Assessment of the work of students with specific learning difficulties - Dyslexia / Dyspraxia: Guidance for Academic Staff

These guidelines, produced by the UCL Student Disability Services (SDS), are intended as a reference tool and helpful resource. We welcome collaboration and dialogue with academic departments at UCL in developing creative ways to provide appropriate reasonable adjustments to students with dyslexia and dyspraxia at UCL.

Contents

Marking guidelines and institutional reasonable adjustments for students with dyslexia and / or dyspraxia

Summary of Reasonable Adjustments (SoRA)
Coursework
Marking coursework
Examinations
Alternative forms of assessment

Why should students with specific learning difficulties receive reasonable adjustments in assessment?

The student cohort: students with specific learning difficulties
The effects of dyslexia
The effects of dyspraxia

Internal and external considerations

Legal considerations and professional codes of practice.
Academic and competency standards
Externally funded reasonable adjustments for students with dyslexia and/or dyspraxia

Appendix 1

Examples of possible reasonable adjustments in HE for students with disabilities, including specific learning difficulties (dyslexia/dyspraxia)
Institutional Reasonable Adjustments for Students with Dyslexia and/or Dyspraxia

Summary of Reasonable Adjustments (SoRA)

To comply with the Equality Act (2010), and to reflect UCL’s aim to promote inclusive education, the purpose of the Summary of Reasonable Adjustments (SoRA) is to enable UCL to support a student with additional needs in his/her studies.

The SoRA is drawn up in collaboration with a student and focuses on his/her requirements for reasonable adjustments in an academic context. Examples of such requirements could include an application for special arrangements in examinations, a request for coursework feedback to be given in typed rather handwritten form, extensions to library loans, permission to use a recording device in lectures and seminars, and the provision of reading and course materials in advance of lectures and tutorials. Whilst similarities may exist between SoRAs, each document will be different with regard to content and circulation.

It is important that information held within a SoRA is handled and stored carefully, with reference to the Data Protection Act (1998), and that the recommended adjustments are put in place with discretion and sensitivity.

Consent to share the information held within the SoRA is obtained from each student. So that the recommended adjustments may be put in place, copies of the SoRA may be circulated to members of UCL staff on a ‘need to know’ basis.

Coursework

This document gives practical guidance to academic departments and to individual markers on how to work within the law whilst maintaining academic standards.

‘Flagging’ of dyslexic and dyspraxic students’ work

Student Disability Services issue dyslexic and dyspraxic students who register with the service with an electronic sticker. The sticker has the following wording:

This student is registered as dyslexic / dyspraxic with Student Disability Services. Please refer to Guidance for Academic Staff: Assessment of the work of students with specific learning difficulties – Dyslexia / Dyspraxia: [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/disability/info-for-staff/dyslexia-marking-guidelines](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/disability/info-for-staff/dyslexia-marking-guidelines)
Examination scripts and coursework essays should be marked anonymously, which means that students should not indicate their name or student number anywhere on their assessments. The coursework stickers used for students registered with SDS do not require students to enter their name or student number, which would contravene the regulation of maintaining anonymity in the marking process.

For anonymous marking purposes students are issued with a unique ‘candidate number’ which is four letters followed by a number, and it is this that students should be entering on their assessments and therefore on the coursework sticker.

The wording on the sticker can be copied on to the cover page of electronically submitted work, or the sticker can be scanned in.

Students can choose whether they wish to use the sticker. The student is also responsible for ensuring that the sticker is kept exclusively for the student’s personal use.

Stickers can be used for departmental tests or departmental exams as well as for course work assignments.

Coursework cover sheets

For departments that use coursework cover sheets, a section to enable students to state that they have dyslexia or another (relevant) disability is recommended. The coversheet can be added to electronic submissions of coursework.

In departments where paper copies of coursework are submitted and the coversheet is removed (for the purpose of anonymity) by departmental administrators, the coversheet can be replaced by a scanned copy of the electronic sticker. Administrators can request a copy of the sticker from Student Disability Services but stickers should never be given to students without first checking with Student Disability Services that the student has been allocated a sticker.

