

LTC15D080

Title: *Guidance regarding the Use of Proof Readers*
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Issue

The existing policy has been in place for many years, and therefore it is felt that only relatively minor revisions are required. Outlawing the use of proof readers would not be appropriate since a prohibitive policy would be impossible to ‘police’ effectively and would inhibit a legitimate educational and developmental process by which students learn how to refine their written English. Seeking support from a proof reader is just one of many sources of support/guidance that are available to students and should be viewed within this wider context of learning support. This paper contains proposed amendments to the ‘Policy’ on the use of Proof Readers, following a review of the policy by the Taught Programmes Policy Group (TPPG) on 14 Jan 2016. It is proposed that the Policy becomes ‘Guidance’ instead. The revised ‘Guidance’ would come into force in Sept 2016 for the academic year 2016/17 for all students.

Recommendation

The proposed changes include re-titling the Policy as ‘Guidance’. The guidance is intended to be used both by students, staff and by third parties engaged in ‘proof reading’ drafts of student coursework (including dissertations and theses). LTC is asked to consider and approve the revisions for 2016/17.

Resource Implications: There are no resource implications

Risk Implications

The conversion from a ‘Policy’ to ‘Guidance’ reflects a change in status of the document that was felt to be appropriate by TPPG members. Breaches of the pre-existing ‘Policy’ would have been dealt with under the University’s Policy on Plagiarism and Collusion, and failure to follow the new ‘Guidance’ will have the same consequence. It is not, therefore, felt that the change to ‘Guidance’ brings a higher level of risk.

Equality and Diversity

There are no equality or diversity implications with regard to the new Guidance – it applies to all students, staff and third parties at all levels.

Timing of decisions

Approval of the proposed ‘Guidance’ means that the latter will apply to all students, staff and third parties from Sept 2016 onwards.

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Background

A Policy on the Use of Proof Readers has been in place for a number of years, having been approved by Senate in April 2010. The policy allows students to engage a third party in the proof reading of their work prior to submission. This might be a peer, family member, friend or professional proof reader. The intention of the policy was to encourage a ‘help-seeking’

approach which enabled students to work with third parties to identify potential enhancements in drafts of their written work as one means of developing their learning and their use of written English. DOS have maintained, in the past, a list of professional proof readers who offer their services on a fee-paying basis. However, over the past couple of years DOS have worked with the ADTP and colleagues from RED to run dedicated training sessions for commercial proof readers to ensure that they are properly briefed and aware of the University's Policy on Plagiarism and Collusion, and the boundaries between 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' practice. Only those who have attended this dedicated training are included on the DOS 'list' which is available to students electronically.

The review of the policy at TPPG sparked a vibrant discussion. The latter focused on a number of issues:

- Whether the Policy should actually be 'Guidance' since infringements or a failure to follow guidance would be dealt with, anyway, under the Policy on Plagiarism and Collusion.
- Many members were previously unaware of the existing Policy, suggesting that a revised document would need to be communicated effectively.
- Some TPPG members felt that a closer linkage with the Policy on Plagiarism & Collusion would be beneficial.
- It was felt by some that there was a misalignment between the policy and the Senate Scales which include a criteria focused on the 'Quality of Written English'.
- There should be a clearer distinction between proof readers 'identifying' and 'making' amendments/corrections/enhancements. Proof readers should only 'identify' such changes – it is the responsibility of the student to determine and make a judgment on which of these suggested changes to actually 'address' in any subsequent revisions to their text. It was important that students take ownership of the changes made and of the text as a whole.
- A distinction needed to be clear between assignments where use of proof readers might be appropriate, and those – where the primary goal of the assignment was to gauge the writing skills of the student - where it should not be allowed. The latter needs to be clear in any assignment briefings/guidance provided by module organisers.
- Some felt that use of proof readers should be allowed for formative but not summative items of assessment – but others were less persuaded by this argument, noting that the greatest incentives to seeking such support was in relation to summative work which carried marks.
- The use of proof readers only at certain levels (e.g. level 4) was considered, but there was little support for a restrictive approach.
- It was felt that the document needed to emphasise more the role that students have in proofing their own work.
- There was some discussion as to whether students should be required to indicate on their work where a proof reader has been used. Pros and cons were explored. Overall TPPG felt that this would not be appropriate since students are able to utilise a range of help and access a range of support (including guidance from LET, advisers etc) without doing so. The student has to take responsibility for the work being their own, and inappropriate use of proofreading services or other third parties would be dealt with under the Policy on Plagiarism and Collusion.

