Guidance on Providing Feedback on Flagged Work

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# Introduction

The University’s Inclusive Marking Policy makes clear that an inclusive approach should be taken when marking written work of all students. Markers should make every effort to look primarily for the communication of ideas within the work, rather than focusing on technical aspects of written language, unless this is a genuine competency which forms part of the marking criteria. In some cases, however, the medium through which students have been asked to present their understanding of ideas can put certain individuals at a disadvantage.

These guidelines have been produced for use by University staff involved in the marking of written work of students who have a verified diagnosis of a condition which impacts on their writing. Commonly, this would be students with Specific Learning Difficulties (or ‘SpLDs’, such as dyslexia or dyspraxia) but could also include other disabilities, as referenced in Section 2. These students will have registered with Disability Services and have a recommendation for *marking consideration* as a reasonable adjustment under the 2010 Equality Act and will be eligible to attach a ‘flag’ or electronic sticker to their written submissions. Approximately 13% of our students are disabled1, and as part of the University commitment to teaching inclusively, it is important that the needs of disabled students are anticipated at all levels of University activity.

For the purposes of this document, references to disabled students only covers students whose disability manifests in their written work.

In order to maintain student anonymity as far as possible within the marking process, it is not possible for markers to have full sight of individual disabled student support summaries while undertaking marking. For that reason, this guidance contains generalised information which has been put together by experienced disability practitioners.

To support staff in feeling confident in their approach to marking and feedback for ‘flagged’ work, it is recommended that ‘flagged’ work could be second marked where possible and feasible. Second marking would ensure that the process is fair and objective, particularly in cases where the script is less clear. Alternatively, the work could be put forward for moderation.

# Which students are recommended for marking consideration, or ‘flagging’?

The following groups of students may have a recommendation for marking consideration due to a variety of impacts from their condition on their written work:

* Students with Specific Learning difficulties (including dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD)
* Hearing impaired students
* Visually impaired students
* Autistic students

While this guidance provides educators with information about how a recognised condition may manifest in a student’s written work, this should not be used to diagnose a student who has not been ‘flagged’ already. If you are concerned about a student please refer to the further sources of support at the end of the guidance.

# What is the rationale for marking consideration?

Work produced by some disabled learners, such as those with the conditions listed in [section 2](#_Who_does_this)can seem clumsily written and lack fluency. It can contain errors which the student has been unable to identify or rectify through the use of technology. The [University's Proof-reading Policy](https://www.leeds.ac.uk/secretariat/documents/proof_reading_policy.pdf) does not allow for students to have their work proof-read by a third party, unless in exceptional circumstances. In the case of timed exams, it would seem logical to offer allowances for errors in written work, but the disability will still be present across all literacy based tasks, whether these are time bound or not.

Some students may have access to software, equipment and support funded by Disabled Students’ Allowances, although the government has been systematically reducing this since 2014, and narrowing the eligibility criteria. Assistive technology and specialist study skills support can go some way towards helping a student develop strategies to plan and produce coursework which is free from errors. However, it cannot be presumed that such support will eliminate all errors, or that all students will have access to that support. Also, depending on the method of assessment and assessment platform used, students may not always have access to their usual support and software.

Teaching staff should make themselves aware of the impacts of disability in written work  [(section 4)](#_How_might_disability) so that they can provide effective and appropriate feedback to help students to develop in this area. Where technical accuracy in written expression is a legitimate learning outcome within a programme, this must be made clear to all students at the outset, with marks awarded accordingly. Feedback on flagged work should take into account the developmental needs of this group of learners by avoiding assumptions of a lack of care in preparation of the work. Advice on doing this can be found in section 6 of this guidance (Principles of Good Feedback for Flagged Work).

Where technical accuracy is not explicitly linked to the learning outcomes, students should not be penalised for errors of this type.

# Understanding Impacts of disability in written work

Having a good awareness of the manifestations and impact of certain conditions in the written work of some individuals can help with understanding how to read it and provide meaningful feedback.

