

**Guidelines for students and staff on the**

**modification of online examination and**

**assessment arrangements for students**

**with disabilities.**

**July 2020**

**Introduction**

The following recommendations for Reasonable Accommodations (RAs) in online assessment and examination are an addendum to current DAWN Guidelines and are subject to legal opinion.

As a general principle, exam options should be streamlined across Faculties to avoid ad hoc or idiosyncratic assessment practices within Departments and Schools. It is also suggested that examiners should stipulate word limits for exam and assignment questions, and suggest a recommended amount of time for completion of the test / examination / assignment, for example, whilst students should take as much time as they need to complete the exam, it may not be necessary to take the full 24 hours, 48 hours, 5 days and so forth.

This document sets out RAs as they relate to each exam option and sets out guidance on inclusive marking practice.

**Exam type and standard Reasonable Accommodations as DAWN guidelines**

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| **Exam Options** | **What this is** | **Disability reasonable accommodations and considerations** |
| Pro Rate Continuous Assessment (CA) | Pro-rate the CA component and convert it into a grade for the module. | If the student on disability grounds has not met the pro-rata requirements (e.g. not completed the percentage required to pro-rate), can an alternative assessment be considered? |
| Assignment | Convert final examinations to written assignments. This is where the assignment is of a different type to the exam, such as a single essay – i.e., it is not just a take-home exam paper | For Assignments the amount of time being given is designed to take account of all students’ personal circumstances, including those who would normally be offered extended time in exams. No additional time will therefore be offered to these assessments.\*Disclosure of disability in exams – see below |
| Take Home Offline Exams | Take-home exams are open-book exams that are given a longer deadline to submit the answers. These could have a deadline set in the same day or over a number of days. | For take-home offline exams offered over a longer period, e.g. 24 or 48 hours etc, an additional time allowance should be provided. If a student has been granted extra time for exams on their LENS report, your online exam must be extended to allow for these exam accommodations. Additional time of 10 (15, 20 or 30) minutes per hour will apply to all timed exams and assessments; from 1 hour up to 48 hrs. For exams and assessments of different durations, 10 minutes per hour is applied as follows:* 48hrs + 8hrs
* 24hrs + 4 hrs
* 3 hours + 30 mins
* 2.5 hours + 25 mins
* 2 hours + 20 mins
* 1.5 hours  + 15 mins

\*Disclosure of disability in exams – see below |
| Real Time Online Exams | Real-time online exams refer to a timed exam offered remotely, where students interact continuously with the online platform. These are not invigilated and so are effectively open book.This exam type will be open for a number of hours and the recommended duration is similar to that of the normal exam, with some additional buffer to allow for students to navigate the system. This mechanism should only be used where take-home exams or assignments are not feasible. Issues of connectivity and access are highly likely to arise, given the variable circumstances of students. The best way to mitigate these is to avoid this type of assessment.Exam answers will be checked by Turnitin software to control for plagiarism and collusion.Students will need to be in a position to contact instructors should there be exam queries. Immediate response from instructors needs to be provided where queries are raised.Where this method is chosen:School needs to be on standby for exam durationLive systems support must also be available | For Real Time Online Exams please ensure to add extra time stated on the student LENS. If a student has been granted extra time for exams your online exam must be extended to allow for these exam accommodations. Additional time of 10 (15, 20 or 30) minutes per hour will apply to all timed exams and assessments; from 1 hour up to 48 hrs. For exams and assessments of different durations, 10 minutes per hour is applied as follows:* 48hrs + 8hrs
* 24hrs + 4 hrs
* 3 hours + 30 mins
* 2.5 hours + 25 mins
* 2 hours + 20 mins
* 1.5 hours  + 15 mins

Guidance on adding extra-time is linked [here](https://www.tcd.ie/disability/teaching-info/Blackboard-time.php).Where students have use of additional supports such as technology, alternative venues or other arrangements, the Disability Service will be in touch with these students to assist them in setting up these supports for themselves in their own venues. Please see table below: <https://www.tcd.ie/disability/services/exam-accommodations.php>\*Disclosure of disability in exams – see below |
| Real Time Online Invigilated Exams | Real-time online invigilated exams refer to a timed exam offered remotely for which students may not use any materials. These exams are conducted through online examinations in Blackboard and they are timed, live sessions. This exam type will be open for a number of hours and the recommended duration is similar to that of the normal exam, with some additional buffer to allow for students to navigate the system. This mechanism is proving extremely challenging to implement and is highly labour-intensive. Schools should be prepared to supply invigilators, who will need to be trained. Schools requesting this mechanism must justify why invigilation is required. This will normally only be approved where there are requirements of professional accreditation. | For Real Time Online Invigilated Exams an additional time allowance should be added - please ensure to add extra time stated on the student LENS. If a student has been granted extra time for exams your online exam must be extended to allow for these exam accommodations. Additional time of 10 (15, 20 or 30) minutes per hour will apply to all timed exams and assessments; from 1 hour up to 48 hrs. For exams and assessments of different durations, 10 minutes per hour is applied as follows:* 48hrs + 8hrs
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\*Students with dyslexia and students who are deaf or have a hearing impairment may opt to disclose their disability on their examination scripts in any of the examination modalities listed above. It is the students responsibility to copy the link to the disclosure of disability linked here <https://www.tcd.ie/disability/services/exam-accommodations.php#id>  The Disability Service will provide this link to all students with this accommodation and will guide on its use. The Disability Service can be contacted with any queries in relation to the provision of exam accommodations for timed, online or take-home exams: askds@tcd.ie