Changes contained in the revised 'Guidance'

Overall, the ADTP is of the view that the existing Policy document was generally fit for purpose, and that only minor amendments are required for the future. In the document attached, changes are limited to:

- 1) Changing the status from 'Policy' to 'Guidance'.
- 2) Inclusion of clearer section regarding 'Definitions'.
- 3) Minor changes to the sequencing of text.
- 4) Revisions to text relating to the role of Module Organisers: MOs are required to make it clear in their Module Outlines or assessment briefing documents whether use of proof readers is permitted.
- 5) A clearer distinction between 'identifying' potential revisions (the role of the proof reader) and making changes to the text (the job of the student).
- 6) Additional guidance on circumstances where it would not be appropriate to use of proof reader.
- 7) Enhanced information on services available via LET (DOS).
- 8) Hotlink to DOS 'List of approved Proof readers' will be added once the latter has been updated

University **Guidance** on the Use of Proof Readers

Introduction

The University acknowledges that in some circumstances proofreading (technical correction) can form a valuable and useful part of the assessment process and of a student's induction into appropriate academic practice. Just as a researcher would expect to have a paper proof read before publication, it is reasonable and sensible for students to seek to have their assessed work reviewed for syntax, spelling and flow before submission. The assessment process is facilitated if work is presented in a comprehensible form. Whilst academic staff / markers / examiners may highlight occasional lapses in spelling or grammar their focus should normally be on the academic content of a student's work, not on comprehensive and extensive correction of spelling and grammar. It is also important that students develop the skill of proofreading their own work to identify flaws and errors, **and recognise that it may be necessary to take deliberate steps (e.g. attending a [Learning Enhancement Team workshop](#)) to develop this skill.**

Definitions

Proof-reading - is the systematic checking and identification of errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar and sentence construction, formatting and layout in the text of a student script. The 'script' might be an essay, report, project, dissertation or any other written assignment. A student should proof read their own work, but may also ask third parties to do so.

Third-parties - persons other than the academic supervisor, tutor, lecturer, marker or examiner, who might offer to proof-read a student's text in the sense given above. Such third parties may be fellow-students, friends and family, or professional proof-readers.

Editing - any material amendment to the presentation of text which exceeds proof-reading, as defined above. In particular it includes any alterations which substantially change, correct, expand or condense the academic content of the work.

Peer/Academic Review – the provision of feedback on draft scripts prior to formal submission by either other students (peers), or from academic staff. The University expects that the process of peer review will result chiefly in the provision of comments and advice regarding the content, logic and clarity of the arguments advanced in the work under review. It should not include directly writing, re-writing, editing or amending the work, including any figures, notation and sequences of code, as well as text. Although the review may include attention to standards of written English and presentation, the role of the reviewer does not normally extend to the systematic correction of grammatical and spelling mistakes, or typographical errors.

The student as sole author

In all cases ultimate responsibility for deciding how best to respond to a reviewer's comments rests with the student as author. Students should be aware that collusion in the preparation of work for assessment is regarded as academic malpractice, thus they must ensure that any contributions or amendments resulting from peer or academic review does not compromise their role as the sole author of the work. Regardless of whether a student has or has not used the services of a proof reader, the work they submit for assessment must represent their own effort and abilities.

When is the use of a proof reader allowed?

Allowable - In some assessments, it is predominantly or exclusively the student's ability to undertake analysis, synthesise ideas and construct a reasoned argument that are being assessed, and the appropriate use of a proof reader may be permitted. **If students are**

unsure as to whether they may use the services of a proof reader, they should consult their Module Organiser.