Coursework Extensions

Extra time for course work should not automatically be granted to students with dyslexia or dyspraxia, as this is not considered to be in students’ best interests. However, at the discretion of the lecturer/tutor/course director concerned, and through negotiation, up to one week’s extra time represents a reasonable adjustment in particular circumstances. The student should contact the
relevant tutor or programme leader with as much notice as possible if he/she needs to request an extension for a written assignment or any course-related work.

**Marking coursework**

If spelling, punctuation and grammar are assessment criteria this should be stated in the marking scheme, as should the potential marks at stake. If they are not mentioned in the marking scheme it should be assumed that they are not assessment criteria and that students will not be penalised. In subjects such as languages, in which accuracy in writing is one of the assessment criteria, this criterion should be stated, along with the potential effect on marks. Students with dyslexia might thus be penalised for inaccurate writing in certain subjects but this would reasonably reflect a weakness in a particular knowledge base deemed to be important in their degree course.

**Examinations**

The provision of extra time in examinations for students with dyslexia or dyspraxia can be justified, on the basis that the time taken to carry out the normal day-to-day activity of reading or writing, can be demonstrated to be substantially greater than for students without dyslexia and/or dyspraxia.

Access arrangements in examinations (for example the awarding of extra time, rest breaks or ‘stop the clock’, use of a computer, a reader and/or a scribe) have become the principal way in which awarding bodies and higher educational institutions comply with the duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ for students with disabilities.

In September 2015 at UCL the process for applying for access arrangements in examinations for students with dyslexia and dyspraxia changed. All students who wish to apply for special arrangements in examinations at UCL must now complete and return an online application form, submitting evidence of their specific learning difficulty in the form of a post 16 full diagnostic assessment report from a practitioner psychologist or specialist teacher with a practising certificate in assessment. The link to the form is here: [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/registry-admin/srs-php/saa.php](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/registry-admin/srs-php/saa.php)

- Dyslexic / dyspraxic students may be granted 25% or 50% extra time in examinations, depending on the recommendations in their diagnostic assessment report.

- If recommended in their report, dyslexic / dyspraxic students are granted permission to use a computer in examinations.
• If students request an arrangement not recommended in their reports they will be required to take an internal assessment carried out by the Disability Services Manager: Specific Learning Difficulties. Recommendations will made be to the Examinations Office following this assessment.

• Some dyslexic students find it helpful to read examination papers through a transparent coloured overlay. Permission to do so is recorded on the administration information provided to departmental invigilators by the Examinations Office.

• Students seriously affected by dyslexia /dyspraxia may be granted a scribe, reader or speech-to-text software for their examinations (but this is rare).

• Extra time is granted for “take-home” examinations on a pro rata basis. For example, a student who would qualify for 15 minutes per hour extra time would be granted 30 hours to complete a 24 hour “take-home” examination (25% extra time).

• Examination arrangements, as established through SDS and processed through the Examinations Office apply to both centrally administered examinations and departmental examinations or tests.

• Any adjustments for clinical, practical or viva voce examinations should be made on an individual basis, through discussion with the Disability Services Manager: Specific Learning Difficulties and course coordinators.

**Alternative forms of assessment**

In a very small number of cases where students are severely affected by dyslexia, possibly co-occurring with other disabilities, the allowances commonly made may not be sufficient to provide appropriate support. It could therefore be necessary to consider alternative modes of assessment, for example, a viva voce rather than written examination or assignment.

When deciding whether an alternative format for assessment is appropriate, it is important to consider the learning outcomes against which students are assessed. It may be the case that, due to professional requirements or the need to demonstrate a particular skill (for example, well-structured written arguments), alternative assessment cannot be offered. The important aspect here is that consideration of alternative forms of assessment are informed by both student need and the maintenance of academic/competency standards and / or professional requirements. An
unambiguous academic rationale should be available for the final decision, so that the student is clear about the grounds on which the alternative assessment was/was not arranged.

Recommendations for alternative forms of assessment for students with specific learning difficulties are made, through discussion with Student Disability Services, who will then liaise with assessment and student records and the Special Assessment Arrangements Panel.

