

## 3L.1.1 PROOF-READING AND EDITING – RESEARCH STUDENTS

### ADVISORY NOTE FOR RESEARCH STUDENTS AND SUPERVISORS

The University expects a high quality of written English in candidates for all higher degrees. To ensure this, it checks the English language capacity and level of applicants at the point of admission, particularly when English is an additional language. All those admitted to postgraduate research degrees should be capable of writing clearly and appropriately, even when this is challenging for them. Achieving a postgraduate degree indicates that the student is able to write independently in an appropriate academic style in their chosen discipline.

These guidelines set out the best practice for supervisors and students regarding the proof-reading of all written work that is part of the assessment in postgraduate degrees, up to and including research Masters dissertations and doctoral theses. Note: these guidelines do **not** apply at undergraduate level, where both proof-reading and editing are the student's responsibility and part of the learning process.

#### 1. SUPERVISORS RESPONSIBILITIES

- 1.1 Supervisors can and should help postgraduate research students with their written work, in terms of grammar, style, and the quality of subject-specific discourse. This is a normal part of the teaching process and should be encouraged. The induction into a fluent use of particular discourses or styles of writing is an important part of any higher degree, and will most often happen through comments and markings on the student's draft work, where the supervisor can:
  - (a) indicate to the student how to emend or improve language so that it better achieves the appropriate style of academic discourse, and
  - (b) indicate characteristic faults of grammar, punctuation, syntax, styling, or referencing.
- 1.2 Examples may be given to help the student achieve a style of discourse appropriate to their academic discipline. Such comments and feedback by the supervisor must be given within the normal time allowed for supervision and supervision-related feedback, e.g. the supervisor's reading of draft work. If the student requires more than this level of help, that is to say more than the appropriate advice available within normal supervisory time, the matter should be raised at Annual Review.
- 1.3 The following are legitimate means for students to improve the quality of their written style:
  - (a) attending at any appropriate skills sessions available from the Foundation department;
  - (b) consulting appropriate style guides and grammar books;
  - (c) using all the automatic correction facilities available on Microsoft Word and similar word processing software;
  - (d) using programmes like 'Grammarly'.

Different subject-areas will be able to direct students to different kinds of support in this respect.

## 2. STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1 Many PGR students will enjoy proof-reading their own work, i.e. refining it to a professional standard of presentation, and learning the skill of this by doing it. There are a number of guidance documents available for students who wish to learn how to edit and proof read their own work, including:

[https://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwadminoxacuk/localsites/oxfordlearninginstitute/documents/pdg/managingyourself/1\\_guide-to-editing-and-proofreading.pdf](https://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwadminoxacuk/localsites/oxfordlearninginstitute/documents/pdg/managingyourself/1_guide-to-editing-and-proofreading.pdf)

2.2 It is legitimate, however, if they wish, for PGR students to seek help from others (whether family, friends, or professionals) to proof-read their work, but **this should normally be strictly proof-reading not editing** (see definitions below). Anything that could be construed as editing risks being a breach of academic integrity. If a student has any doubts about what is reasonable, s/he should consult with their supervisor.

2.3 Students are required to observe the following in the use of proof-readers:

- a) It is the student's responsibility to provide proof-readers with a copy of these guidelines
- b) The University expects that any piece of work submitted for assessment is the student's own work, and any assistance by a proof-reader should not compromise the expectations outlined in the Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedure
- c) Students should note that the use of a proof-reader will not be accepted as mitigation for any deficiencies in their work
- d) Failure to adhere to these guidelines could be judged a breach of academic integrity and contravene the Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedure.

## 3. PROOF READING

3.1 Proof-reading involves minor corrections to achieve a fully accurate presentation of ideas and findings. Licit proof-reading may, for example:

- Identify literals, i.e. typing mistakes
- Indicate missing words
- Indicate spelling errors in complex/subject-specific words
- Indicate missing punctuation
- Indicate a missing paragraph indent
- Indicate wrong placing of footnote numbers
- Indicate wrong use of double or single quotation marks
- Indicate accidental changes of font within the text
- Indicate failure to use italics properly (e.g. on book titles)
- Indicate omissions in footnote references (e.g. missing out of place, or publisher, or date, or page range)
- check author references in the text for consistency with bibliography/reference-list/works cited
- Indicate errors in the bibliography that do not follow the Style Guide used
- Identify errors in the labelling of diagrams, charts, or figures
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## 4. EDITING

4.1 A PGR student may *not* usually seek help from others that involves editing or sub-editing her or his work. Editing, as defined here, is an intervention that makes more significant changes in the student's text and manifestly improves the quality of the written style. Professional editors or sub-editors should not be used by a PGR student. Examples of what counts as editing are:

- Suggesting word substitutions to improve sense or nuance
- Creating new content, phrases, or full sentences to insert in the text
- Re-ordering of words in a sentence to create a grammatical or better syntax
- Re-ordering the sentences of a paragraph to create better logic and clarity
- The rephrasing of one or more sentences to improve syntax and grammar
- Improving structure or argument by moving sentences or paragraphs into different positions in the text
- Deleting individual sentences or paragraphs to improve the logic or rhetoric of argument
- Deleting paragraphs that repeat material and are considered redundant
- Reducing content so as to comply with a specified word limit
- Inserting new sub-headings or other divisions of the text
- Translating any part of the work into English
- Re-labelling, checking, or correcting diagrams, charts, figures, calculations or formulae

4.2 The logic of the distinction drawn here between proof-reading and editing is that the former involves the correction of minor errors, omissions, or mistakes, while the latter is a more fundamental invention, often at sentence or paragraph level, and usually involving some significant form of rewriting of the text. The use of professional editors, making these kind of significant interventions, would make it unclear if students had themselves, at the completion of their degrees, achieved the ability to write in an appropriate academic style in their chosen disciplines. For this reason professional editors should not be used.

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