

Assessing inclusively

Guidelines for inclusive writing and formatting of print and
digital assessments

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Contents

1	Background	3
2	Scope of guidelines	4
3	Guidelines.....	5
3.1	Media	5
3.2	Font.....	6
3.3	Headings and Emphasis.	7
3.4	Layout	8
3.5	Writing Style.....	10
3.6	Increasing accessibility	12
3.7	Checking Readability	15
3.8	Preparing a document for text-reading software	17
4	Accessibility Regulations 2018	19
	Appendix 1: Avoiding the passive voice	21
	Appendix 2: Avoiding ambiguous instructions	22



Appendix 3: Avoiding double meaning	23
Appendix 4: Avoiding ellipses.....	24
Appendix 5: Avoiding the negative	25
Appendix 6: Avoiding difficult word order	26
Appendix 7: Further examples of amendments to improve structure and formatting	27

1 Background

- Queen Mary University of London has a legal duty to anticipate the requirements of its disabled staff and students under the terms of the Equality Act (2010).
- From September 2019, the university also has a duty to ensure that its digital content is as accessible as its physical estate.
- The following guidelines have been produced to enable colleagues to prepare and produce written assignments that allow all our students to complete their assessments at a level commensurate with their ability.
- The guidelines will help the university comply with accessibility legislation and to realise its stated strategic objectives of being 'truly inclusive'.
- We have produced these guidelines with reference to best practice in the Higher Education sector, including guidance from the British Dyslexia Association.
- They have also been produced with reference to the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1AA](#) accessibility standards.
- For more information, see the 'Accessibility' tab on any Queen Mary webpage (<https://www.qmul.ac.uk/site/accessibility/>).

2 Scope of guidelines

- The Cambridge Dictionary defines guidelines as "information intended to advise people on how something should be done or what something should be." <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/guideline>.
- The guidance can be used in the preparation of all forms of assessment that have a text component including, but not limited to:
 - Examinations (print or digital).
 - Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCE) and Structured Clinical Reasoning (SCR) assessments.
 - In course assessments (print or digital).
- We have prepared the guidance for use by **all** schools at QMUL.
- Some elements may seem to be less relevant to the Institute of Dentistry than others are e.g. recommendations for students with visual impairments.
- Please use **all** recommendations for assessments with **all** students. Those marked "DDS-advised" are student-specific.

3 Guidelines

3.1 Media

- | | |
|--|-------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper should be thick enough to prevent the other side showing through when placed on a desk or table surface. | All |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use matt paper rather than glossy except for photographs. | All |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid digital print processing, which tends to leave paper shiny. | All |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All text must be black on a light (not white) background. | All |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid white backgrounds for paper, computer and visual aids. White can appear too dazzling. Use cream or a soft pastel colour. | All |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some dyslexic people (as well as other specific learning differences) will have their own colour preference. The Disability and Dyslexia Service may recommend that students bring in coloured transparent overlays to use in their exams. | DDS-advised |

3.2 Font

- | | |
|--|-------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use a plain, evenly spaced sans serif font such as Arial and Comic Sans. Alternatives include Verdana, Tahoma, Century Gothic, or Trebuchet. | All |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Font size</u> should be 12-14 point including headers and footers. | All |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some dyslexic readers may request a larger font. | DDS-advised |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid green and red/pink backgrounds, as these are difficult for colour-blind individuals. | All |

3.3 Headings and Emphasis

- | | |
|--|-----|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Avoid underlining</u> and <i>italics</i>: these tend to make the text appear to run together. Use bold instead. | All |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• AVOID TEXT IN BLOCK CAPITALS: this is much harder to read. | All |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use bold to emphasise in the body of a text. | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• For electronic documents, use the <u>Headings function</u> in MS Word's Home ribbon. This provides structure that helps a text-reader read. | All |

3.4 Layout

- | | |
|--|-----|
| • Text should be <u>left justified</u> with a ragged right edge. | All |
| • Avoid narrow columns (as used in newspapers). | All |
| • Lines should not be too long: 60 to 70 characters. | All |
| • Avoid cramping material and using long, dense paragraphs: space it out. | All |
| • <u>Line spacing</u> should be 2.0 throughout. | All |
| • Spacing of 1.5 may be necessary where using 2.0 would lengthen the question, section or document to an extent that it hampers student comprehension e.g. OSCE instructions split over two pages. | All |
| • Avoid starting a sentence at the end of a line. | All |
| • Use <u>bullet points</u> and numbering rather than continuous prose. | All |
| • Avoid using text boxes for formatting. | All |
| • Use clear, concise sentences separated by full stops. | All |
| • Maintain consistency of formatting throughout. | All |