Although marking criteria will generally focus on content over form, the structure and coherence of written work is likely to be an assessment criterion. Dyslexic or dyspraxic students who find it difficult to produce structured written work with a logical sequence should be advised to contact Student Disability Services to ask about specialist one-to-one sessions in literacy and study skills.

It is helpful for students with specific learning difficulties to be given constructive feedback to help them to identify ways of improving their written language skills. Students with specific learning difficulties will benefit if essay/coursework feedback is given in a word-processed format rather than hand-written.

**Why should students with specific learning difficulties receive reasonable adjustments in assessment?**

**The student cohort: students with specific learning difficulties**

Students with specific learning difficulties, e.g. dyslexia and dyspraxia, are one of the largest student groups eligible for assessment and additional examinations support at UCL. Each new academic year, approximately 500 students register with Student Disability Services as dyslexic and between 50 and 100 students register as dyspraxic. Students can present with co-occurring specific learning difficulties and/or with other disabilities or medical or sensory conditions. Students with specific learning difficulties occur across all subjects and courses at UCL. Where high proportions of students with specific learning difficulties appear in a subject grouping (such as students taking science and medical degrees), this is much more likely to reflect the high number of different degree possibilities within that grouping than any other factor. That said, at UCL there are relatively high proportions of students with specific learning difficulties taking courses in psychological and language sciences, in architecture and construction and in education (at the UCL IoE).
The Effects of Dyslexia

Dyslexia nearly always affects both speed and accuracy in reading and writing. It does not generally affect higher level language skills such as oral comprehension, and reading comprehension is only affected if the ability to decode text is seriously impaired. Most dyslexic students are slow readers, and as accuracy is also affected they generally need to re-read texts more often than students who are not dyslexic. Dyslexic students generally dislike or dread reading aloud, as this exposes the errors they make.

Most students with dyslexia cannot produce written work as quickly as other students; they are likely to make more spelling errors even in word-processed work; their punctuation and grammar may be weak and they often omit, repeat or insert small function words or word endings in both reading and writing.

Dyslexic students typically find it very difficult to proof read and edit their work, as they lack awareness of detail in texts. They may submit assignments which look as if they have not been checked for inaccuracies. If they experience significant weaknesses in working memory, they may have difficulty transcribing or copying, resulting in inaccuracy. When numbers are involved, this may have serious implications. Students with dyslexia who are also dyspraxic (see below) may have handwriting difficulties.

The Effects of Dyspraxia

Many dyslexic students are also affected by dyspraxia, but both can occur independently. Dyspraxia affects motor coordination and fine and/or gross motor skills. Students with dyspraxia typically have difficulty with speed and legibility of handwriting. They may also have difficulty with some aspects of spatial awareness, such as following directions, and organisational skills. Some individuals with dyspraxia experience difficulties in working memory, with consequences for their ability to create structure in writing, to extract key points or to co-ordinate and synchronise information from a variety of sources. When attending lectures or completing coursework, students may experience difficulties in taking notes, in planning and constructing longer pieces of written work and in organising their time.
Internal and external considerations

Legal considerations and professional codes of practice.

The Equality Act 2010 requires schools, colleges and higher educational institutions (HEIs) to provide reasonable adjustments to enable disabled students to access the curriculum, including examinations. Dyslexia and dyspraxia are specific learning difficulties recognised as disabilities under the Act (Equality Act 2010 Guidance, Part 2, section A5). Institutions should not treat a disabled person less favourably than others, for a reason that relates to their disability, without justification.

A disability is defined as ‘a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on (a person’s) ability to carry out normal day to day activities.

If the student is at a substantial disadvantage, the HEI is required to make reasonable adjustments. The Equality Act reflects a social model of disability, which holds that the educational disadvantage and exclusion faced by many disabled people is not an inevitable outcome of their impairments or health conditions, but arises from social, attitudinal and environmental barriers.


“An inclusive environment anticipates the varied requirements of students, for example because of a declared disability, specific cultural background, mode of study or age. Where possible, equity of access is achieved through inclusive design but, in some circumstances, arrangements are made to enable access for individuals.”

