

Best Practice Guidelines for Providing Feedback on Assessed Work of Students

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Introduction

This document is intended to guide staff in providing constructive feedback for students with SpLD (Specific Learning Difficulties) who have an Inclusion Plan (IP). These guidelines are based on best practices in the sector and from professional SpLD organizations. It includes information on the following topics:

- Typical challenges faced by students with dyslexia and other SpLDs
- The Standard Assessment Feedback Statement
- Best practices for providing feedback to students with SpLDs

Assessors should note that academic standards cannot be compromised, as stipulated by the Equality Act Draft Code of Practice for Further and Higher Education, 2010. The University of Chester aims to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to assessment, as outlined in Handbook F: The Assessment of Students at Levels 4,5,6,7, and Taught Provision at Level 8.

Typical Challenges Experienced by Dyslexic Students

Students with dyslexia face limitations in working memory, leading to difficulties with reading, word recall, and slow handwriting. They may misinterpret complex written and spoken information, which affects the writing process. These issues are part of a wider pattern of language processing difficulties that include slowness, lack of flexibility in manipulating language, challenges in sorting information, and a tendency to experience information overload. Students with dyslexia typically:

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- Spend hours reading and processing complex information before writing.
- Experience challenges in formulating and transcribing sentences as quickly as other students.
- Make more spelling errors, even in word-processed work.
- Tend to use familiar words they can spell, rather than more academic terms.
- Experience challenges with punctuation and grammar.
- Insert, omit or repeat small function words or word endings.
- Produce written assignments that may lack the “polish” demonstrated by their peers.

Standard Assessment Feedback Statement (SAF)

The Standard Assessment Feedback Statement (SAF) is found on the front page of all work submitted for assessment by students who have been granted this as a reasonable adjustment within their Inclusion Plan. The best practice guidelines for offering constructive feedback to students with an identified SpLD can be accessed through the link provided within a student's Inclusion Plan or through AQS Quality and Standards Manual. Departments may choose to provide this type of feedback to all students as an inclusive approach to teaching and learning. The SAF ensures that staff involved in the assessment process receive standard information on the typical challenges that students with an identified SpLD face.

Best Practice Guidelines for Providing Feedback to Students with SpLDs

If feedback is computer-based, consider using comment boxes or coloured fonts to highlight a point that can aid the academic development of specific skills, e.g., “this sentence is descriptive” or “this is a good example of analytical writing.” Avoid using red ink for marking, as it may have a negative effect. Use different colours for comments, such as one for ideas, understanding, and knowledge, one for comments about grammar, punctuation, and spelling, one for critical analysis, and one for descriptive writing. All feedback should be clear and explicit, avoiding complex sentences. It is important to avoid ambiguity in feedback as students with an SpLD find it difficult to “read between the lines,” and confusion may lead to anxiety.

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For Draft Assignments

Clear Information

- It is important to provide students with clear and specific information regarding the marking criteria for a particular course.
- Promote early planning for all students, allowing time for editing and refining techniques to be applied later in the process. Offer direction on subject-specific resources.
- Provide direction (as appropriate) to ensure accurate interpretation of assignment questions/project briefs. Include an explanation glossary of complex phrasing and new vocabulary.
- Remind students that it is their responsibility to seek study skills support as early as possible.
- Structure and Sequencing
- Provide clear examples to show how to improve the structure and sequencing of ideas discussed. Indicate where the student has moved away from the relevant point and, if possible, explain why.
- Only correct a small number of errors, or focus on a paragraph, giving clear guidance about what is incorrect and how it can be improved.

Examples of Good Use of Academic Language

- Provide concrete examples of effective use of academic language. Students with a SpLD (specific learning difficulty) often require models and/or examples of effective sentence structure that can be replicated to support the development of academic writing style.
- Highlight two or three examples in the writing that require development and, where possible, model an accurate alternative.
- If a mistake is highlighted, provide an explanation of the nature of the mistake and feedback on how it can be corrected.

Spelling Errors

- Highlight subject-specific spelling errors only so that the student can focus on correcting them. A short comment may be made about spelling.
- If spelling or grammar is highlighted, select the most common or major errors for comment. Indicate clearly how a particular aspect of the work can be improved.
- If your marking scheme does not include marks for spelling and grammar and you do not usually highlight spelling or grammar, make the student aware of the marking scheme.

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- Certain subject areas (e.g., languages) may explicitly assess competence with grammar, spelling, and written expression. In some areas (e.g., law, education, medicine, and allied subjects), accrediting bodies external to the institution have expectations for standards and formats of written expression. Students should be explicitly informed of the accepted standards of the discipline.
- Each program should have clear aims and objectives, taking into consideration professional considerations. These aims and objectives should then give weighting as to the importance of written language skills. This will allow programs to consider the extent to which dyslexia, and any other disability, can be taken into consideration and the type of accommodation that can be
- allowed. The marking criteria need to be made explicit to all applicants to the course or program.
- Spelling and punctuation errors may not always be eliminated by spelling and grammar check.