	Reasonable adjustments
Slowness in reading the rubric and questions. Exam papers with dense text may be difficult to decipher and multiple choice question papers are particularly difficult for some students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra time of 25% (this is a standard adjustment for students registered for dyslexia with the DDS).
Slow awkward handwriting, may be confused.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept that the script may be awkward to read.
Spelling and grammar difficulties which slow down writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take time to unravel meaning. This may involve some re-reading where spelling, punctuation and grammar are awkward. • Do not penalise for spelling errors or awkward grammar. • Clarify the extent to which marking criteria allow for awkward language to be ignored.

Structure – answers may be poorly structured; for some students, planning to a sequence is difficult. There may appear to be no clear flow to an essay answer, as ‘signalling’ language may be sparse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take time to identify a bright idea, or piece of information, that might crop up out of sequence.
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Marking Oral Presentations

Some dyslexic students may prefer oral presentations to written work, however, this method of assessment is equally challenging. It is also a common perception that students with dyslexia have difficulty with written language but are fluent orally.

However, some students with dyslexia also experience spoken language difficulties. These can include word finding, hesitations, mispronounced and incomplete sentences. They may also experience difficulties with organisation of their ideas orally, in exactly the same way as with their written work (University of Bournemouth, 2003).

Possible challenges	Reasonable adjustments
Fluency	Ignore aspect of delivery that affect fluency; e.g. hesitation and mispronunciation.
Stress and anxiety	Ignore apparent stress and anxiety and consider the presentation environment to try to reduce stress (University of Bournemouth, 2003).
Audience	Create a calm environment; e.g. fewer people watching.
Time	Allow extra time to set up before the presentation and to gather thoughts during the presentation, if requested (University of Bournemouth, 2003).
Presentational skills	Ignore similar difficulties apparent in the presentation of written work, such as organisation and sequencing.
Reading out loud	Take account of difficulties reading out loud from notes.

Questions	Questions should be presented clearly and repeated where necessary, if they are part of the process.
Thinking time	Allow thinking time for responses.

Adapted from University of Teesside, (2008)

Feedback

Feedback is important so that students with SpLD can realise the extent to which their low marks are due to a lack of detailed knowledge or to an inability to reflect their knowledge adequately in writing. This should be given clearly, especially if written. Students are quick to jump to the conclusion that low marks are as a result of not following the marking guidelines so it is important to make it clear that you have taken that into account to avoid misunderstandings.

Questions on the Marking Guidelines

Please contact DDS if you have any questions about the marking guidelines or how to apply them disability-dyslexia@royalholloway.ac.uk.