

How SPaG is promoted and assessed on this module.

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The Office for Students has stated that

“Providers should assess spelling, punctuation and grammar where this is relevant to the course, subject to compliance with their obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and other legislation. We would expect this to mean that most students on most courses should be assessed on their technical proficiency in written English.”¹

Our University requires all lecturers to assess **Communication Skills**. Level-6 grade-A work is judged as having

“Accomplished communication style and expression of ideas, information, analysis and argument to a high level **with** accurate use of English/ spelling, punctuation and grammar.”²

There are two grammatical clauses here, separated by the word **with** (my highlight) which plays the role of the word **and**. The first refers to *communication* in its own right and the second refers to *SPaG*. My assessment matrices all assess Communication (last column) already and I don't want to add an additional SPaG column. So, I shall do something else.

But first let's have a look at some typical student shortcomings based on assignments I have received. I group these into two categories.

Pitfalls you can easily avoid

Category 1: Blind reliance on Word auto-correct

There are easy ones to spot because they are often crazy or humorous, but they stand out. Here's some quotes from assignments I have graded in the past.

What the student wrote	What the student intended to write
“The theatrical explanation did not agree with my experiments”	The theoretical explanation did not agree with my experiments
“Alan Turning made a significant contribution to the theory of computing”	Alan Turing made a significant contribution to the theory of computing

These mistakes can be attributed to the student's reliance on Word to correct their text. The student did not check the auto-correction **at the time Word made the incorrect correction**.

Other errors I would place in this category are things like this

What the student wrote	What the student intended to write
“I measured the program execution time. It's value was to large”	I measured the program execution time. Its value was too large.
“The damping force created a breaking effect”	The damping force created a braking effect.

¹ https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1482/assessment_practices_english_higher_education_providers.pdf

² <https://www2.worc.ac.uk/aqu/documents/GenericGradeDescriptors.pdf>

Category 2: Lack of Coherence

This is the big one. This is where you write some text which is difficult or impossible to understand. It's (not 'its') important to write *coherently*. This means your text flows, ideas in your text are joined up. Here's an example, albeit a little contrived.

What the student wrote	What the student should have written
Power is proportional to wind speed, but the steps had no change. The code was corrected. Power was then proportional to wind speed.	The investigation aimed to find out how the <u>wind speed</u> affected the <u>power</u> generated by the turbine. We increased the <u>wind speed</u> in steps of 10 m/s and observed the <u>power</u> output. There was no change. Therefore , we concluded there could have been a problem with the code, so we went back and reviewed the code. We discovered an incorrect condition in an if-statement and on correcting this then repeating the investigation we found that the <u>power</u> output increased with the <u>wind speed</u> as expected.

The text on the left could have been written as a series of bullet points, not appropriate for an assignment. The text on the right is coherent. I've highlighted how grammar has been used to make this happen. The table below categorizes these, and suggests other examples

	Function of these words	Other examples
and, then	These are connectives; they join clauses together	but, except, either ... or.
Therefore, so	These express either cause or purpose	because of, consequently, hence
	These express a result	in consequence, as a result
	Conditional (positive)	then, in that case, under the circumstances
	Conditional (negative)	otherwise, if not
<u>wind speed</u> <u>power</u>	Repeated words. Work best when they appear at the start and then at the end of a paragraph, rather like curly-brackets in code. They really join up your text.	

How I will assess your assignment through the SPaG Lens

*I will not be actively looking for SPaG issues when grading your assignments. I expect to be excited reading your assignment. But I know that **SPaG may be looking for me** and, pace, I need to respond when this happens.*

There are 3 assignments on this module. If SPaG hits me on your assignment 1, I shall make a note of it, **and you will get a warning and hints how to improve, but no penalty.**

Then I shall actively check for SPaG on assignments 2 and 3, and if there is no improvement then you will **receive a penalty** of one grade point on your assignment. This means a grade A-minus would drop to a B-plus etc.

If there is no SPaG on assignment 1, but there is on assignment 2, **you will get a warning and hints how to improve, but no penalty.** Then I shall actively check on assignment 3.

