

THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

TAUGHT STUDENT EDUCATION BOARD

INTRODUCTION

- 1 In a University context responsibility for proof-reading student work prior to its submission for assessment rests with the individual student as author. This long-standing principle cannot be compromised by the spread of professional proof-reading services advertised to students, or any ambiguity amongst students and staff as to what constitutes acceptable practice. The University therefore wishes to develop a shared understanding of what proof-reading student work can reasonably entail and who can legitimately be involved in offering various forms of comment on, and correction to, work that is yet to be submitted for assessment.
- 2 This policy, intended for the guidance of students and academic staff, relates to the proof-reading of any text to be submitted as part of academic course work, including dissertations, for any foundation-level qualification, undergraduate, taught postgraduate, or taught component of a research postgraduate degree.

PROOF-READING, PEER REVIEW AND ACADEMIC EXAMINATION

- 3 It is important to distinguish between proof-reading as discussed here and the process of peer review. It is entirely appropriate and frequently beneficial for students, to subject their work to peer review. This may involve their supervisors; other academics at the University of Leeds or elsewhere; and, where they possess the necessary expertise to be able to offer an informed judgment, fellow students. The University expects that any review will result chiefly in the provision of advice regarding the content, logic and clarity of the arguments advanced in the work under review. Although the review may include attention to standards of written English and presentation, the role of the reviewer does not normally extend to the systematic correction of grammatical and spelling mistakes, or typographical errors. In all cases ultimate responsibility for deciding how best to respond to a reviewer's comments rests with the student as author.

DEFINITIONS

- 5 **“Proof-reading”** is defined for the purposes of this policy as the systematic checking and identification of errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar and sentence construction, formatting and layout in the text.
- 6 **“Third-parties”** are persons other than the academic supervisor, tutor, marker or examiner, who might offer to proof-read a student's text in the sense given above. Such third parties may be fellow-students, friends and family, or professional proof-readers.

- 7 “**Editing**” is defined as any material amendment to the presentation of text which exceeds proof-reading, as defined above. In particular it includes any alteration which substantially changes, corrects, expands or condenses the academic content of the work.

1) THE ROLE OF STUDENTS IN PROOF-READING THEIR OWN WORK

- 8 The starting point is the fundamental principle that responsibility for all aspects of the work submitted for assessment remains with the student. The integrity of University awards rests upon the principle that work submitted for assessment represents the student’s own effort and reflects their own abilities and understanding. As part of the student’s induction into appropriate academic practice, it is therefore important for students to develop the skill of proof-reading their own work to identify specific flaws and errors. In this way proof-reading may be seen as a concluding stage in the process of producing academic writing.
- 9 In addition to the initial planning, researching, drafting and writing, students are expected to review and edit their own work. In this context, editing will seek to enhance the academic content of the work by rewriting passages of text, for example to improve the readability and clarity of the argument, or by making adjustments to formulae or code. Accordingly successive drafts of work are likely and these should be retained by the student. This process should culminate in a stage of proof-reading, which identifies any remaining errors of punctuation, grammar, spelling, layout and pagination for final correction.
- 10 As aids to proof-reading students may use dictionaries, thesauri and spelling and grammar-checking software to help identify and correct typographical and spelling mistakes or errors. However, students should be aware of the limitations of such software. Suggested alternative forms of phrasing or sentence construction are sometimes clumsy or inappropriate, whilst guidance on spelling takes little or no account of the context in which words are being used. Over-reliance on automatic proof-reading systems can thus result in the meaning of sentences being lost or distorted, and in a failure to use technical terms appropriately. It follows that such systems are no substitute for careful proof-reading by the student of their own work.
- 11 Students are also encouraged to seek assistance in developing their skills in academic writing and proof-reading from a number of sources of support provided by the University. In no case, however, will such support extend to the provision of a proof-reading service for students.
- 12 All students have access to the academic development support provided by Skills@Library: <http://library.leeds.ac.uk/skills>
- 13 Further advice and support is available from the Student Advice Centre based in Leeds University Union (LUU):
www.leedsuniversityunion.org.uk/helpandadvice/academic

- 14 Some University Faculties and Schools host writing tutors, including the Royal Literary Fund Fellow in the Faculty of Environment, to assist students in developing their writing style.
- 16 Part-time and mature students may access academic skills support through the Lifelong Learning Centre: <http://www.llc.leeds.ac.uk/students/academic-skills-support>
- 17 The team of Dyslexia Strategy Tutors within the Disability Services Team works with students to identify and develop academic strategies: www.equality.leeds.ac.uk

2) THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC SUPERVISORS AND TUTORS IN PROOF-READING

a) In relation to the proof-reading of all assessed work other than academic theses, research dissertations and extended projects.

- 18 Although academic staff most frequently provide feedback on finished work submitted for assessment, there are a number of contexts in which they may offer formative advice on work in draft form. For example, a tutor may offer general comments on the ideas and information presented in the draft work, raise further questions and suggest additional reading or elaboration. Staff may indicate to students where further work is required to clarify the meaning of a particular passage of text, or to ensure compliance with the specified word limit for an assignment. Advice may also be offered in relation to the overall style, tone and presentation of the work. Students are, however, expected to be active participants in this process and retain responsibility as the author to determine whether and how to make specific changes to the work in response to the general advice offered.
- 19 In providing formative advice, academic staff may highlight specific spelling mistakes, typographical errors, instances where words and phrases are misused, and lapses in sentence construction, grammar or punctuation. Staff may also explain why such features are likely to prove problematic and provide limited exemplification of the ways in which particular failings might be addressed.
- 20 Staff may indicate where a student has made inconsistent use of referencing conventions, and where inconsistencies exist between items in the reference list or bibliography and items in the text. This may extend to the identification of incomplete items in the reference list or bibliography.
- 21 Staff advice should **NOT**, however, amount to the systematic and comprehensive correction of errors in spelling, grammar or punctuation throughout an entire piece of work.
- 22 Staff must **NOT** directly rewrite, edit or amend the student's work. This prohibition extends to figures, notation and sequences of code, as well as to text.
- 23 Where draft work is submitted to a member of academic staff in electronic form, proof-reading should involve the use of the word processor Comment function to

annotate the work, rather than the Track Changes function. Staff must **NOT** make direct (i.e. invisible) edits to a text. Electronically annotated text should be returned to the student in PDF format, so that a clear distinction can be drawn between successive drafts of a piece of work. The student remains responsible for considering each suggested comment critically and carefully, and for the identification and inclusion of an appropriate correction to the text.

