

This document is under revision to reflect current research

University of Nottingham Disability Support Services

Marking Guidelines for students with Specific Learning Differences (SpLDs) in examinations

These guidelines have been produced to aid staff in marking the examination papers of students who have used the sticker system to identify themselves as having a Specific Learning Difference (SpLD). A detailed account of the rationale for these recommendations has been made available to all departments and is also available on the Disability Support Services website.

There is very little published research into the writing skills of dyslexic adults and so we have tried to provide a list of grammatical features that we have found not only to be common in the work of our dyslexic students but also ones that they have difficulty in eradicating. This list is based upon our work here, over the past decade, and that of dyslexia support tutors at the University of Leicester. We would point out that not all dyslexic writers display these characteristics and that some students with dyslexia will demonstrate greater skills in writing than those who are not so identified.

The key recommendation is: *wherever possible, do not penalise for errors in spelling, syntax, word order, and expression.*

We do recognise that, in some departments, clarity of expression and accuracy in spelling is an integral part of what is being tested and therefore errors of this kind cannot be ignored. If this is the case, we suggest that the departmental policy is transparent to students so that they understand what is required of them and where they are likely to be penalised. Departments should also be prepared to offer feedback about their examination performance to dyslexic students so that they know where they have lost marks and have ample opportunity to address their errors.

We suggest that you mark positively for content, focussing on what the student is trying to say or argue rather than on minor errors.

In addition, wherever possible, avoid penalising:

- Long paragraphs that look like a single sentences 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 or with

This document is under revision to reflect current research

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.
- Clumsy/illegible handwriting: this is often an indication of the student's grapho-motor difficulties rather than merely rushing to complete the paper and these difficulties are likely to be exacerbated under pressure.

Please note that it is common for dyslexic students to do less well in examinations than their coursework marks, their commitment and oral contribution might predict.

Feedback

Additional effort should be made to provide feedback to dyslexic students so that they know whether they have lost marks because they lack detailed knowledge of the material or whether they have not managed to reflect their knowledge adequately in their writing.

If you would like further information about dyslexia, please see the [British Dyslexia Association](#) website or [contact Disability Support Services](#).