

Assessment Considerate Marking and Feedback Policy for Disabled Students

Introduction

The University of Wolverhampton aspires to create real opportunities for people from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences. It is committed to widening access and delivering an excellent and enriching student experience.

Wolverhampton is proud of its status as a multicultural and inclusive university, with students travelling from far and wide to come and study here. The University of Wolverhampton respects that everyone is different and works hard to remove any institutional barriers created consciously or unconsciously against some groups, so that all individuals have a fair chance to progress and develop.

The [QAA Code of Practice](#) for the assurance of academic quality and standards in HE recommends that:

“disabled students and non-disabled students are offered learning opportunities that are equally accessible to them, by means of inclusive design wherever possible and by means of reasonable individual adjustments wherever necessary.” (Part B; Chapter B3; 2012).

Nb. This applies to marking as well as curriculum delivery.

A [Curriculum of Opportunity](#) is promoted to support students in achieving their full potential in their chosen academic field of study and a focus of the Learning & Teaching Strategy is creating and developing well-designed and accessible assessments that are varied and inclusive. These goals are enabling the University of Wolverhampton to take an anticipatory approach to develop an accessible learning and working environment where all individuals can participate fully in the academic and social life.

This policy has been developed to maintain equality of opportunity for students whose disabilities affect literacy and/or language in assessment work / receiving feedback – written or oral. **This applies to students diagnosed with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) – dyslexia, dyspraxia, AD(H)D or dyscalculia and pre-linguistically deaf students.** It includes the legal obligations that the university, services, Faculties and staff are required to make under the Equality Act 2010, the

processes in place for implementation and guidance for academic staff on marking assessments and giving feedback to disabled students.

Legal Context

In October 2010 the Equality Act became law. The [Equality Act 2010](#) consolidates and replaces all previous discrimination legislation (SENDA, 2002; DDA, 1995) which required HEI's to provide reasonable adjustments to enable disabled students to access the curriculum.

The Equality Challenge Unit 2010 guidance on '[Managing reasonable adjustments in higher education](#)' reports that discrimination against disabled applicants or students can take place either by treating them '**less favourably**' than others or by failing to make a '**reasonable adjustment**' when they are placed at a '**substantial disadvantage**' compared to non-disabled people.

Under the Equality Act 2010 (as with the previous legislation), it is permissible to treat a disabled person more favourably than a non-disabled person. For example, a disabled student may be eligible for a 7 day automatic extension which is not available to non-disabled students.

Disability legislation allows for specific courses which are validated by statutory professional bodies to impose specific requirements which may supersede this policy.

The University's key responsibilities in relation to disability under the Equality Act 2010 are:

1. A prohibition on discrimination arising from disability.
2. A duty to make reasonable adjustments.

A reasonable adjustment involves taking action to alleviate a substantial disadvantage either at a strategic institutional or individual level. The University as an institution accepts overall responsibility for implementation of anticipatory reasonable adjustments; however individual students and members of staff are required to take responsibility for individual reasonable adjustments and to assist the University by complying with practices outlined in policy documentation such as this - **Assessment Considerate Marking and Feedback Policy for Disabled Students.**

Individual Reasonable Adjustments

The Student Enabling Centre (SEC) enables disabled students to access **individual reasonable adjustments** and support to ensure they are not placed at a **substantial disadvantage** for a reason relating to their disability.

Individual reasonable adjustments could include:

- 7 day automatic extensions
- Enabling assistive technology i.e. text to speech or mind mapping software
- Non-medical helper support i.e. Specialist Tutor / Mentor / Note taker / BSL Interpreter
- Additional Time – Examinations / In-class Tests
- Permission to use a Dictaphone
- Considerate marking

A Tutor Awareness Sheet (TAS) is a confidential electronic document outlining the individual adjustments that academic staff and service departments are required to make for Teaching & Learning, Examinations & In-Class test arrangements as well as requirements within Residential Services, Learning & Information Centres and plans for emergency evacuations (PEEPs) based on the individual needs and assessment of disabled students.