**Inclusive marking guidelines for online examinations**

**Introduction**

Inclusive Marking Guidelines inform academic staff that the student, due to the nature of his/her disability, may have a particular difficulty with reading, spelling, grammar and written expression. They provide a framework for marking coursework and examination scripts for such students. If a core component of assessment is that of competence in spelling, grammar and written expression, it is not possible to disregard these elements (for example, languages, journalism).

Inclusive Marking Guidelines are intended to raise awareness of reading, spelling and / or writing difficulties, and that, even with additional supports put in place in examinations, disabilities which affect production of written work may prevent them from demonstrating knowledge and understanding relevant to their course. Such students are at a disadvantage when assessment takes the form of written examinations under timed conditions, or where they do not have access to their usual technological aids, nor are able to adopt the extensive drafting and redrafting strategies they would use for assignments.

1. **Principles**
	1. Colleges and universities have an overall expectation that all students should be able to communicate their ideas and demonstrate their knowledge effectively in writing. This includes appropriate levels of English language literacy as demonstrated in the correct use of grammar, punctuation and spelling. The expected level of proficiency depends on the nature and focus of the programme.
	2. DAWN colleges are committed to inclusion in all aspects of academic life and it is important that this is reflected in assessment and examination practices. Inclusive assessment should acknowledge the needs of a diverse student population, and that these practices are fair, transparent and consistently applied. Students for whom English is not their native language, students with Specific Learning Difficulties such as dyslexia, and students who are deaf, may be disadvantaged if they are assessed on competency in English language, rather than the ability to communicate their ideas successfully.
	3. Technical accuracy in written expression should be stated as a learning outcome and linked to marking criteria where it is considered to be a competence standard for the discipline or course.
	4. Students who experience difficulty with written expression benefit from feedback that acknowledges these challenges and which provides guidance and support in developing writing skills. For this reason, disclosure of disability notifications are used to communicate writing difficulties in timed examinations, as a reasonable accommodation under the Disability Act 2005.
	5. Students should have access to supports for producing written work that allow them to demonstrate their ability, such as writing technologies and resources that teach and develop academic skills. There is equally an expectation that students engage with and utilise such supports.
2. **Marking Practices for Coursework**
	1. Coursework for all students should be marked primarily on content and demonstration of knowledge, analysis and critical thinking. Where spelling, grammar and punctuation do not form part of the assessment criteria, and the intended meaning of the coursework is clear and presented coherently, marks should not be deducted for inaccuracies in the use of English language.
	2. Where the assessor / examiner is unable to decipher the meaning of the text, or the meaning is ambiguous, marks cannot be allocated.
	3. Feedback on coursework should highlight issues relating to written expression and indicate where work would benefit from improvements in language and writing skills. This advice may include referral to other sources of support within college.
	4. Where technical accuracy in written expression is deemed to be a competence standard this must be specified in the marking criteria, which should be shared with all students.
3. **Marking Guidelines for Students with Disabilities**
	1. Approximately 40% of disabled college students have a diagnosis of Specific Learning Difficulty or another disability which affects written expression.
	2. Coursework and examination scripts submitted by students for whom there is an evidenced need for consulting marking guidelines, should be identified to enable the marker to take a different approach to reading and evaluating academic work.
	3. Where accuracy in written expression is a stipulated competence, and is an explicit element of the marking criteria, students should expect to receive marks which reflect this requirement, together with guidance on developing skills in this area. This advice may include referral to other sources of support within college.
4. **Student awareness of marking criteria and practices**
	1. Students who have an evidenced difficulty with written expression are aware of the errors they are likely to make in terms of spelling, grammar, fluency, and meaning. They are also conscious that written work takes much longer to produce, to draft, and to review for such errors. This can be a source of anxiety and therefore students benefit from reassurance that in timed examinations, examiners are aware that it may not have been possible to engage with their usual technology.
	2. Students need to know whether accuracy in written expression is part of the marking criteria. Specific modules or learning outcomes may require students to demonstrate high levels of accuracy and attention to detail in written communication. Where this is the case, this should be an explicit part of the assessment and marking criteria, and clearly communicated to all students as a competence standard. This information should be made available prior to students applying for courses or choosing modules.
	3. Where assessor or examiner feedback identifies errors, students need to know whether these have affected marks.
	4. Where accuracy in written expression is not central to the assessment, a marker may still feel it is appropriate to provide feedback on some aspects of written expression, for the purposes of helping the student to develop. It is important to state that marks have not been lost in such cases.
5. **Marking guidelines by assessment type**

