

## **Guidelines for Examiners when Marking Scripts of Students with a Disability who have a Reading, Writing and or Spelling Difficulty**

Marking Guidelines inform the examiner that the student, due to the nature of his/her disability, has a particular difficulty with spelling, grammar and written expression, and provide a framework for marking the scripts of such students. Marking Guidelines apply to end of semester officially timetabled examinations only.

If a core component of assessment is that of competence in spelling, grammar and written expression, it is not possible to disregard these elements (for example, languages, journalism).

A student with a disability who has a reading, writing and/or spelling difficulty can be disadvantaged when assessment takes the form of a written timed examination. Student's written work may contain:

1. Surface errors in spelling and grammar such as inaccuracies in the use of tense, grammatical agreement, plurals, spelling and punctuation.
2. Structural flaws including weak sequencing of ideas, paragraphs, and sentences; unclear expression of cause and effect; lack of competence in using abstract language or lack of awareness of writing genre.

The following should be taken into consideration:

1. If the script contains all the required elements but does not introduce them in a clear logical order, avoid penalising the student for a lack of structure in their writing unless this is a stipulated competency being assessed. A quick first reading of the script allows for judging if the student has an underlying understanding of the topic, which then allows assessment as to their performance against the learning outcomes.
2. Errors in spelling do not mean that the student is confused about the meaning of the

word or its function in their writing. Generally, such errors do not lead to ambiguity and should not be penalised when subject knowledge is being assessed.

3. Lexical errors, such as *coarse* for *course*, do not mean that the student is confused about the meaning of the words. This kind of error should not be penalised unless it leads to ambiguity.
4. Grammatical errors, like incorrect tense endings, lack of subject – verb agreement and incorrect word order may not affect the meaning of the sentence. For example: *Some of the features of Socratic dialogues were they seek definitions of abstract ideas, crossexamining beliefs to expose contradictions and he used to use questioning to bring the pupil to recognise the truth.* Here the student's meaning is clear, the errors do not lead to ambiguity and the student should not be penalised.
5. Punctuation may not be used as a tool for clarifying meaning. Scripts may contain long sentences that are difficult to follow with indiscriminate punctuation or no punctuation at all. Very short sentences or fragments of sentences might also be produced. For instance: *The study considered three main areas of research. The effect's of frequent drug use the role of the family in the offenders behaviour and the impact of custodial sentence's on reoffending.* In this case the student's meaning is clear, but errors in punctuation can lead to ambiguity.
6. Some students may have restricted vocabulary and use a far more limited range of words than one would expect. Avoid penalising students who may have an immature style of writing, unless written communication is a specified learning outcome.
7. Where grammar and spelling are core competencies of a course a student's work must be marked on the basis of accuracy in the language and therefore these marking guidelines will not apply.
8. In all subjects, if a student's errors make a material difference to the meaning of their work, it will not be possible to classify them as surface errors that do not incur penalty. For instance, if a nursing student writes *hypertension* instead of *hypotension*, this will affect the mark awarded.
9. In all subjects, if the surface errors or structural flaws make a student's work so ambiguous that it is impossible to decipher the meaning, then this diminishes his/her ability to demonstrate the module's learning outcomes and this would be reflected

in the marks awarded.

## **Information to keep in mind when marking examination scripts of dyslexic students.**

When marking these scripts it is important to keep in mind the nature of the difficulties these students experience. By definition, dyslexia is a difficulty with language, particularly when dealing with the written word. Because of the nature of examinations the dyslexic student has to respond in the medium (the written word), which creates their greatest difficulty. Many students who are dyslexic tend to read inaccurately so the examination problem can start at the level of reading the question. In preparing for examinations, dyslexic students will have covered issues like the structure and layout of examination papers with their Dyslexia Support Tutor.

It is preferable that dyslexic students use an extra examination booklet where they can jot down thoughts that come to mind while writing and also plans for answers. These booklets should be handed up with their formal answer book and may prove helpful to an examiner who has the task of deciding whether or not a student really understands the concepts and has the necessary knowledge to pass the paper.

Students who are dyslexic have a great tendency to omit connecting words, which can be critical at examination time. They have great difficulty with complex sentences and this is why some of them are approved for a Reader at examination time. Some dyslexic students are approved for Extra Time in examinations. Students who are approved for extra time get the time at the end of the examination.

Dyslexic students can have difficulty getting their thoughts on paper and the final product can have a clumsiness of expression. The resulting work can be littered with some or all of the following:

- Spelling errors (a word may be correct in one sentence and wrong in another or may

have various spellings throughout the work

- A student may consistently omit word endings
- Words may be omitted from sentences
- Sentences may be rambling and it can be difficult to identify the point being made. Rather than dealing with a particular point and going on to a new one they often repeat or paraphrase what was dealt with earlier, which can result in confusion for the person marking the work.

At the beginning of the academic year students who are dyslexic register with the Disability Office at South East Technological University. Students are encouraged to make their lecturers aware as to why they have registered with the Office and explain the nature of their learning needs as worked through with them at their Needs Assessment. In this way, it is hoped that a good working relationship develops between the lecturer and the student so that any misunderstandings can easily be clarified.