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- All pages must show the page number in the footers. All
- All pages must show "Turn the page over" in the footers, apart from the final page. All
- The final page must show "End" in the footer. All

3.5 Writing Style

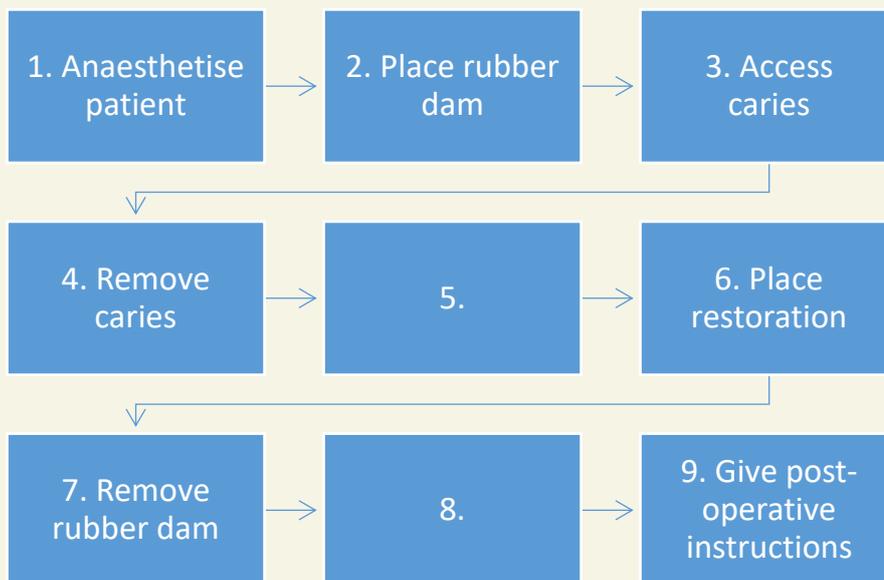
- | | |
|--|-----|
| • Use short, simple sentences in a direct style. | All |
| • Give instructions clearly. | All |
| • Avoid long sentences of explanation. | All |
| • Use active rather than passive voice. (see appendix 1 for examples). | All |
| • Avoid double negatives (see appendix for examples). | All |
| • Avoid ambiguous terms (see appendix for examples). | All |
| • Consider rewording questions to make them clearer. See the table below for examples. | All |

Table showing improved style of writing

Previously used words/phrases	Modified words/phrases
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All questions carry equal marks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All questions are worth equal marks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This examination paper comprises eight questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This examination paper is made up of eight questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions A1 to A10 require you to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For questions A1 to A10 you must
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> THREE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> three
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show all calculations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You must show all your calculations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each question consists of a stem with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each question is made up of a 'stem' (a question or incomplete statement) with

3.6 Increasing accessibility

- Flow charts are ideal for explaining procedures.
- A linear explanation should accompany the flow chart to improve accessibility for anyone with a visual impairment.



- For example, a linear explanation for the flowchart above might be:

"The flow chart shows nine steps involved in restoring a tooth. The steps are: one, anaesthetise patient; two, place rubber dam; three, access caries; four, remove caries; five, blank; six, place the restoration; seven, remove the rubber dam; eight, blank; and, nine, give post-operative instructions."

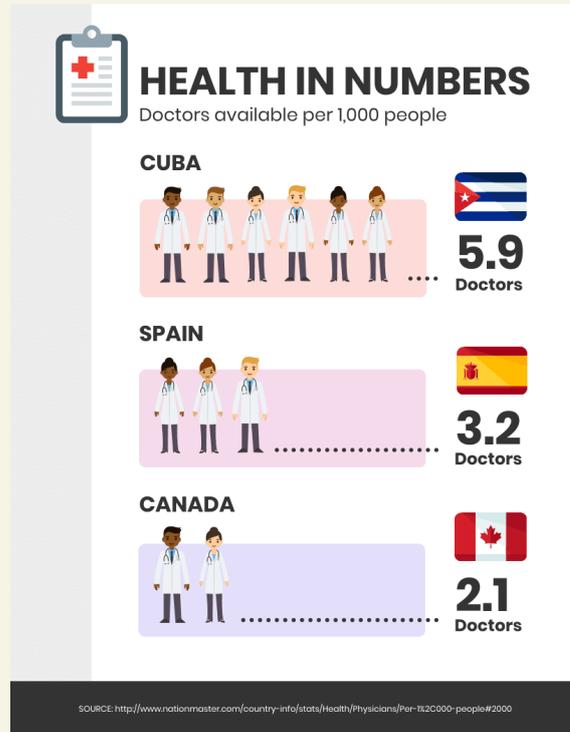
• Pictograms and graphics help to locate information.

All

All

- A linear explanation should accompany the pictogram or graphic to improve accessibility for anyone with a visual impairment.

