School of Psychology

Coursework Marking Guidelines for Students with dyslexia and other Special Learning Disabilities

Students with dyslexia are not a homogeneous group and how dyslexia presents itself can vary greatly from one person to another. Sometimes it might seem that there is little evidence of dyslexia in a student’s written work but this does not mean that they do not have dyslexia. Many students have developed strategies, often from a young age, to help them overcome their difficulties.

However, the most common errors that students with dyslexia may make in written assignments are as follows:

- spelling mistakes other than when certain technical terms are required;
- repeated information or phrases – dyslexic students find this hard to detect during proofreading;
- excessive/misplaced punctuation;
- omitted words/letters/syllables/endings or punctuation;
- unusual word substitutions e.g. ‘venerable’ for ‘vulnerable’;
- simplified vocabulary – in order to avoid spelling errors, many dyslexic students adopt a simplified vocabulary when writing;
- unsophisticated language structures – simplified language structures are often adopted in order to avoid grammatical errors, which do not necessarily denote unsophisticated thinking; others have rambling sentences;
- stilted style of writing due to difficulties with sequencing or word-finding, which may not match the student’s oral performance in seminars.

Markers should take these factors into account when marking coursework. Generally, they should not penalise students for language which is unreliable, not fluent and contains grammatical and spelling errors. However, students with dyslexia are capable of creative, lateral and innovative thinking and markers should therefore focus upon the students’ knowledge, their ability to critically evaluate and their clarity of argument rather than clarity of expression.

However, please do provide sensitive feedback regarding grammar, spelling etc. This feedback is invaluable as students with dyslexia attend Study Skills sessions at the DDSS where they are taught strategies to help them overcome their particular weaknesses.

Guidelines approved by Learning and Teaching Committee on 23.9.10