Not allowed - For some assessments, the learning outcomes which are being assessed include the student's ability to express themselves in written English or to record information (such as numerical data) accurately and here it may be appropriate to expect that a student will not make use of a proof reader. **In cases where assessments fall into this category, Module Organisers should make this clear in their Module Outlines and/or in written guidance provided to students with regard to assessments.**

Collusion

It is not appropriate or acceptable for a student to ask or to allow someone else to make material changes to their work, for example by rewriting passages of text or making adjustments to formulae or code. The University and the wider academic community regard this as inappropriate academic conduct (collusion), which will result in disciplinary action as set out in the [University's Policy on Plagiarism and Collusion](#). The integrity of the awards the University makes rests upon the principle that work submitted for assessment represents the student's own effort and their own understanding, without falsification of any kind.

Aims of Proofreading

A student's work should represent their own effort and reflect their own understanding of the topic being assessed. Students must take responsibility for their own work and actively participate in the proofreading process by considering the suggested corrections and highlighted errors **and deciding whether or not these are appropriate and should be adopted**. Ideally, a proof reader will make no changes to a text, but will simply suggest alternatives/corrections.

The aims of proofreading work should be to identify:

- spelling, formatting or typographical errors within the specific piece of work
- grammatical errors within the specific piece of work
- areas of frequent errors, which the student should then use as a learning tool
- passages where the meaning is unclear and which the student should review, reconsider and potentially revise themselves

What proof readers may and may not do:

A proof reader may:

- identify a spelling mistake or typographical error
- identify poor grammar, indicate what the error is (e.g. "tense")
- highlight a sentence or passage that is overly complex or where the intended meaning is not clear and include an explanation of the reason why the sentence or passage is unclear or what the alternate interpretations might be
- indicate where there are obvious and apparent logical inconsistencies within an equation (although this would not be appropriate in a subject such as mathematics, where it is the student's understanding of an equation that is being assessed).
- point to formatting errors
- flag errors in labelling diagrams or figures
- note errors in cross referencing.

A proof reader should not:

- rewrite passages of text in order to clarify meaning
- change the words or figures or notation used by the author (except to identify the correct spelling of the word used)
- rearrange passages of text, sequence of code or section of other material
- reformat the material
- contribute additional material to the original
- check calculations or formulae
- rewrite formulae, equations or computer code
- re-label figures or diagrams

Who Can Proofread

- A student can proofread their own work, including using spelling and grammar-checking software to help (for example spell checkers). However, students should be aware of the limitations of such software and the risks of becoming over-reliant on automatic proofreading systems. Careful proofreading by the student of their own work forms an important part of the writing process. In addition to planning, researching and drafting, it is considered good academic practice for students to review, revise and proofread their own work. Students are encouraged to seek support in developing their skills in academic writing from, for instance, their lecturer, adviser, a Learning Enhancement Tutor.
- Peers/other students¹ – **except those who are on the same module and completing the same assignment. Unauthorised collaboration of this kind may be deemed to be 'collusion' and could result in disciplinary action in accordance with the University's Policy on Plagiarism & Collusion.**
- Another third party, such as a friend.
- Professional proofreading service. **(The Dean of Students Office (DOS) maintains a list of 'approved' professional proof readers. These are proof readers who offer a fee-paying service to students who have attended dedicated training on the [University's Plagiarism and Collusion Policy](#), and the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable proof-reading practice. The list can be accessed at: [Insert URL]).**

Types of Proofreading

Acceptable proofreading may take a variety of forms

- A student reading through their own work to check for mistakes and for clarity of meaning or flow of argument.
- A student using spellchecking software to highlight typographical and spelling mistakes.
- A student asking a third party to read through a piece of work to identify areas where clarity of meaning could be improved, to identify spelling, formatting or typographical errors or to check that diagrams are appropriately formatted, labelled and referenced.
- A research student asking a peer or professional service to read through a thesis to identify typographical errors or passages where the clarity of meaning could be improved.

Services available from The Learning Enhancement Team (Dean of Students' Office)

The [Learning Enhancement Team](#) provides expert guidance on a wide range of study skills together with advice concerning academic writing and use of English. This includes specialist expertise in supporting international students and students with specific learning difficulties. Students can access study guides, workshops and individual tutorials. Learning Enhancement Tutors do not offer a proof reading service but can work with students to help them to identify areas of their writing to work on and to develop ways of improving their writing, including strategies for managing the writing process. The service is available during term time and holiday periods when the University is open. It is free and confidential, and is available to all students registered on UEA courses.