HEIs are encouraged, increasingly, to develop and implement inclusive teaching and learning environments and to become the primary providers of support to students with disabilities.

Academic and Competency Standards

The Equality Challenge Unit has recently produced a very clear and helpful guide: Understanding the interaction of competence standards and reasonable adjustments - http://www.ecu.ac.uk/guidance-resources/student-recruitment-retention-attainment/student-retention/inclusive-learning-teaching/competence-standards-reasonable-adjustments/
As this guide states, particular modes of assessment may present barriers to disabled students:

“Assessment determines the extent to which a student has achieved the competence standards of a particular learning programme. Assessment design is undertaken within the academic framework of the degree-awarding body, with individual degree-awarding bodies setting their own standards. These standards must meet thresholds determined by the QAA. HEIs have considerable autonomy in the types of assessment methods they use. In designing assessment methods, staff consider the most effective method for evaluating a student’s achievement of competence standards”.

**UCL’s regulatory framework** for the assessment and examination of Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate students at UCL is currently (January 2016) being re-drafted.

The review will, among other issues, look at the new **Extenuating Circumstances** regulations and UCL’s arrangements for **reasonable adjustments** for students with disabilities, guidance on **methods of assessment** (including peer assessment and group work) and include a **pilot of late summer resits** on selected programmes in three faculties. Each of these will be incorporated into a **new draft of the Assessment Framework for Taught Programmes** developed from feedback from UCL staff and students, which will aim to ensure that the regulations are as clear and accessible as possible.

**Externally Funded Reasonable Adjustments and Support for Students with Dyslexia and Dyspraxia**

The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) oversees support to students with specific learning difficulties granted through the Disabled Students’ Allowance. Traditionally, students with dyslexia / dyspraxia have been eligible, through the Disabled Students’ Allowance, for 1:1 non-specialist study skills support from a small team of specialist tutors based within Student Disability Services and/or through outsourced tuition. The tutorial support helps dyslexia and dyspraxic students to develop their literacy and study skills to meet the coursework and examination requirements of their courses and to reach their academic potential. Specialist tutors help students develop study strategies that they can employ themselves, thereby becoming independent: tutors do not proof-read for the student or teach course-specific content.

Through a DSA application, students with dyslexia and dyspraxia have, to date, been able to apply for the computer hardware and assistive technologies that can support them in their academic work.
However, BIS is in the process of limiting the 1:1 tutorial (non-medical help) and individual and computer software/hardware support previously granted to students through the Disabled Students’ Allowance. How and for whom this specialist support will continue to be funded is currently unclear. In this context, all universities, including UCL, are encouraged to review course design and delivery, including assessment procedures. HEIs must also consider anticipatory reasonable adjustments, looking at barriers to success faced by particular groups of students and seek to eliminate or reduce these through overall assessment design as well as other measures. In October 2014 BIS produced draft guidance for HEIs with examples of reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities, including students with specific learning difficulties. Appendix 1 of this document reproduces this list of suggested adjustments, including adjustments relating to coursework, examinations, assessment and alternative forms of assessment.

**Contact UCL Student Disability Services**

For further information or to request contact with a member of the Student Disability Services team:

Student Disability Services,
Student Support and Wellbeing,
UCL Institute of Education Level 4,
20 Bedford Way London WC1H OAL
University College London
disability@ucl.ac.uk
020 7679 0100
https://www.ucl.ac.uk/disability

**Appendix 1.**

**Examples of possible reasonable adjustments in HE for students with disabilities, including specific learning difficulties (dyslexia/dyspraxia)**

**General**

All students provided with a course overview or ‘road-map’ for the whole course, in a format that is accessible to them. This includes reading lists

Teaching materials used in the learning and teaching environment are inclusive by design and available in advance of teaching

Teaching is delivered in an inclusive manner and is accessible for students to access afterwards online

Appropriate academic and generic support with preparing coursework is available.

