

Queen's University Belfast

## Proofreading Support: A Guide for Students

### 1. Introduction

Proofreading is the final stage in the process of producing a piece of written work. This guide sets out for students what is and is not considered acceptable proofreading practice, to ensure that at all times the student's responsibility as the author of their own work is clear.

Proofreading is an important part of the academic writing process. Students are encouraged to develop their own proofreading skills using support outlined below, rather than using third party proofreaders to replace development of these skills.

**Where a student chooses to ask another individual to proofread their work or engages a proofreading service to undertake this task they must adhere to this guidance.**

Before using a third party proofreader<sup>1</sup>, students should consider the following:

- Academic skills support is available at no cost to Queen's students through School and University services (see Section 2 below);
- Students have responsibility to ensure that any work you submit is your content;
- It is an academic offence to gain or attempt to gain an unfair advantage, or to help another student in doing so. This includes plagiarism, duplication, collusion, fabrication and contract cheating. If you are not sure what constitutes an academic offence, read the [University's Regulations \(Procedures for Dealing with Academic Offences\)](#) and speak to one of the sources of support outlined in Section 2 below. There is a range of penalties for committing an academic offence, outlined in the Procedures.

There may be situations where the School or academic staff indicate that, for certain assessments, students are not allowed any assistance in terms of proofreading or editing, as the skill of writing is being assessed. This should be made clear to students but, if in doubt, a student should check with their Course or Module Convenor.

Peer review, group reading or other collaborative practices built into learning are not covered by this guidance. If students who are supporting each other have any queries about good practice, they are encouraged to contact their Tutor or one of the services listed below.

### 2. Support for Students

Students who feel that they need assistance in academic writing have a range of options:

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<sup>1</sup> Any person(s) other than the academic tutor, includes other students, peers, friends, family and professional proofreaders.

### All Students

- Seek guidance from your School, for example **Programme or Module Convenor**, or **Supervisor** for research students. Find out when they have office hours, or arrange a time to meet to discuss some of your work, and any specific concerns you have relating to your writing. Tutors may comment on the ideas presented and clarity of the work. They can signpost students to appropriate support to build their academic writing skills.
- **Subject Librarian:** In addition to each School having a designated member of Library staff, the Library offers a series of [LibGuides](#), online resources available to help you with topics such as copyright, reference management and source information relevant to your subject area.
- [Writing Skills Resources](#) developed by Queen's and available online, are free and **available to all Queen's students**. These include English Language resources, such as interactive tutorials and downloadable information.

### Undergraduate Students

- **Learning Development Service:** As a student on an undergraduate course, you may be relatively new to using references and writing critically in an academic context. The [Learning Development Service](#) can support you to learn these skills, through workshops (e.g. referencing and plagiarism, developing writing skills), one-to-one consultations, or tailored group sessions.

### Postgraduate Students

- **Graduate School:** The Graduate School offers postgraduate students a [series of seminars and workshops](#) to help refresh or review academic and research skills. These include sessions specifically for students on Master's-level courses, *Essentials for international students* who want to learn more about academic writing within the UK higher education system, and academic writing at various stages in a research degree. The Graduate School programme also features a range of courses offered by Library staff relating to referencing and using different sources of research.

After attending a workshop to learn the basic skills, you can arrange to meet a member of The Graduate School Training and Development team ([pg.skills@qub.ac.uk](mailto:pg.skills@qub.ac.uk)) to talk about areas you wish to strengthen, and explore tools and techniques for doing so.

### International Students

- **INTO** (English language support): Queen's University works with INTO to provide [English language support](#) for students who wish to prepare for studies in the UK, or enhance English language skills while they are studying. International students at Queen's are entitled to attend a two-hour per week English language course

for one semester (small charge for books and materials). There are also pre-arrival English courses and longer Academic English options, available at a cost.

### Students with Disabilities or Learning Difficulties

- Students with additional learning needs arising from a disability or long-term condition should speak to **Disability Services** about support for them. A student can choose to [disclose a disability](#) at any point in their studies, and will be able to meet with a member of Disability Services staff to register with the service and discuss their individual requirements.
- You can also speak to your School Disability Advisor about how to access support available to you.

### 3. The Role of the Student

The University encourages students to develop their own academic writing skills and discourages students from using services providing proofreading.