Guidance Framework

The following sets out a guidance framework within which proofreading may appropriately be undertaken.

¹ There may be some contexts where a student may ask another student on the same module to proof read their work. Examples might include instances where the students are on the same module, but completing different questions within an assessment strategy, or working collaboratively in project teams. In the latter, mutual proof-reading may be an expected and entirely routine aspect of the learning process. Students should always seek guidance from their Module Organiser if they are unsure what legitimate use can be made of proof readers as part of the learning process on the module.

1. Students may be permitted to use proof readers for summative assessments (assessments where marks “count”) including written assignments, presentations, projects, and dissertations, at both undergraduate and taught postgraduate level.
2. Undergraduate and taught postgraduate students should not use proof readers for formative assessment (work where marks do not “count”). This will enable markers to identify appropriate areas for a student’s academic development.
3. Postgraduate research students are permitted to use proof readers for their final thesis, papers prepared for annual review or transfer panels. It is not appropriate for students to use proof readers when submitting formative work (such as draft chapters) to their supervisory team as supervisors must be able to gauge the English language competence of their students.
4. For postgraduate research students and taught postgraduate or undergraduate students completing a dissertation, it is considered good practice to ask others to proof read their work.
5. The use of proof readers will not be permitted where a learning outcome of the assessment task is to test English language (or other language) ability, including the ability to write accurately and clearly or to demonstrate quality of expression. Some professional bodies may specify particular assessment requirements in this aspect of practice.
6. Module Organisers are expected to clarify in their Module Outlines or in assessment briefing documents provided to students whether the use of proof readers is permitted in relation to specific assessments. If students are unsure whether use of proof readers is permitted, they should seek confirmation from their Module Organiser(s).

~~School Directors of Learning, Teaching and Quality will make decisions in respect of these assessment tasks where students are not permitted to make use of proof readers on the basis of the learning outcomes that the assessment task is designed to test.~~

7. ~~Module outlines and/or assessment briefing documents (e.g. written guidance relating to individual assessments) shall state where the use of a proof reader is not permitted.~~
8. Using a proof reader where not permitted to do so will be classed as collusion and will be pursued in accordance with the [University’s Policy on Plagiarism and Collusion](#).
9. Where the use of a proof reader is permitted, students should be informed by academic staff (e.g. Module Organisers) that the purpose of proof reading is to ensure that grammar is correct and that the flow and meaning of the text are clear. The content and argument contained within the work must be the student’s own.
10. Schools must clearly indicate within marking schemes where poor grammar and spelling will be penalised, and will have in place mechanisms for ensuring that students with specific learning difficulties are not unfairly impacted by such marking schemes.
11. Students shall not be required to indicate on their work where a proof reader has been used.

12. Effective proof reading should encourage and support students in the development of their own writing style, by permitting them to identify weaknesses and ways of addressing these .
13. It is not appropriate for a proof reader to materially amend text in such a way that the meaning of the original is changed. Nor is it appropriate for a proof reader to comment on quality of analysis or understanding of content. Where there is a lack of clarity in the meaning of a passage, the proof reader should indicate this in their comments and provide guidance in respect of the alternative ways in which the passage of text could be understood by a reader.
14. Students should clarify with the proof reader (whether a friend or a professional service) in advance the nature of the service to be provided. **Students are strongly advised only to use professional proof readers who are on the DOS 'List of Approved Proof Readers' (Insert URL) since the latter have agreed to sign-up to adhere to this Guidance and have received training on the University's Plagiarism and Collusion Policy.**
15. Students who elect to use a proof reader (whether a friend or a professional service) must retain copies of all draft material sent to the proof reader, showing their original material and annotations/corrections made by the proof reader.
16. Where a marker suspects plagiarism or collusion, the **School Plagiarism Officer** may ask a student to produce draft material and evidence of the changes suggested or made by the proof reader. Failure to retain copies of drafts or to produce them when requested to do so by the Plagiarism Officer will weigh against a student **in any subsequent Plagiarism Meeting**.

~~The Dean of Students makes available to students a 'List of approved professional proofreading services'. The proof readers on this list have attended a training event at UEA to ensure that they are aware of the UEA policies relating to the use of proof readers and plagiarism and collusion <insert link to list>~~