



Heriot-Watt University

**SCRIBING/READING
In exams**

A Guide for Staff and Students

May 2015

GUIDELINES FOR SCRIBING/READING

INFORMATION FOR STAFF AND STUDENTS

Principles

Where students are prevented from satisfying the normal requirements for examinations and course work because of a disability, it is appropriate for compensatory arrangements to be made. This includes, where appropriate, the use of a scribe/reader.

The use of a scribe/reader in such circumstances enables the student to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of a topic and places them on a par with their peers.

Special arrangements should:

- be the *minimum necessary* to allow the student to demonstrate their level of ability
- not be intended to compensate for lack of attainment
- not give any advantage to the candidate

Who needs a scribe/reader?

Students with Specific Learning Difficulties (Dyslexia, etc.)

Commonly, this group of students forms the largest percentage of students with a disability in H.E. Given the wide range and level of reading, writing and comprehension difficulties experienced by students in this category, it is likely that some students will find it easier to verbalise their answers rather than write them. Using a scribe in this instance is entirely appropriate, though some students may prefer to use a PC. Students with dysgraphia in particular should not be expected to write by hand.

Students with Permanent Disabilities, Chronic Medical Conditions and temporary disabilities

There are a number of disabilities and chronic medical conditions which may necessitate using a scribe such as a visual impairment or concentration problems. Many medical conditions result in reduced ability or total inability to use fine motor skills. Such conditions can cause difficulties in writing, often affecting the use of fingers, hands and arms. Writing can produce high levels of discomfort and pain which, in many cases, can result in physical damage to nerve and even muscle tissue.

Examples of these include:

- Carpel Tunnel Syndrome
- Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI)
- Tendonitis
- Tenosynovitis
- Students with temporary injuries such as fracture

All are covered by professional evidence of disability.

Guidelines for Scribing Practice

The Scribe should:

- Turn up 30 minutes before the start of the exam
- Have experience of the scribing and examination process
- Not have any close connection with the student
- Meet the student for a short practice session if required
- Agree a method of working and managing the exam situation with the student

Writing Speed

The Scribe should be able to write at a reasonable speed over prolonged periods of time, or be able to touch type

Legibility

In most cases the Scribe will hand write. It is important that scribes are able to *write clearly and neatly* – students may wish to read over what is being written.

Occasionally Scribes may be asked to type but will be notified in advance if this is the case.

Communication

The Scribe should be able to communicate clearly and effectively with the student.

Accuracy

The scribe must not re-word, re-structure, fill out or in any way augment what is dictated by the student. When requested, the scribe/reader must read back any passages or make alterations to the text on the exact instructions of the student.

It is recommended that the scribe write on every second line in order to accommodate changes, additions and corrections.

Ethical Standards

The scribe/reader must respect student confidentiality at all times and adhere to the University's expectations of scribes.

The disability service recruit, test and train scribes/readers to ensure acceptable standards.

It is currently the responsibility of the School setting the assessment to arrange for a scribe/reader. Special arrangements made by the School should take into account:

- Accommodation - separate room with sufficient desk space to accommodate both the student and the scribe
- Invigilation – this will be carried out by the scribe/reader unless otherwise directed by the School.
- Extra time allowance is recommended for scribing (normally 25%)
- At exams, copies of the exam paper should be given to both scribe/reader and student
- There should be clear identification on the exam paper that a scribe has been used – the scribe should note on the exam booklet the word “scribed” to alert the marker
- Graphics and diagrams should be produced by the student (unless the disability is a physical one)

CHECKLIST FOR SCRIBES/READERS

- Before the exam, collect the exam paper 30 minutes in advance as arranged by the School Administrator

Do...

- Sit beside the student, not opposite
- Make the student feel as relaxed as possible
- Discuss how you will tackle punctuation, spelling, formulae, etc.)
- Give any reminders prior to the exam starting (e.g., “remember that I can read parts as often as you would like me to”)
- Read what the student asks you to as often as the student requests it
- Point to the section being read
- Read at normal speed
- Read words on maps, graphs, tables, etc.
- Write down exactly what the student has dictated
- Read back what the student has dictated if requested
- Make alterations to answers if requested
- Put in the correct punctuation if pre-arranged
- Agree whether you will alert them, e.g. 30 minutes before the end
- Remember to note on the exam booklet the word “scribed” to alert the marker
- Any difficulties – contact School Administrator staff (ensure you have their contact details)
- If the student does not turn up for their exam, you are required to stay for one hour only and you will be paid for the session

Don't...

- Select passages to read without the student indicating this is desired
- Explain any words
- Explain any questions
- Provide the student with any additional information
- Suggest when to move on to the next question
- Emphasise correct answers (or incorrect answers) in any way
- Show by your facial expression or body language that the answer given is correct, incorrect, or quite unbelievable
- Show by keeping your pen poised too obviously that you think more needs to be written
- Comment either way if a student asks if the answer is correct
- Draw diagrams, tables or graphs (though adding words to graphics on request is acceptable) unless the student has a physical disability
- Ask a student with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) to spell or punctuate
- Use your mobile phone
- Be late, this causes unnecessary stress for the student

Reading in an exam

- Read whatever the student asks you to read, as often as they need to hear it
- Do not explain questions or comment on answers
- Sit quietly next to the student when not reading

CHECKLIST FOR STUDENTS Before the exam

- You may not want to use a scribe/reader for every exam. Your School Administrator will email you asking whether/in which exam you would like to use a scribe/reader. You must reply to this email to let them know
- If needed/possible, arrange at least one practice session with the scribe well in advance of the exam

In the exam

- The scribe/reader will also act as the invigilator
- Check seating arrangement to make sure you are both comfortable and able to work effectively
- Prepare any mind maps or other notes for yourself if you wish, before beginning dictation (inform your scribe of what you are doing)

Reviewing Scribing/Reading arrangements

- Suggest any changes that would be helpful to your School Administrator
- Check with your School Administrator if your suggestions have been acted upon, well in advance of your next exam

GUIDELINES ON GOOD DICTATION PRACTICE

Dictation is the central aspect of scribing. Good dictation ensures that ideas are accurately transferred from thought into the written word. The main aspects of good dictation are *clarity, punctuation and paragraphing*. It may also be helpful for the student to prepare their own mind maps or notes prior to dictation.

Headings can also be very useful in creating structure. The following guidelines will assist in the development of an effective and speedy dictation style. Many of these points will be particularly applicable to essay-type examinations or other written assignments or reports. Students should take note of the following suggestions to improve their style of dictation.

Clarity of Voice in Dictation

- Adopt a normal tone of voice
- Be aware of how you articulate words - speak clearly to assist the scribe to distinguish words correctly and reduce the need for interruptions
- Enunciate more clearly than usual while maintaining fluency
- If numbers need to be dictated, tell the scribe before you begin. Say “zero” for ‘0’ and pronounce numbers in a slightly exaggerated fashion to avoid any confusion

Fluency

- If stuck for a word, don't panic: relax and concentrate on the idea you want to express
- If you lose your train of thought, you can ask the scribe to read back what has been written
- Alternatively, you can ask to read what has been written yourself
- Try to be sure of what you want to say before you say it, but ask the scribe to make corrections if necessary

Spelling

- Normally the scribe will spell words to the best of their ability. The paper will have the word 'scribed' put on it so that any spelling errors will not be attributed to the student

Punctuation

- Normally the scribe will add punctuation unless otherwise directed by the student

Paragraphing

- Let the scribe know when you are starting a new paragraph

Further Information

For further information and advice, please contact:

The Disability Service
Disability@hw.ac.uk
0131 451 4594

May 2015