If using a third party proofreader, it is a student's responsibility to:

- Ensure that all work submitted for assessment is their own, and represents their own abilities and understanding. Any use of third party proofreaders must not compromise the authorship of this work. Be aware of what practices would constitute an [Academic Offence](#) and avoid undertaking any of these practices. Know the difference between 'editing' and 'proofreading'.
- Read the proofreader's suggestions and decide what suggestions to take on board - and make corrections themselves.
- If engaging a third party proofreader, keep a 'paper trail' of pre- and post-correction versions of assignments. A copy of the original material that was given to the proofreader must be available from the student, on request by the University.
- Allow sufficient time before assignment deadlines to make corrections. Proofreading support should not be a last minute service, and the student must leave time to make amendments to their own work.
- Stand over authorship and quality of work submitted for assessment. Inadequacies in proofreading will not be accepted as mitigation for any deficiencies in a student's work.
- If you choose to use a proofreader, it is your responsibility to ensure that the proofreader follows these guidelines (as set out in Section 4).

Please note, Schools may ask students to declare whether they have used a proofreader, at point of assignment submission.

#### 4. Guidelines: What Proofreaders May and May Not Do

##### A proofreader may:

- Identify errors in spelling, punctuation, formatting, grammar, and suggest alternatives
- Comment on formatting of references in terms of font, spelling, punctuation, and consistency
- Highlight redundancy or missing words
- Highlight errors in the labelling of diagrams / charts
- Highlight formatting errors, inconsistencies such as page numbers, line spacing, font size and headings
- Highlight general clarity of written English: where the meaning of a passage is unclear, they may highlight this, but not re-write it

Use of a third party proofreader should provide a student with an understanding of grammatical or spelling rules. The goal is to lessen a student's dependence on proofreading support, and empower students to become **independent learners** through improving how they use the written language.

Proofreading may take place electronically or using hard copies. Whatever mechanism is used, a proofreader should be identifying and explaining the suggested amendments, leaving any choices relating to content to the student.

Proofreaders should be encouraged to use the 'insert comment' facility in Word when proofreading electronic versions of assignments. This ensures that the student is required actively to incorporate the proofreader's suggestions into their work, and take responsibility for the changes made. 'Tracked changes' functionality should be avoided.

A student may choose to check for spelling and grammatical errors through the use of spelling and grammar checking software. This software should always be used with care, and students should still check their work for accuracy after using this.

##### A proofreader should not:

- Recommend or make substantive changes to the content of work submitted for assessment, for example by re-writing passages of text
- Alter argument or logic, comment on appropriateness of content, validity, quality of argument
- Suggest different perspectives or alternative sources of information
- Implement or alter a referencing system or add to references
- Check or correct facts, calculations, formulae or equations
- Provide an editing service for making corrections and returning the 'perfect' essays to a student. Rather, clear indications of mistakes or rule violations should be given. The actual corrections should be made by the student themselves.

Students must avoid any service that provides completed essays, assignments or undertakes research or any academic work on their behalf.

All of these activities are considered to be academic offences and will be dealt with under the University's [Academic Offences procedures](#). The student must be the sole author of their own written work.

## 5. Managing a Proofreader Relationship

The University does not recommend or endorse 3<sup>rd</sup> party proofreading services, apart from in the context of [disability support](#). The arrangement between the student and the proofreader is agreed between them, and it is up to the student and proofreader to negotiate a suitable contract arrangement, if appropriate. It is the student's responsibility to manage the relationship with the proofreader, and to determine the extent to which the advice provided by the proofreader is implemented, to avoid committing an offence of academic misconduct.

If you choose to use a proofreader, it is your responsibility to ensure that the proofreader follows these guidelines (as set out in Section 4).

As an approximate guide, the rate of pay for proofreaders who are Support Providers for students with disabilities, as set out by the Department for the Economy, can be found on the [Disability Services website](#) (Click on 'Rates of Pay'). Please be aware that this may vary in a private arrangement depending on the experience of the proofreader, the level of proofreading required, and whether a short turnaround time is expected. A proofreader may request that you supply them with a sample of your written work, to enable them to provide you with an accurate hourly rate.

Questions to consider when considering paying for proofreading support:

- Does the person understand the guidelines (as set out above)? For example, do they understand why they are asked to provide comments rather than make corrections?
- What is their expected timeframe for receiving / completing work?
- What is their rate of pay? Have they set this out clearly in a document or email? Are there any circumstances in which this rate would change (for example, short deadline?)
- Will they look at a short piece of your work and provide an estimate of the amount of time to proofread larger pieces, e.g. 3,000 – 5,000 word essays?
- What are their qualifications and experience in proofreading, particularly at same level of study (e.g. undergraduate, Master's, PhD)?