

THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD  
ACADEMIC SERVICES  
LEARNING AND TEACHING SERVICES

**Guidance on Accessible Assessment**

**1. Introduction**

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) Part IV requires that all aspects of learning, teaching and assessment do not discriminate against disabled students, including those with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs), such as dyslexia, and students with communication difficulties, such as deaf/hearing impairments or Asperger's Syndrome. The DDA recognises that assessments must be rigorous in order to maintain academic standards. However, it emphasises that assessments must also be flexible, so that each student has an equal opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the learning outcomes.

**2. The Institutional Approach**

The institutional approach towards accessible assessment is as follows:

Literacy is a required generic skill of the Sheffield graduate, since communication skills are a key element of employers' expectations of graduates.

**Therefore literacy is considered to be a generic learning outcome for all programmes.**

Both examinations and coursework assignments have important roles in assessing student achievement. It is important to strike an appropriate balance between them, based upon the programme's aims, objectives and learning outcomes and those of its constituent units.

A flexible approach is required to ensure that there is a level playing field for **all** students when being assessed.

Very often, equality of opportunity for students can be achieved prior to the point of assessment. For example, students can use re-drafting strategies, study skills support, or assistive technologies in the preparation of coursework.

However, it is not always possible to create equality of opportunity for all students prior to assessment. For example, unseen examinations will test a student's ability to use knowledge under pressure, using memory.

**It is expected that literacy will remain a specified competence for any assessed coursework and any seen examinations but not for unseen examinations<sup>1</sup>.**

**3. The Sticker System**

Students with specific learning difficulties (SpLDs), for example, dyslexia, as well as hearing impaired/deaf students or those with Asperger's Syndrome, will be given the option of affixing a sticker to any assessed work.

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<sup>1</sup>With respect to unseen examinations, students should not be penalized for any spelling, punctuation or grammatical errors where the meaning remains clear. However there will be certain instances where the use of language is the focal point of an unseen examination, for example in foreign language examinations or where it is an explicit assessment outcome. In these cases, literacy would remain a specified competence.

**To note:** The stickers are **not** intended to influence the assessment or marking of a piece of work.

**To note:** The aim of the sticker system is to raise staff awareness about the occurrence of dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties in the student cohort and to provide a link to the accessible assessment guidance **Staff can then adapt any formative feedback as appropriate.**

### 3.1 Electronic Stickers / MOLE

For work that is submitted electronically via MOLE, students should be advised as follows:

The tutor should set up the assignment with an instruction to students with specific learning difficulties

\*Title: Assignment 1

Description: This is a test assignment.

Item Visibility:  Show Item  
 Hide Item  
(This item cannot be made visible until it is assigned to an individual or group of Students)

Instructions:   
If you have been diagnosed with a specific learning difficulty (SpLD), for example dyslexia, and normally use a sticker on hard copies of your work, you should type SpLD in the comments box provided when submitting your work via MOLE.

Use HTML

Attachments:

Then when the student submits the assignment they get this screen. They can use the comments box to indicate their 'sticker'.

**Edit Submission: Assignment 1 (Attempt 1)**

Due Date: 17 July 2009 12:00  
Type: Work individually  
Status: In Progress (Attempt 1)

**Instructions:**  
If you have been diagnosed with a specific learning difficulty (SpLD), for example dyslexia, and normally use a sticker on hard copies of your work, you should type SpLD in the comments box provided when submitting your work via MOLE.

Attachments:

**Submission:**   
 Use HTML

**Add Comment:**  
SpLD

See below for the 'flag' for the tutor.

**Assignment Submission: Assignment 1**

Due Date: 17 July 2009 12:00  
Type: Work individually  
Status: Submitted on 03 July 2009 14:20 (Attempt #1)

**Instructions:**  
If you have been diagnosed with a specific learning difficulty (SpLD), for example dyslexia, and normally use a sticker on hard copies of your work, you should type SpLD in the comments box provided when submitting your work via MOLE.

**Submission:**  
Attachments: None

**Most Recent Comment:**  
Author: SpLD  
Date: 03 July 2009 14:20  
[View Previous Comments](#)

**Grader/Reviewer Comments:**  
  
[Add Attachments](#)

**\* Save Options:**  
 Return to Student for further editing  
 Save for further review and editing  
 Mark as completed and return to Student

[Save](#) [Cancel](#)

\* Required field

Students should be advised that any abuse of the electronic sticker system will be viewed as a disciplinary matter by departments.