Although students often receive support through assistive technology or specialist tutor sessions, they may still require considerate marking / feedback adjustments.

Academic Standards

The University recognises that it has a duty to take reasonable steps to ensure all assessment and examination policies, practices and procedures provide disabled students with the same opportunity as their non-disabled peers to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes, without comprising **academic or competence standards**. It is important that learning outcomes and assessment criteria are non-discriminatory.

Staff in Higher Education should be reassured that disability legislation ([SENDA, 2001](#)) fundamentally states the need to maintain the rigour of **academic or competence standards**. Higher Education Institutes and staff are not required to compromise **competence standards** of the courses they offer but support the implementation of reasonable adjustments which aim to allow disabled students to achieve their maximum potential.

If, therefore, when individual reasonable adjustments have been made, a disabled student is not able to demonstrate academic competence as specified by the course requirements, he or she will not be able to complete the course successfully.

The purpose of coursework and examinations is for students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding. There must be no difference in the requirement for disabled students to provide evidence of learning than for their non-disabled peers. However, as a direct result of their disability, the standard of written work of students diagnosed with a Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) or pre-linguistically deaf students may differ from that of their non-disabled peers, and it is these subtle differences for which markers may need to make adjustments.

Academic staff may seek guidance on **academic or competence standards** from their Faculty Enabling Tutor in relation to specific learning outcomes and curriculum design or their Faculty Disability Adviser within the Student Enabling Centre (SEC) to discuss legislative requirements.

Application and Procedure

This policy has been developed to maintain equality of opportunity for students whose disabilities affect literacy and/or language in assessment work – written or oral.

Students that experience ‘substantial disadvantage’ and where this **Assessment Considerate Marking and Feedback Policy** apply are:

1. Students diagnosed with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) – dyslexia, dyspraxia, AD(H)D and dyscalculia

Dyslexia	Difficulties with handwriting, spelling, sentence structure, grammar
Dyspraxia	Poor or slow handwriting, poor structure in written work, difficulties organising paragraphs
Attention Deficit Disorder (with or without Hyperactivity)	Poor concentration, difficulties finishing work, poor time management, impulsivity
Dyscalculia	Problems with understanding basic number concepts and relationships (not mathematical reasoning).

2. Pre-linguistically deaf students

Difficulties relating the use of English language including: vocabulary and word knowledge, knowledge of syntax/grammar, and the use of idiomatic and metaphorical language.

These students, once registered and appropriate evidence of their diagnosis/disability is provided to the Student Enabling Centre (SEC), will have a Tutor Awareness Sheet (TAS) created with '**Considerate Marking**' listed as a reasonable adjustment.

Considerate Marking Stickers

On creation of a Tutor Awareness Sheet (TAS) eligible disabled students will be sent a sheet of considerate marking stickers from the Student Enabling Centre (SEC) to attach to any work they submit for marking in order to receive considerate marking. Each sticker lists a serial number that can be traced to the student.

If students are required to submit work electronically, they should quote their sticker number on the work above their title, stating that they are a student that receives Considerate Marking.

Misuse of Considerate Marking Stickers

Any concerns over the authenticity of considerate marking stickers should be reported to the Student Enabling Centre (SEC) as soon as possible so that the student's eligibility can be verified.

Misuse of these stickers by students constitutes academic misconduct and action may be taken by Faculties under these circumstances.

Guidance for Academic Staff

The Association of Dyslexia Specialists in Higher Education (ADSHE) [Guidance for Good Practice: Institutional Marking Practices for Dyslexic Students](#) refers to the recommendations made by the Singleton Report: Dyslexia in Higher Education (1999) which supports the view that

“academic staff should discount as far as possible errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation in dyslexic students' work, and that marking instead should be based on content, ideas and critical acumen (Singleton et al, 1999)”.