**Access to lectures**
All venues are accessible

Learning outcomes stated at the outset of each lecture

Lectures recorded and available to download

Students allowed to make personal recordings of lectures

Single note-takers provided for each lecture where disabled students are attending

Student helpers or support workers available to act as scribes where necessary

Multi-sensory presentation to appeal to all learning styles

**Handouts**

Handouts available in advance and on line; institutions use

Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) facilities e.g. WebCT, Blackboard to enable all students to access handouts in any format they find suitable

Clear font used (e.g. Arial) of at least 12 point

Non-glare cream/ivory paper used for handouts

A clear structure provided which offers a simplified version of the lecture

Handouts with reading lists give library class/shelf number

**Access to tutorials**

Students able to make a sound recording of the tutorial if they find note-taking difficult

A summary of the tutorial made available

References to literature written down rather than given verbally and names of authors spelt out

SpLD students not be asked to read aloud (without prior preparation)

**Reasonable adjustments in relation to coursework**

Advanced timetables in course outlines to assist with planning

Tutors give written essay feedback in a word processed format especially if their handwriting is difficult to read, when requested

Tutors provide recorded comments for students, when requested

Flexible access to tutors for follow up questions

**Time Limits on Coursework**

A rigorous whole institution policy so that (all) students know what to expect
Communication between departments to establish agreed time-limits is essential

Departments ensure that deadlines for assignments are staggered

If departments offer joint courses, deadlines are checked with the co-operating department

Extensions are not be automatic but granted if applied for and supported by a good case as with all extenuating circumstances

Individual reasonable adjustments

Specific colour paper used for handouts where recommended for a particular student

Mobility orientation

Access to research

Named contact for disabled students in libraries to assist as necessary

Extended loans for library material

Provision of alternative format publications, free of charge, for disabled students where possible

Developing study skills

Named contact for disabled students in each academic department

Academic support available for all students in all academic departments

A dyslexia specialist available at each institution

Specialist one-to-one support for students with SpLDs available from the institution for one hour per week, per SpLD student

Access to IT and Assistive Technology

Networked computer suites available for student use

Networked computers to have AT software installed as standard

Networked computers to have roaming profiles and facility to store student preferences

Quiet rooms available for priority booking by disabled students

AT trainers available in each institution

Free Wi-Fi available at different sites across institution

Practical studies

Practical support to be provided in workshops and laboratories, as required

Competence standards: An institution is not required to make any reasonable adjustments to the application of a competence standard.
A competence standard is an academic, medical or other standard applied for the purpose of determining whether or not a person has a particular level of competence or ability.

Institutions have genuine competence standards in place to ensure all candidates are able to demonstrate their ability in a particular area. Institutions review entry, course and examination criteria to ensure they are not discriminatory and that appropriate anticipatory reasonable adjustments are in place.

**Examinations**

Consideration of, and adjustment to, exam requirements where appropriate

Exam support workers

Exam reader/scribe

**Assessment**

Advance dates given for assessments.

Draft work accepted for checking well ahead of the deadline

Alternative forms of assessment

There should be a rigorous Whole Institution Policy

Oral presentation of work allowed in the form of vivas, but both staff and students need training in the use of vivas to meet the learning outcomes of courses. When allowed, vivas recorded for external examiners

The option of students presenting coursework instead of doing examinations considered (but see competency standards)

Examinations with an open book provision is considered

Audio or video presentations allowed for students who find direct presentation difficult (e.g. due to expressive language difficulties)

Mind mapped presentations may be acceptable for some assessment components

Practice items readily available and marked if requested

Projects and work of a more practical kind, may be acceptable alternatives to dissertations

Portfolios or presentations may be acceptable alternatives to essays

Short answer responses may be an acceptable alternative to essays in some contexts

The use of voice activated software allowed if needed

The use of text reading software, if needed

Double marking of work in terms of looking at its content and then its form considered
In examinations, students have additional time, and if necessary the use of information technology with the facility to change the background colour and font, access to large print versions of the questions and the services of a reader or amanuensis.

Alternative forms of assessment reviewed at Academic Progress Review Boards.

Annex B from BIS Guidance Document 16/10/2014