

[Taken from UCD Access Centre Policy and procedures for students and staff on alternative arrangements for students with a disability in UCD]

5.2 Guidelines for Examiners when Grading Scripts for Students with a Specific Learning Difficulty or Deaf/Hard of Hearing Students¹

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

- **Surface errors** in spelling and grammar such as inaccuracies in the use of tense, grammatical agreement, plurals, spelling and punctuation.
- **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 guidelines should be taken into consideration when grading the examination script of a student with a reading, writing or spelling difficulty:

- a) First, read the script quickly to judge the student's underlying understanding of the topic; then assess their performance against the learning outcomes. 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.
- b) 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.
- c) **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.
- d) **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, cross examining 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.
- e) **Punctuation** may not be used as a tool for clarifying meaning. Scripts may contain long

¹ Adapted from *Guidelines for Marking the Work of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties (University of Central Lancashire)*
http://www.uclan.ac.uk/information/services/sds/marketing_guidelines_for_students_with_specific_learning_difficulties.php [accessed 14th June 2012]

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 which will be reflected in the grade awarded.

- f) Some students may have **restricted vocabulary** and use a far more limited range of words that one would expect. Avoid penalising students who may have an immature style of writing, unless written communication is a specified learning outcome.
- g) 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 grading guidelines will not apply.
- h) 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 grade awarded.
- i) In all subjects, if the surface errors or structural flaws make the 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 grades awarded.