Marking Assessment Work

The aim of this guidance is to:

- ensure that students' assessment work is marked fairly, neither compensating or penalising for disability
- provide guidance for markers on good practice on marking students assessment work
- enable markers to give positive and constructive feedback

Although no two individuals experience the same combination of difficulties, the motor skills, information processing, memory, spelling/grammar/punctuation, difficulties with manipulating numbers, syntax and language acquisition of students diagnosed with a Specific Learning Difficulty / Difficulties or pre-linguistically deaf students are most typically affected. These students think in a holistic way which is non-verbal in format and does not lend itself to the linear nature of words and written formats.

Spelling, grammar and punctuation are rarely included as a marking criterion and therefore students, disabled or not, should not be penalised for minor errors that do not hinder the reader's ability to understand the content of the assessment work. However, if the spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors detract significantly from the content of the assessment work, it may be appropriate to start marking by proof-reading and making the necessary corrections. For academic standards to be safeguarded, considerate marking cannot extend to written expression so poor that coherence and intelligibility are an issue.

These difficulties are likely to be more acute under assessment conditions and during examinations and in-class tests students do not normally have access to spellcheck, assistive technology and no ability to re-order work if handwritten. Even though students may have individual reasonable adjustments for their coursework (i.e. 7 day automatic extensions and/or Specialist One-to-One Study Skills Tuition) and examinations or in-class tests (i.e. additional time and/or use of a computer or scribe) these arrangements do not fully compensate for their difficulties.

Therefore the following considerations should be made when marking the work of a disabled student that is eligible for Considerate Marking.

Please note that a student with dyscalculia should have the considerate marking guidelines applied only to those aspects covering use and application of number.

Considerate Marking Guideline	Difficulties Experienced	Good Practice for Marker
Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar	<p>Spelling errors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single words misspelled in different ways • Parts of polysyllables in incorrect order • Letters within words out of sequence e.g. flied/field for field • A tendency to use phonetic spelling e.g. eny/any • Use of capital letters in the wrong place • Misuse of spellcheck leading to incorrectly selected words e.g. ‘sublimely perception’ instead of ‘subliminal perception’ • Misspelling proper names such as the names of researchers • Telescoping polysyllabic words e.g. rembered/remembered • Homophone substitution e.g. to/too, their/there, effect/affect • Letter reversals e.g. dose/does • American spelling e.g. colorful <p>Punctuation and grammatical errors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misuse or omission of punctuation marks • Failure to identify sentence boundaries - possible overuse of conjunctions • Inappropriate grammatical constructions • Excessive use of or misplaced punctuation <p>Syntax errors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbs used in all forms: tenses, auxiliaries, infinitives and gerunds (-ing forms) • Use of question forms • Use of negative forms especially those involving verb ‘to be’, ‘have’, ‘do’ etc • Use of pronouns, especially possessive pronouns • Use of plurals • Use of the definite, indefinite and zero articles (a/an, the, -) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignore any spelling, grammar, punctuation or syntax errors (unless a competency standard) • If they are part of the competency standards make them explicit in marking criteria available in the module guide / virtual learning environment • If they are part of the competency standards, indicate the marks deducted for poor spelling e.g. commonly no more than 2-5% • If correcting do not point out every error: select and state the significant issues • Use a pencil or black ink for these corrections • Mark the content of the students work using a different colour (excl. red) of ink without penalising for any corrections in pencil or black ink • If you have not made

