

Guidance for marking scripts for students with specific learning difficulties

According to the Equality Act of 2010, Higher Education Institutions have an anticipatory duty to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled students are not less favourably treated. In this respect, the marking system in these guidelines should be seen as a levelling of the playing field rather than leniency.

These guidelines are intended to assist academic staff when assessing the written work of students who have diagnosed specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia or dyspraxia, and have 'Marking Guidelines' as a requirement within their ILP. They are intended to avoid penalising the written work of such students for features associated with their specific learning difficulty. However, whilst language-based errors may not be a barrier to demonstrating knowledge, understanding and ideas, in certain subjects these guidelines should not compromise competence standards, or core learning outcomes.

General guidelines for marking

There are a range of common characteristics that may be evident in the written work of students with specific learning difficulties; they are likely to make more spelling errors, even in word processed work; punctuation, grammar and sentence structure may be weak; their proof reading skills tend to be unreliable; and language structure may be unsophisticated with omitted or repeated information, words or phrases.

1. Read quickly initially, to assess for ideas, understanding and knowledge.
2. Aim for a clear separation between the content of the work and language errors, to ensure there is no subjective interpretation of the student's ability.
3. Mark principally for content and understanding - disregarding, as far as possible, errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation.
4. Be very clear about the marking criteria, especially in terms of spelling, grammar and punctuation.
5. Avoid using red to denote errors, due to negative associations that the student may have encountered in the past.
6. Ensure that feedback is clear, constructive and sensitive to the student's difficulties. Write legibly, avoiding complex sentence structures.

Error Analysis Marking:

Even if you are marking without penalising for mistakes in the technical use of language, students do need help to develop their written English skills. The following marking system will help a student to aim towards independent learning, as long as it is augmented with explanations, examples and models of good practice.

Error analysis marking encourages the student to find and correct errors identified by a tutor through a coded mark in the margin e.g. **Sp** - spelling, **G** -grammar, **SS** - sentence structure, **P** - punctuation, **V** - vocabulary, **O** - word omission, **R** - repetition, **T** - tense.

Using this guidance the student will examine the line of writing, identify the highlighted error and attempt to correct it. Once a student learns to identify particular types of error, s/he can begin to check their own work and re-draft accordingly.

Guidance for the marking of viva assessment for students with specific learning difficulties

The difficulties experienced by students with specific learning difficulties which may affect their performance during viva assessment will include;

- Problems ordering sequentially
- Can easily lose their place in text
- Difficulties organising their ideas
- Short-term memory deficit can result in them forgetting questions
- Can find assessment stressful due to past negative experiences

General guidelines for viva assessment:

1. **Questions** - Ensure that questions are presented clearly and that wording is unambiguous. They should address a single point and not have multiple parts. Be prepared to repeat or break questions down and allow thinking time for responses, where necessary
2. Consider that the student may show signs of apparent stress and anxiety
3. Extra time may be required to allow for difficulties affecting organisation and sequencing
4. Consider that the student may experience difficulties reading aloud from notes and lack fluency
5. Consider providing short breaks to allow the student to refocus
6. Mark for content rather than fluency

It may also be helpful to offer the student the opportunity to discuss the viva with staff prior to the assessment and that it is made clear to them what will be expected of them during the viva.