

**LTC09D106**

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**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.

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 conduct (collusion), which will result in disciplinary action. 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.

A more detailed description of what is and is not acceptable is set out below.

**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.

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

A proof reader may

- identify a spelling mistake or typographical error and provide the correct spelling
- identify poor grammar, indicate what the error is (e.g. “tense”) and provide the correct grammatical construction
- 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
- 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

A distinction needs to be drawn between proofreading (the technical correction of text or other material) and formative feedback or academic discussion. For some students and some types of assessed work, for example research students preparing draft chapters or papers, the draft may *additionally* be used as a mechanism for sparking discussion of their work. Here the audience or reader may, in addition to performing the proofreading functions described above, also comment on ideas, raise further questions or suggest additional reading. Here students are again considered to be active participants in the process and it is the author’s responsibility to determine how such suggestions should be pursued, rather than accepting any such suggestions passively.

### **Who Can Proofread**

- A student can proofread their own work and use computer software to help (for example spell checkers). This is a useful skill to develop.
- Peers / other students.
- Another third party, such as a friend.
- Professional proofreading service.

### **Types of Proofreading**

Acceptable proofreading may take a variety of forms

- A student using spellchecking software to highlight typographical and spelling mistakes.
- A student reading through their own work to check for mistakes and for clarity of meaning or flow of argument.
- 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 student for whom English is not their first language asking a peer or professional service to read through draft work to identify areas where clarity of meaning could be improved or to identify grammatical errors as part of the student’s ongoing language development.
- 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.

(The Learning Enhancement Team within the Dean of Students' Office does not offer a proofreading service, but can help students identify areas of style and language that need attention, and offer support in identifying strategies to address these. Similarly, the Royal Literary Fund Fellow does not offer a proofreading service, but can assist students with developing their writing style. The Dyslexia Team within the Dean of Students' Office does not offer a proofreading service, but works with students to identify strategies to address specific learning difficulties.)

## **Assessment**

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 other 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 can be permitted.

All work submitted for assessment must represent the student's own effort and abilities.

## **Framework**

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

1. Students may be permitted to use proof readers for summative assessments (assessments where marks "count") including written assignments (WA), presentations (PS), projects (PR) and dissertations (DI), at both undergraduate and taught postgraduate level.
2. Undergraduate and taught postgraduate students should not use proofreaders for formative assessment (work where marks do not "count"). This will enable markers to identify potential problem areas and suggest appropriate learning support packages.
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 outcomes 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 requirements.
6. Module Organisers will make recommendations to the School Director of Learning, Teaching and Quality on an annual basis (as part of Module Update) in respect of those assessment tasks where students are not permitted to make use of proof readers.
7. School Directors of Learning, Teaching and Quality will make decisions in respect of those 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.
8. Course handbooks, module outlines or assessment outlines shall state where the use of a proof reader is not permitted.

9. 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 disciplinary procedures in respect of Plagiarism and Collusion.
10. Where the use of a proof reader is permitted, students should be informed 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.
11. 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.
12. Students shall not be required to indicate on their work where a proof reader has been used.
13. 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 those weaknesses.
14. 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.
15. Students should clarify with the proof reader (whether a friend or a professional service) in advance the nature of the service to be provided. If in doubt, advice may be sought from the Learning Enhancement Service within the Dean of Students' Office.
16. 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.
17. Where a marker suspects plagiarism or collusion, the 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.