Where a department has concerns about the validity of an electronic sticker, they should contact the Disability and Dyslexia Support Service (DDSS) in the first instance. In the majority of cases, the DDSS will be able to advise departments about the validity of any sticker (although this would be subject to whether or not a student has given permission for full disclosure to be made).

### 3.2 Electronic Stickers / Turnitin

For work that is submitted electronically to Turnitin, students should be advised as follows to add 'SpLD' after the last name.

e.g/ SMITH 'SpLD'

**MOLE** Accessibility | Help  
Engineering - Session 2

Your location: Home Page > test99

**turnitin**

assignment inbox  
edit assignment  
libraries  
class stats  
preferences

**WriteCycle Academy**  
Introducing the WriteCycle Academy, a new series of FREE webinars for instructors that offer an easy, practical solution for integrating Turnitin and WriteCycle into writing-intensive classes.

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Browse

We currently accept document files of the following types: MS Word, WordPerfect, PostScript, PDF, HTML, RTF, and plain text. File size limit: 9.5367431640625 MB

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#### 4. Assessment design

Departments are encouraged to adopt more inclusive assessment practices where possible whereby students are assessed using a variety of methods.

Departments should:

- Consider using a variety of assessment methods, e.g. coursework, presentations, practicals and examinations;
- Consider using another/ other assessment method(s) for those units which require an element of formal examination.

The following list outlines the range of assessment methods identified in the QAA Subject Benchmark statements. This is intended as a cross-disciplinary resource to stimulate ideas for alternative ways to assess learning outcomes:

Analytical exercises	'In class' tests
Briefings	Laboratory reports and practicals
Computer-based assessments	Multiple choice testing
Coursework with discussion elements	On-line assessment
Critical diaries and learning logs	Oral examinations
Crits	Peer and self-evaluation
Data interpretation exercises	Portfolios and sketchbooks
Dissertations	Projects, independent or group
Electronic presentations, e.g. websites	Slide and picture tests
Examinations – seen, take away, unseen, open book	Student-led seminars, presentations and discussions
Fieldwork reports	Video formats
Finding primary source material	Work books

#### 5. Examinations

Unseen examinations are an important component in the assessment process.

Consideration of the following when formatting an examination paper could enhance its accessibility.

Wherever possible:

- Keep the layout clear and simple
- Use a clear font such as Arial, rather than a serif font, such as Times New Roman
- Ensure the writing style is clear and concise
- Avoid using dense blocks of text
- Avoid using underlining or italics to highlight text
- Where possible, use alternative ways of presenting information as well as or instead of text – flow charts, diagrams, graphs etc.
- If possible, allow students to word process work, so spellcheckers can be used.
- Print the exam paper on coloured paper (as per the request of the student in their needs assessment).

No single style and format of examination will be entirely accessible to every dyslexic and SpLD student. It is important to listen to feedback from these students on whether examinations they have undertaken were accessible, and make improvements as appropriate.

It is important to note that under the Data Protection Act, a student can request to have access to comments made on an examination script, (even though they do not have the right to see the script itself). Given that this is the case, it is of benefit to a marker to be aware of any SpLD when commenting on a script in case they are asked to provide feedback on their comments at a later stage. Hence the provision of the sticker to eligible students (which they may or may not use).

## 6. Reasonable adjustments

It is not possible to 'design out' inaccessibility in assessments for all students.

Students who suspect that the standard mode of assessment will be inaccessible to them are advised to contact their department to discuss making a reasonable adjustment.

Departments should be open and responsive to such requests. When deciding whether a reasonable adjustment is appropriate, departments should consider the type of skills being assessed. Often, minor and straightforward adjustments to standard practice can make an assessment accessible.

It should be noted that reasonable adjustments

- Should not affect the reliability and validity of the assessment
- Should not give the student an unfair advantage
- Should reflect the student's normal way of working
- Should be based on the individual requirements of the student

Support is available from the ELTC, DDSS and the Exams Office to assist departments in achieving a reasonable adjustment.

