



The Disability Service

Marking Guidelines for Students with Specific Learning Difficulties

What are Specific Learning Difficulties?

Specific Learning Difficulties (known as SpLD) are difficulties that relate to the processes of learning and literacy. This might be specific to one area of learning, such as working memory and may be referred to as a SpLD, or it could be a problem that affects more than one process of learning and may be referred to as Dyslexia or Dyspraxia.



Common errors in the written work of students with SPLDs:

- Inconsistencies in spelling
- A specific word misspelled in many different ways on one page
- Simple, high frequency words such as 'who' and 'how' misspelled and muddled
- Parts of multi-syllabic words in an incorrect order
- Letters within words out of sequence e.g. flied/field for field
- A tendency to use phonetic spelling
- Capital letters used in the wrong place
- Substituting less effective words because of worry about spelling

Weak sentence construction

- Words missed out of sentences
- Phrases not in the correct order
- Meandering construction - too many ideas telescoped together
- Lack of sophisticated use of punctuation
- Punctuation muddled e.g. the boys hats' for the boys' hats
- Lack of sound, grammatical construction
- Inconsistent use of tenses

Poor essay structure

- Weak sequencing of ideas, paragraphs, sentences
- Unclear expression of cause and effect
- Lack of confidence in using abstract language
- Lack of awareness of writing genre

The above points are not intended to be an exhaustive checklist but rather to give tutors examples of typical difficulties which are observable when marking written work.

It is important to understand that the nature and severity of these difficulties can vary considerably, as can the coping strategies that students develop to accommodate them. Other factors, such as their learning environment and self-esteem, also make a significant contribution to their ability to cope. In order to ensure students are not disadvantaged by these learning barriers, marking arrangements for students with a SpLD have been agreed with the University.



Legal Rationale:

In October 2010 the Equality Act became law. This follows previous legislation, SENDA (2002) and the DDA (1995), which required Higher Education Institutions to provide reasonable adjustments to enable disabled students, including students with SpLDs, to access the curriculum.

This applies to marking as well as curriculum delivery and all aspects of learning, teaching and assessment within the University including exams.

When should these guidelines be applied?

You have been notified by the Disability Service that the student has a SpLD
The student has affixed an appropriate sticker to their work.

The sticker system

A printed sticker sheet



Guide to marking written assessments and exam scripts of students with Specific Learning Difficulties:

General guidelines

It must be remembered that the difficulties described above vary from person to



3. Giving Feedback (if the script is to be returned to the student).

It is important that the feedback given to students with SpLD is accessible and meaningful so that they can develop their skills and make them aware of your usual feedback style eg if you don't usually highlight spelling or grammatical errors as you mark, it is important to let the student know this, otherwise they may think that their work does not contain any errors of this type.

If you are commenting on spelling, grammar and punctuation select a sample section rather than correcting the entire piece of work and inform the student that this is your approach. This would be time consuming and wasteful, not to mention demoralising for the student.

All feedback should be constructive and positive and you should explain your comments in a straightforward and accessible way, using short, clear sentences with simple vocabulary. The feedback should also be legible, ideally Word-processed.

In all cases it is important that the SpLD sticker is removed from the student's work before it is returned to them. This shows the student that you have acknowledged their SpLD and prevents its unauthorised disclosure to other people.

4. A student must demonstrate that they have met the learning outcomes of their course and therefore there may be instances where the guidelines are not appropriate.

You may not always be able to apply all of these guidelines all of the time, for example where a student's ability to manipulate language is being tested. For instance, a student of Journalism producing a newspaper article, rather than a more academic piece of work. The reasons for this must be made clear to the student and feedback given as outlined above.

If a student's errors make a material difference to the meaning of their work, it may not be possible to overlook them eg, if a student of Nursing writes *hypoglycaemic* instead of *hyperglycaemic*, this might affect the mark awarded depending on the context in which it is written.

Another example would be if the surface errors or structural flaws make the student's work so ambiguous that it is impossible to understand the meaning, then this might reflect on their ability to demonstrate that they have met the learning expectations of the module and this would be reflected in the mark awarded. If appropriate in some circumstances, discussion with the student might help to clarify the level of their understanding or perhaps another method of assessing their learning might be more appropriate, however you must be very clear about the marking criteria especially in terms of knowledge and understanding.



Further Guidance:

For further information and guidance please contact the Disability Service, student services.

Find further information on the following websites:

<http://training.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/>

<http://adshe.org.uk/>