All



- For example, a linear explanation for the pictogram above might be:

“The pictogram above is titled, “Health in numbers”. It shows the number of doctors available per one thousand people in Cuba, Spain and Canada. In Cuba, the number is 5.9 doctors per 1,000. In Spain it is 3.2 doctors per 1,000. In Canada it is 2.1 doctors per 1,000.”.

- | | |
|---|-----|
| • Lists of "dos" and "don'ts" are more useful than continuous text to highlight aspects of good practice. | All |
| • Avoid abbreviations if possible. | All |
| • When using abbreviations, ensure the full term is used first, followed by the abbreviation in brackets. | All |
| • Alternatively, provide a glossary of abbreviations. | |

3.7 Checking Readability

- Readability is a measure of how easy a piece of text is to read.
- It can include elements of complexity, familiarity, legibility and typography.
- Readability formulas usually look at factors like sentence length, syllable density and word familiarity as part of their calculations.
- Readability scores measure whether content is likely to be understood by your intended reader.
- Learn how to check the readability of your documents [here](#).
- One readability scale is the Flesch Reading Ease score. This rates text on a 100-point scale. The higher the score, the easier it is to understand the document.
- A score of around 30-50 would be appropriate for most undergraduates.
- See Rudolf Flesch's explanation of the scale [here](#).
- The Flesch Reading Ease score for this document is 51.

All

- Check long documents in sections, so that you know which parts are too hard.

3.8 Preparing a document for text-reading software

- | | |
|---|-----|
| • Listening to a document using a text reader will take longer than visual reading. | All |
| • Put semi-colons, commas, or full stops after bullet points to make a pause. | All |
| • Use <u>Styles in Word</u> to organise headings and formatting. Styles provide a structure that text-reading software can discern. | All |
| • Contents page listings should be hyperlinked to the relevant section to aid navigation. | All |
| • Number items in the contents page. | All |
| • Use internal and external hyperlinks for ease of navigation. | All |
| • Include as few signs and symbols as possible, e.g. asterisks or dashes (both short and long). These will be spoken. | All |
| • Avoid long dashes. Use colons instead to make the voice pause. | All |
| • Use <u>straight quotation</u> marks. Some screen readers may read out curly or slanting ones as "back quote". | All |

“These are curly quotes”

"These are straight quotes"

- | | |
|--|-----|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid Roman Numerals and "No." for number. | All |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider whether abbreviations and acronyms need full stops. | All |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid text in images. Listeners cannot hear it. Repeat in the main text. | All |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Include an alt-text description for images. | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use hyphens in compound words to aid text-reading pronunciation. | All |

4 Accessibility Regulations 2018

- The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018 came into force in September 2018. These apply to public sector organisations' websites, including what the government now refers to as Higher Education Providers (HEP).
- The regulations state that an HEP's website must be "accessible by making it 'perceivable, operable, understandable and robust'".
- As part of Queen Mary's response to this legislation, we have acquired a subscription to an online tool that Queen Mary staff and students can use to make their documents more accessible: SensusAccess.
- While we would not suggest that staff upload exam papers to SensusAccess, it is a great tool for enhancing readability in general and the improvements it makes to other documents could help staff to improve formatting for exams.
- Please access SensusAccess via this link:
<http://www.dds.qmul.ac.uk/disability/sensusaccess/convert-a-document/>
- SensusAccess have also produced several online learning modules about digital documents. Module six is called "Designing and creating accessible documents" and is particularly relevant to this guidance.