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of embedded and complex sentences • Recognition of parts of speech and their correct use - noun/verb/adjective/adverb form of words are commonly substituted for each other e.g. perform/performance • General word order- often follow word order used in British Sign Language 	<p>comments on spelling, punctuation or grammar, inform the student</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide guidance using simple sentences or models to help explain corrections / how to improve errors • Do not say 'please use the spell-checker.' The student is probably using it a lot, and choosing the wrong options
Use and application of number	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent difficulties with Arithmetic, confusing signs+, -, ×, ÷ • Difficulties with times tables and mental arithmetic • Difficulties with sequential processing which can even mean difficulties with using a calculator • Difficulties relating to basic number concepts such as telling the time, calculating prices, handling change and estimating and measuring • Mixing up times of scheduled appointments – miscalculating how long it will take to travel between venues • Problems organising budgets and keeping track of finances • Poor self-esteem as a learner of mathematics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignore difficulties with manipulating numbers and focus on marking content unless a competency standard • For parts of a course which have numerical content students may need additional feedback. • Do not ask students with Dyscalculia to solve numeracy problems in front of the whole class
General presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor presentation of work even when produced using a computer package • Work may appear “shoddy” or careless 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignore presentation of work and focus on

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty in presenting work in a standard academic format • Difficulties with sequencing or word-finding may produce a stilted style of writing which may not match the students' oral communication in class 	marking content unless a competency standard
Handwriting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Untidy handwriting or the inability to use cursive style • Confusion of visually similar letters (b/d, p/q) • Misuse of capital letters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not penalise for poor handwriting • If handwriting is illegible discuss this with the student and check they are accessing individual reasonable adjustments via SEC e.g. scribe / use of a standard PC / Specialist One-to-One Study Skills Support
Structure and Academic Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of sentence and/or paragraph structure leading to a repetition of information and a failure to develop a sustained and detailed discussion • Lack a "polished finish" that their peers demonstrate • Short sentences, repeated sentence construction or simple words and terminology does not necessarily indicate poor understanding or unsophisticated concept development but may reflect difficulties with word retrieval and sentence construction characteristic of individuals with a SpLD diagnosis or pre-linguistically deaf students • Writing digresses from the assessment task by either including information that is irrelevant or expanding unnecessarily on points of minor importance • Unusual links between topics are made that reflect a students' lateral and creative thinking skills but do not meet the learning outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on what the student is trying to argue rather than on the errors • Even though it is not possible to award marks for digressions from the assessment task it can be supportive to acknowledge the students research attempts when providing feedback
Word knowledge and vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Words with multiple meanings • Words borrowed from other languages • Unfamiliar or unusual words (jargon etc.) • Use of phrasal verbs, many of which have multiple meanings e.g. get off • Over use of active forms of language rather than passive forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignore word knowledge or vocabulary of work unless a competency standard

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often limited breadth of vocabulary 	
Metaphorical and idiomatic language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is almost impossible for a native English speaker to talk without using many examples of idiomatic and metaphorical language, the meanings of which are often really obscure to deaf people. This may be due to the fact that they are Sign Language users and so, as with other languages, there may not be a direct translation. Alternatively, it may be because a deaf person does not hear or see these expressions in print often enough to internalize them and add them to their personal bank of vocabulary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do make constructive comments about both the factual content and the use of language. Explain what is required or what is wrong.

A Step-by-Step Marker's Guide

1. Make it clear to the student that the marking is about the learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and for ideas, knowledge and understanding of the subject content and analytical, critical and evaluative or other skills and not the technicalities of spelling, grammar and punctuation (unless specified as a learning outcome/competence standard)
2. Make the marking criteria for the module explicit in the module guide and/or in the virtual learning environment
3. Read the work quickly looking for ideas, understanding, knowledge and content rather than errors
4. Use a clear system for corrections indicating the type of error in the margin against the line they are found e.g. **sp** = spelling mistake / **ss** = sentence structure / **pn** = punctuation / **gr** = grammar / **lt** = layout / **r** = repetition / **t** = tense
5. Encourage students to go through their corrections with either their Specialist One-to-One Study Skills Support Tutor or in a follow up session with you
6. If you are commenting on spelling, grammar and punctuation, select a sample section rather than correcting the entire assessment work and inform the student that this is your approach
7. Make positive and constructive comments about what is good as well as how it can be improved
8. Make your comments brief, clear and concise and explain improvements in a straightforward and accessible way using simple sentences i.e. "You are not clear at this point" followed by "Do you mean..?" is more helpful than a vague comment such as "Does not make sense".
9. Written feedback should be word processed as students struggle to read handwriting
10. Offer the student the opportunity to go over the comments with you in a face-to-face appointment / Skype session