**Exam essay**

The assessment provides students with the opportunity to write an essay in response to a question under exam conditions.

When grading work, markers should mark primarily for content, ideas, critical thinking, and providing focused responses to the question, without penalising the student for specific weaknesses of expression, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure and spelling. Marking should not penalise poor handwriting, which is common weakness for many students with SpLDs.

Omitted words or punctuation should not be penalised too much for essay exams but issues with sequencing the essay into a logical structure should, as this is fundamental to an essay.

**Exam short answer question**

The assessment provides students with the opportunity to provide short answers to a number of questions under exam conditions.

When grading work, markers should mark primarily for content, ideas, critical thinking, and providing focused responses to the question, without penalising the student for specific weaknesses of expression, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure and spelling. Marking should not penalise poor handwriting, which is a common weakness for many students with SpLDs.

Simplified vocabulary should not be penalised too much for short answer exams as long as the responses presented are thoroughly described and focused on the question. Any statistical terminology should be accurate and reporting of statistics should be thorough.

**Qualitative report**

The assessment provides students with the opportunity to write a method, results, and discussion section of a qualitative grounded theory report.

When grading work, markers should mark primarily for content, ideas, critical thinking, and ability to present theory and literature in a style that is suitable for an academic audience without penalising the student for specific weaknesses of expression, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure and spelling.

Omitted words or punctuation should not be penalised too much for qualitative reports but issues with sequencing the report into a logical structure should (particularly given the guidance provided on structure – sections, subheadings within sections).  Omitted words should be penalised when referencing quotes as they have had clear guidance as to how to do this.

Simplified vocabulary when writing should not be penalised too much for qualitative reports as long as the themes presented are thoroughly described and the theory presented is coherent and grounded in the data.

**Blog**

The assessment provides students with the opportunity to develop skills in disseminating research findings in a style and format that can be accessed and understood by members of the public.

When grading work, markers should mark primarily for content, ideas, critical thinking, and ability to present information and arguments in a style that is suitable for a non-academic audience (e.g. avoiding use of specialist technical language) without penalising the student for specific weaknesses of expression, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure and spelling.

Omitted words or punctuation should not be penalised too much for public engagement blogs but issues with sequencing ideas into a logical structure and use of overly technical language should.

**Position paper**

The assessment provides students with the opportunity to develop skills in presenting a persuasive argument.

When grading the work of students with SpLDs, markers should mark primarily for content, ideas, critical thinking, and ability to present a persuasive argument (e.g. one that convinces the audience that the opinion presented is valid and worth listening to) without penalising the student for specific weaknesses of expression, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure and spelling.

Omitted words or punctuation should not be penalised too much for position papers but issues with sequencing ideas into a logical structure and issues with developing a convincing argument that is

supported by evidence should.

1. **Common errors associated with reading, spelling and / or writing difficulties**

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:

1. **Surface errors** in spelling and grammar such as inaccuracies in the use of tense, grammatical agreement, plurals, spelling and punctuation.

**2. 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 marking the examination script of a student with a reading, writing or spelling difficulty:

1. 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.

2. Errors in **spelling** do not necessarily 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.

3. **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.

**4. 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.

**5. Students with difficulties in reading, writing and spelling might not always use punctuation as a tool to clarify meaning.** Scripts may contain long 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 example: “The study considered three main areas of research. The effects of frequent drug use the role of the family in the offenders behaviour and the impact of custodial sentences 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 mark awarded.

*6.* Some students may have **restricted vocabulary** and use a far more limited range of words than one would expect. Avoid penalising students who may have an immature style of writing, unless written communication is a specified learning outcome.

7. 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 marking guidelines will not apply.

8. 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 mark awarded.

9. 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 their ability to demonstrate the module’s learning outcomes and this would be reflected in the marks awarded.