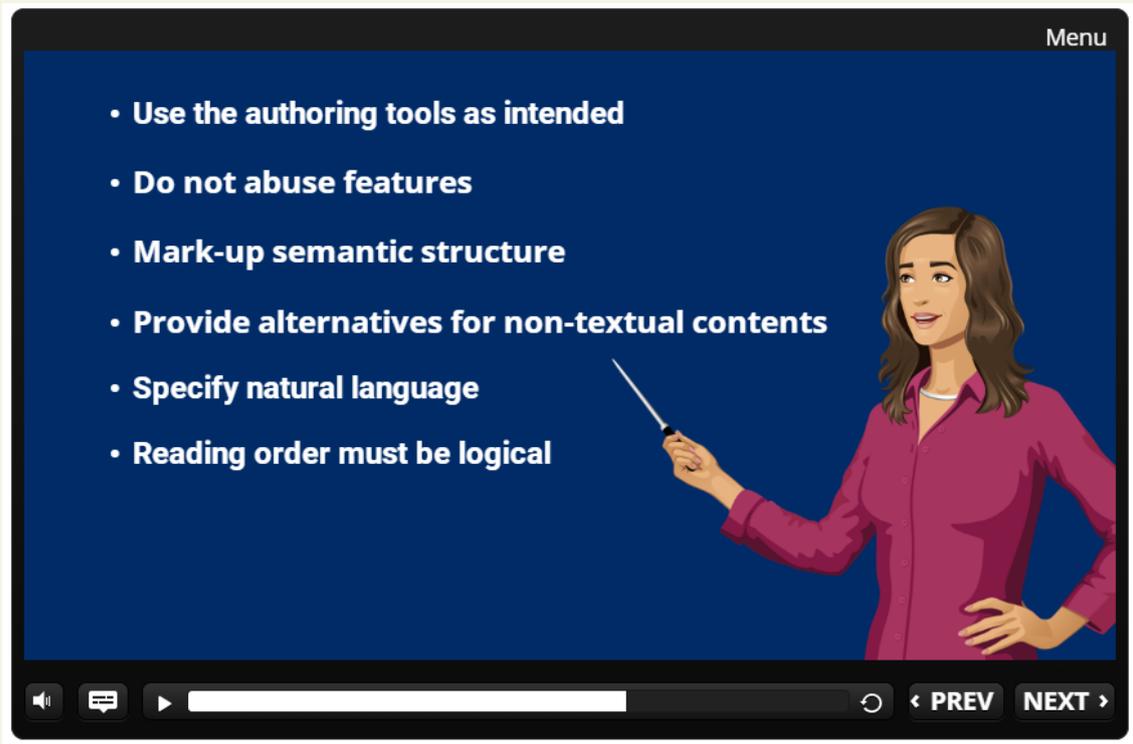


Figure 1 A screenshot from the SensusAccess module, “Designing and creating accessible documents”.



Appendix 1: Avoiding the passive voice

- The passive voice tells us **something is being done**, rather than that **someone is doing something**.
- It can be a difficult sentence structure for some readers.
- Those with language differences (e.g. non-native speakers) often do not comprehend this structure.

Passive	Active
The house was sold by an estate agent	An estate agent sold the house
The show was watched by a large audience	A large audience watched the show



Appendix 2: Avoiding ambiguous instructions

Ambiguous	Alternative
Explain briefly [3 marks]	Explain in three sentences... Explain in three paragraphs or less... Give three reasons... [If you cannot explicitly quantify 'briefly', it is better not to use it at all.]
Illustrate your answer [2 marks]	Give two examples to explain your answer. Use examples to explain your answer.
Consider	Look at / study / think about
Indicate	Write down



Appendix 3: Avoiding double meaning

Double meaning	Alternative
Illustrate	Use examples to explain your answer
Discuss	Analyse and evaluate
Explore	Describe in detail
Argue	Give a case for and/or against

Appendix 4: Avoiding ellipses

- An ellipsis (plural, ellipses) is when we leave a word or phrase out of a sentence so as not to repeat it.
- The use of ellipses can lead to confusion of meaning.

Ellipses	Avoiding ellipses
There are three main carbohydrate groups. Sugar is one of these.	There are three main carbohydrate groups. Sugar is one of these groups .
a) Name the other two groups.	a) Name the other two carbohydrate groups.

Appendix 5: Avoiding the negative

- Using the negative causes unnecessary confusion and can usually be avoided.
- It makes the main subject matter of the question the opposite of the real focus of the question.
- Highlighting the negative word in bold does not help.

Negative	No negative
Explain why the Lake District does not have a dry climate.	Explain why the Lake District has a wet climate.

Appendix 6: Avoiding difficult word order

- Try to use **subject-verb-object** sentence order to avoid confusion.
- Follow a logical flow.
- Separate the information from the question.

Difficult word order	Less difficult word order
What kind of cleaning agent will remove the hard-water stains left by a dripping tap on a washbasin?	A dripping tap leaves hard water stains on a washbasin. What sort of cleaning agent will remove these stains?

Appendix 7: Further examples of amendments to improve structure and formatting

Example 1

Before amendment:

Answer **three** questions, **Question 1** (compulsory), plus **one** question from **Section B** and **one** question from **Section C**

**PLEASE SHOW ALL WORKINGS IN ANSWERS TO NUMERICAL
QUESTIONS.**

After amendment:

- You must answer **three** questions **in total**
- You must answer **Question 1**, which is the only question in **Section A**
- You must answer **one question from Section B**
- You must answer **one question from Section C**
- **You must show all your workings in answers to numerical questions**

Example 2

Before amendment:

Answer three questions, at least one question from each **Section**

After amendment:

- There are two sections to this exam: Section A and Section B
- You must answer **at least one question** from **each section**
- You must answer **three** questions **in total**

Example 3

Before amendment:

Percentages in brackets [percentage] indicate the weight of each question for the paper.

After amendment:

- The numbers in brackets indicate the marks available for each question.

End