Giving Feedback on Assessments

Please be aware that many students diagnosed with a Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) or pre-linguistically deaf students will have experienced negative reactions to their written work throughout their educational lives.

Feedback should be offered in written and verbal formats to meet the needs of students varying learning styles visual / auditory.

Comment as far as possible on the strengths of the students' work and try the 'sandwich technique' when providing feedback:
positive comment / constructive advice for improvements / positive comment

Feedback should be word processed and attached to the students assessment work if providing feedback in the written format.

Avoid using innuendoes or nested/double negatives in written feedback; as disabled students often find it hard to 'read between the lines'.

Avoid using certain symbols such as crosses, question marks, exclamation marks when marking as these can be perceived as critical without adequate explanations to establish the reasons for use.

Assessing Oral Presentations

Although some eligible students favour oral presentations as an assessment method, others experience anxiety or even phobic reactions. Where these negative feelings occur, they can sometimes be linked to humiliating experiences of reading aloud at school.

Where a student has a significantly high level of anxiety over oral presentations, offer support and reassurance where possible. In extreme cases of anxiety or phobia, alternative methods can be explored, such as allowing the student to submit a video recording of his or her presentation or allowing the presentation to be made directly to the lecturer without other students present. This can be considered an interim measure if the student is willing to participate fully once his or her confidence has increased.

Marking Visual Aids

The purpose of assessing oral presentations given by eligible students is to avoid penalising them for mistakes made with grammar, spelling and punctuation or with speech production.

Establish the learning outcomes for the oral presentation in question. Mark the work with the intention of giving credit for the student's achievements in meeting these learning outcomes by focusing on the content and understanding of the topic.

Avoid penalising the student for mistakes with the basic skills errors on visual aids or hand-outs.

Please refer to the section titled 'Guidance for Academic Staff' – 'Marking Assessment Work' when marking the written content of visual aids i.e. PowerPoint slides.

Marking the Students Delivery

Several students can have speech and language difficulties that affect the pronunciation of words. Some experience a stammer when under pressure and this can cause high levels anxiety in formal speaking situations, such as oral presentations.

Avoid penalising the student for mistakes with the pronunciation of words or for misreading from the visual aids.

Procedure for Eligible Disabled Students to Appeal

If an eligible student believes his/her work has not been marked in accordance with the guidelines outlined in this document, s/he can use the Academic Appeals procedure (available at <http://www.wlv.ac.uk/current-students/conduct-and-appeals/academic-appeals/>).

An eligible student will not have the right to appeal against penalisation for failing to meet core requirements that have been established as marking criteria and of which the student has been informed within the written feedback for the assessment.

These assessment guidelines only apply from the date on which they became formally introduced. Students do not have the right to request re-marking or re-grading of work marked prior to the introduction of these guidelines.

Students who are identified as being eligible for Considerate Marking whilst studying at the university (for example through formal assessment of SpLD / medical evidence) are not entitled to have coursework re-marked that they submitted before their eligibility was identified. However, if such a student submits a claim for extenuating circumstances, it is appropriate to take into account that s/he has been studying with an unidentified disability and has therefore not received relevant support.

Further Information and Guidance

The university will support staff in the use of these guidelines both through awareness sessions and online guidance.

Online guidance is available via WOLF module - [SEC – Info and Guidance for Staff](#)

Bespoke awareness sessions can be requested by contacting the Disability Advisory Team, Student Enabling Centre, sec@wlv.ac.uk or 01902 321074.