Each individual student will be affected by their condition in different ways and may have developed compensatory strategies. Flagged work may contain some or possibly all of these traits:

* Difficulty putting ideas into writing
* Difficulty organising ideas and presenting material in a structured, sequential manner
* Inconsistent use of punctuation
* Incorrect use of homophones (e.g. their/there)
* Incorrect or inconsistent use of tenses
* Long, confusing sentences
* Limited use of vocabulary, restricting what is written to avoid spelling difficulties
* Difficulty identifying errors in own work
* Inaccuracies when copying
* Unexpected spelling errors – even in ‘common’ words
* Choosing the wrong words when spelling
* Omission or transposition of letters or syllables
* Tendency to spell phonetically
* Difficulty recognising misspelled words

# How should I read flagged work?

Disabled students may approach producing written work differently to their non-disabled peers. The apparent lack of order in the work can be the result of a mismatch between their way of thinking and the linear nature of academic writing conventions. It can also be the result of issues with retaining and manipulating information in short term memory. Reading the work quickly to get a sense of what the student is trying to convey will be the most effective approach in the first instance.

Fast reading is best accomplished by:

* Ignoring any mistakes of grammar, punctuation or spelling.
* Not making corrections to or comments on the grammar, punctuation or spelling.
* Focusing on what the student is trying to say/argue rather than on the errors.
* Concentrating on understanding the point even if there are mistakes in the text.

**Where the content of the writing is unclear and the meaning is ambiguous, marks cannot be allocated and this should explained in the feedback.**

# What are the principles of good feedback for flagged work?

[The Leeds Expectations Assessment and Feedback (LEAF)](https://ses.leeds.ac.uk/info/22170/quality_assurance-related_policies/1147/leeds_expectations_for_assessment_and_feedback)make clear that feedback should promote learning and support student achievement. The principles below support the LEAF guidance; providing useful prompts for enhanced inclusivity and appropriately tailored feedback on flagged work.

1. Be positive: state what has been done well.
2. Be constructive: explain what is required to meet the learning outcomes and improve their future approach.
3. Write legibly (if handwriting) and in [plain English](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/files/howto.pdf).
4. Be sensitive.
5. Align the comments next to the student’s work, or use a numbering system so that it is clear to students what the comment refers to.
6. Consider using a coding system for errors with language skills e.g. SP (spelling), G (grammar), P (punctuation), T (tense) and so on. Be consistent and always provide the key for reference if using such a system.
7. Remind students that comments on spelling, punctuation and grammar are to support skill development and not to penalise in marks (unless this is explicitly part of the marking criteria and is considered a competence standard).
8. Offer verbal feedback in addition to written comments.  It may be difficult for some students to hold verbal information in short term memory, and to therefore make constructive use of it in future work, particularly if they feel anxious about discussing their written work. For this reason, verbal feedback should only be offered *in addition to* written feedback. However, an advantage of verbal feedback is that it can help students to seek clarification and reassurance more effectively, see the positive comments and put the criticisms into perspective.
9. Set comments against marking criteria and competence standards, ensuring its clear exactly which section of the work the comment relates to. Where technical accuracy in written expression is deemed a competence standard, feedback on language use will be a really important development opportunity for students.
10. If model answers are used, take time to explain them so that students are able to fully appreciate the difference between that and their own work. Annotated papers are more useful: use a consistent system but avoid the use of colour to denote meaning.

Academic tutors are well placed to assist students in developing their academic writing and explaining any potential areas of miscommunication in the written work, from the reader’s perspective. For students who are eligible for specialist 1-1 support through Disabled Students Allowances, written feedback can be useful as a basis for development and discussion in these sessions.

As a matter of inclusive practice, students should be provided to understand how to write an effective introduction. When ‘fast reading’ an essay, markers can then use the introduction to give clear signposting of the use of the essay structure to communicate the organization of key ideas and arguments in their answer. Any expectations around structure should be provided at an early stage alongside the assignment brief, with past examples if available.

# Further Information and Useful Contacts

[Inclusive Teaching website](https://inclusiveteaching.leeds.ac.uk/embedding-inclusivity/inclusive-baseline-standards/)

[School Academic Leads for Inclusive Practice](https://inclusiveteaching.leeds.ac.uk/embedding-inclusivity/our-academic-leads/) (SALIPs)

[School Disability Contacts](https://ses.leeds.ac.uk/info/21810/disabled_students/838/disability_contacts_in_schools)

[Faculty Disability Coordinator](https://students.leeds.ac.uk/info/1000032/support_for_disabled_students/1197/disability_advisory_team)

[Skills@library](https://library.leeds.ac.uk/info/1401/academic_skills)

[Disability Services](https://students.leeds.ac.uk/info/10710/disability_services/1162/disability_services_at_leeds)

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