b) In relation to the proof-reading of, research dissertations, extended and final year projects.

- 24 Supervisors of students working on extended projects, dissertations or theses have specific responsibilities to comment on written work submitted, advise generally on the research and preparation of the text, and read and comment on drafts. Such advice extends to the clarity and style of the written argument, as well as to academic content. This may extend to interventions which go beyond the provision of advice as outlined above. It is not the intention of this statement of policy to inhibit good supervisory practice which is often an iterative process involving comment on successive drafts of particular sections of a thesis, dissertation or report.
- 25 It follows that there may be instances where it is legitimate for supervisors to propose specific changes to the draft text to correct numerical or textual errors, and/or to improve the structure and clarity of the argument. Such actions should, however, be set within the context of a wider supervisory discussion of the development of a student's work. The need for revision and the logic of the alternative text, figures or formulae being proposed should be discussed with the student. As in all other circumstances the student retains ultimate authorial responsibility for the content and quality of work submitted for assessment.
- 26 Supervisors and other academic staff commenting on student work should, therefore, remain mindful that any editorial intervention must not be so extensive as potentially to compromise the student's role as the author of the work. Where possible, supervisors and tutors should follow the advice given in section 2 a) above regarding the use of the Comment function when proof-reading an electronic text, in preference to the Track Change function. Staff must **NOT** make "invisible" edits to a text, so as to allow proper discussion of the development of the draft with the student.

3) THE UNIVERSITY'S POSITION REGARDING THE INVOLVEMENT OF THIRD-PARTIES IN PROOF-READING

- 27 With the specific exceptions outlined below it is the policy of the University of Leeds that third-parties must **NOT** act as proof-readers of any academic work submitted for assessment, including, research dissertations and extended projects.
- 28 This prohibition applies equally to offers of proof-reading as a commercial service for which a fee is charged, and to proof-reading on an informal basis by fellow-students, friends and family. As previously noted the University requires students to take responsibility for proof-reading their own work, regarding this as an integral part of the writing process and an essential element of a student's induction into academic practice.

There are three general exceptions to the prohibition on third-party proof-reading:

- 29 **i) Group work:** where an exercise is designed as a single piece of group work for which several students take collective responsibility, it will often be entirely appropriate for individuals to proof-read each other's contribution to ensure consistency in the style and format of submission, and to eliminate errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation etc. Where this is the case staff have a duty to communicate to the relevant students the specific conditions which apply to the writing, checking and submission of work. Students have an equivalent responsibility to check with staff in instances where they are unsure about the extent to which work can be treated as a group submission.
- 30 **ii) Encouragement of collaborative practice:** in some contexts student discussion of the content and presentation of drafts of each other's work for individual submission is explicitly encouraged as part of the learning outcome of a module. Such discussion must not, however, be such as to compromise authorial ownership of the work ultimately submitted for assessment. Again, staff have a duty to communicate the specific arrangements which apply to the development and submission of the work in question, whilst students must resolve any uncertainty about the process by checking with the relevant staff.
- 31 **iii) Support for students with a disability or learning difficulty:** assistance by a third-party may be expressly sanctioned as a result of an assessment of need in instances where students have a disability or learning difficulty. Such assistance most frequently takes the form of support through a Disability Strategy Tutor to enable students to develop their own individual proof-reading strategies. The use of assistive software may also be recommended to support students in carrying out their own proof-reading. A minority of students may also make legitimate use of third-party proof-readers, but only where this is explicitly recommended in their needs assessment. In all instances where third-party proof-reading is used, it must be declared on the academic integrity form and comply with the guidelines for support by academic tutors outlined in section 2 above.

4) PROOF-READING AND BREACHES OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

- 32 It is vital that neither students nor staff breach the terms of this policy in ways which mean that a student cannot truthfully sign the statement of academic integrity that sets out their claim to be the author of a particular assignment. Inadequacies in proof-reading by the author or by parties other than the author will not be accepted in mitigation of any deficiencies in the work.
- 33 Students are warned of the particular risks they run in proof-reading each other's work, unless expressly permitted to do so by the instructions accompanying a particular assignment. Unless such specific exemptions apply, both parties – the author and the proof-reader – may risk a charge of academic misconduct.

- 34 Students must also be alert to the especial dangers that may follow from uploading the content of their work to on-line essay checking websites. In some instances this may lead to their work being shared publicly (without acknowledgment) and in turn, expose them to allegations of academic misconduct.
- 35 Any case which is suspected of breaching the terms of this policy will be investigated in accordance with the University's existing procedures on academic misconduct. The student may be required to produce draft material and evidence of the annotations and changes suggested or made by the proof-reader. Failure to retain copies of drafts or to produce them when requested to do so will weigh against a student.
- 36 For further information regarding University policies on academic misconduct see: www.leeds.ac.uk/secretariat/documents/cpffm_procedure.pdf and www.leeds.ac.uk/rsa/assets/word/policies/plagiarism_procedures.doc

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