

Inclusive Marking Guidelines for Students

These guidelines are to assist examiners and assessors in marking the submissions and examination papers of students who have a specific learning difficulty (SpLD) or visual impairment (VI) that has been confirmed by the Disability Advisory Service (DAS).

Specific Learning Difficulties

SpLD is an umbrella term that includes dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder or AD(H)D, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia. SpLDs are characterised by a pattern of difficulties or differences in cognitive skills. They exist on a continuum and the particular impact varies from one individual to another, but can often lead to a discrepancy between a student's verbal and written performance. An SpLD might also explain why a student has continued difficulty presenting work in a standard academic format, which is not due to lack of academic experience or knowledge, or connected to intellectual ability or effort.

Common difficulties experienced by students with SpLDs can include (but are not limited to):

- Slow reading speed, word omissions and difficulty making sense of the printed word without substantial re-reading – potentially leading to misunderstanding the text and misreading or miscopying information.
- Getting ideas onto paper or expressing full understanding of ideas or vocabulary.
- Proofreading or seeing own errors in print.
- Thinking in linear patterns, with the result that work may appear disjointed.
- Ordering things sequentially and keeping place in a numerical series or passage of text.
- Poor working memory – difficulty memorising or recalling new facts, terminology, names, etc.
- Persistent or erratic problems with spelling (even with 'easy' or common words), sentence structure, punctuation or organisation of written work.
- Tendency to misinterpret or miscopy complex written or spoken instructions.
- Trouble generalising, or acquiring and applying rules.
- Slow handwriting that lacks automaticity, omits words, and is poorly constructed or illegible.

More information about the impact of SpLDs on study can be found in the [DAS Staff Guide](#).

Key recommendations for marking written work:

- 1. Mark positively for content, ideas and critical thinking, focussing on what the student is trying to say or argue.**

This can be accomplished by concentrating on understanding the point even if there are mistakes in the text. It can be helpful to first read through the work quickly to get an initial sense of the candidate's overall argument and understanding of the question, without making corrections to or comments on the grammar, punctuation or spelling, etc.

- 2. Wherever possible do not penalise work for:**

- Short sentences that lack links with those that precede and follow.
- Long paragraphs that look like a string of undifferentiated simple sentences linked by conjunctions.

- Sentences where it is possible to see that words have been omitted or mistaken, e.g. of in place of on.
 - Sentences that change direction midstream: this may be because the student has realised that the sentence requires the use of a word that they cannot spell and so needed to rephrase the sentence to avoid a spelling error.
 - Apparent preference for simple words rather than the more complex academic terms. This may reflect the student's difficulties with rapid word retrieval or with spelling, rather than an unsophisticated understanding of the topic.
 - Repetition of words, sentences or ideas using slightly different phrasing. This may be because the student is not certain the point has been clearly made and has made a second (or third) attempt.
 - Problems with spelling, sentence structure, punctuation or organisation of written work.
- NB. Minor inaccuracies do not normally affect overall coherence and intelligibility of written expression. If clarity of expression and accuracy in spelling is an integral part of what is being tested, the departmental policy must be transparent to students so that they understand what is required of them and where they are likely to be penalised.
- Clumsy/illegible handwriting, which is often an indication of grapho-motor difficulties that are likely to be exacerbated under pressure.

Visual Impairments

'Visual impairment' (VI) is a term used to describe a loss of sight that cannot be corrected using lenses. Sight loss is usually categorized into partial or severe impairment. However, degrees of sight loss, the impact on daily functioning, and the type of support required varies considerably from person to person. Many individuals will have some level of functional sight and the VI will often not be obvious to others (even if registered blind).

Many of the common difficulties experienced by students with SpLDs in assessments can also occur with students with a VI. Therefore, the same key recommendations apply when marking written work.

In addition, where an amanuensis is required additional issues can arise: the misspelling of terminology, names, places, and events, and issues with the use of notations, punctuation and formatting. If the student is unable to visually see the work produced by the amanuensis, and only receive a verbal read back, such errors may go unnoticed.

Updated March 2026