### **Common reasonable adjustments:**

- Flexible timetabling, e.g. a student may need to have their exam in the morning before the onset of fatigue, or they may be unable to manage more than one exam per day
- Additional time in examinations (typically 15 minutes for dyslexic students)
- Rest breaks
- Allowing students to use a computer in exams, so that spell checking software can be used
- The use of an electronic spell checker
- The use of an amenuensis

Guidance, advice and procedural information on making alternative arrangements for invigilated and non-invigilated exams for students with additional support requirements is available at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/disability/exams>

## 7. Alternative assessments

In a small number of cases, it may be necessary to substitute the proposed method of assessment with an 'alternative,' e.g. substituting an invigilated exam with an oral presentation.

In determining whether to offer an alternative method of assessment, departments must consider both the needs of the student and the need to maintain academic standards as well as the interests of other students.

Departments should consider:

- Why was the existing standard assessment mode chosen to test the learning outcomes?
- Are the learning outcomes, teaching and assessment strategy aligned with one another?
- Can the learning outcomes be achieved and measured by the proposed alternative assessment mode?

If so,

- What would this mean in terms of redesigning the existing assessment criteria?
- Could the alternative method be offered to all students?

It may not be possible to offer alternative assessments, e.g. where professional requirements or the need to demonstrate a particular skill cannot be addressed with a different assessment.

In considering all requests for alternative assessments, departments should consult the Disability and Dyslexia Support Service, the appropriate ELTC dyslexia tutor, and the relevant Faculty Director of Learning and Teaching (FDLT). The students, the ELTC, the DDSS and the FDLT should be notified of the final decision of the department and should be provided with a clear rationale for the chosen course of action, explaining why it is equitable.

## **8. Providing feedback to students with specific learning difficulties**

Feedback plays a vital role in student learning. The sticker system has been introduced to encourage the provision of targeted, effective and sensitive feedback to students with specific learning difficulties.

### **8.1 Tips for providing accessible feedback to students with specific learning difficulties:**

- Provide assessment criteria to students prior to their completion of the assessment task, so the criteria act as a 'feed-forward' mechanism to assist students in organising and focussing their work
- Provide typed rather than hand-written feedback
- Check the format of the feedback and consider whether it poses any difficulties for students, e.g. in terms of layout, type and size of font. Guidance on and examples of accessible feedback proformas are available at [http://www.shu.ac.uk/services/lti/accessibleassessments/content/section\\_4/4.0.html](http://www.shu.ac.uk/services/lti/accessibleassessments/content/section_4/4.0.html)
- When providing feedback on errors or weaknesses in students' work which have been flagged on the checklist as areas of specific difficulty, contextualise comments by providing examples of errors from students' work and provide a model alternative
- Give students the opportunity to discuss feedback and clarify any issues they are unsure of with the tutor in a private space

## **9. Good practice in providing feedback**

University guidance on providing feedback is available at [http://www.lets.shef.ac.uk/flats/guidance\\_feedback\\_students.pdf](http://www.lets.shef.ac.uk/flats/guidance_feedback_students.pdf)

Some key features of good feedback are summarised below.

## **'Good' practice features:**

### **Before assessment task is carried out:**

- Content areas of the task are clearly outlined when the task is set
- Assessment criteria are provided to students when the task is set
- Students are given sample writing on a similar task to assess and give their own feedback
- Students give feedback on a sample of each others' writing

### **During task:**

- Students are given opportunities on a set number of occasions to consult their tutor to make sure that they are on the right lines in preparation of the coursework task

### **When task was marked:**

- the feedback sheet focused on content, gave grades on the outlined areas, and added an overall grade
- specific, printed comments on the student's work included:
  - a first comment that pointed out positive aspects of the student's work
  - a subsequent comment that made suggestions about weaker areas
  - and general comments on the submission as a whole.

## **10. Useful links**

University guidance on teaching students with dyslexia

[www.shef.ac.uk/disability/support/spld.html](http://www.shef.ac.uk/disability/support/spld.html)

University guidance on alternative examination arrangements

[www.shef.ac.uk/disability/exams](http://www.shef.ac.uk/disability/exams)

Sheffield Hallam University Accessible Assessments website

[www.shu.ac.uk/services/lti/accessibleassessments](http://www.shu.ac.uk/services/lti/accessibleassessments)

The Open University (2006) *Making Your Teaching Inclusive*

[www.open.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching](http://www.open.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching)

Phil Race website on learning, teaching and assessment

[www.phil-race.com](http://www.phil-race.com)

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