Third-party Proofreading and Editing of Student Assessments

Students are normally permitted to engage a third-party person called a proofreader to make suggestions for minor changes in order to improve the readability of written English in an assignment prior to submission; this process is called *proofreading*. A proofreader can be a friend, family member, paid professional or company.

Students are not permitted to engage a third party to make more substantive changes to their work, or to produce any content on their behalf. This is *editing* or ghost-writing and will be considered academic misconduct.

Please note that this guidance does not apply to supervisory input by academic staff.

Details about what is and what is not acceptable for a proofreader to do are listed below.

1.1 A proofreader may do the following:

- *Edits* to text may be made but only to indicate and correct *minor issues*
  Minor issues relate to items of *spelling, punctuation, grammar and syntax*.
  Minor issues are localised, typically single words or punctuation items within existing sentences.
  This is the only type of direct editing which is permitted.
  This editing must be recorded (e.g. using 'Review > Track Changes' in Microsoft Word)

- *Comments* on text may be added in relation to identify and explain more *major issues*
  Major issues relate to errors in the text and problems with the *clarity of written English*
  Major issues are more extensive, typically affecting whole or multiple sentences or sections.
  These types of issues can all be commented on, but not corrected by direct editing.
  Comments must be recorded (e.g. using 'Review > New Comment' in Microsoft Word)

  Edits and/or comments can be made to main body of text or any text used in the legend or labelling of diagrams, charts, tables or figures. Issues identified might include word choice, tense, repetition, missing words etc. The proof-reader should include an explanation of why text is unclear, or what the alternate interpretations might be.

1.2 A proofreader must never do the following:

- Make *untracked changes* to the work;
  (i.e. any edits must be made using e.g. 'Review > Track Changes' in Microsoft Word)
- Identify, correct or add anything relating to the *sequence* of information or line of argument;
  (e.g. cross-referencing and the order of sentences, paragraphs and sections)
- Add *new content*;
  (e.g. sentences, figures, calculations, code or additional words apart from those obviously missing)
- Check, correct or comment on the truth or accuracy of any *factual content*;
  (e.g. factual statements, data, calculations, equations and code)
- *Rewrite* any of the text;
  (e.g. replace sentences or sections, change argument(s) or logic, change or enhance writing style)
- Identify, correct or add anything relating to document *appearance*;
  (e.g. typography, formatting and layout)
- Identify, correct or add anything relating to *reference lists* not within the main text;
  (e.g. reference lists, bibliographies or footnotes)
- Identify, correct or change anything relating to use of *referencing systems*;
  (e.g. changing from Harvard to Vancouver referencing system)
- *Translate* any part of the work from one language into another;
- Change charts, figures or diagrams (including adding or removing text used in labelling);
- Deliberately *reduce word count* with the aim of ensuring a specified word limit is met.

1.3 Best practice in proofreading and editing

Proofreaders
- Proofreaders working in Word should be encouraged to use the 'Review > New Comment' function rather than 'Review > Track Changes' when making suggestions for anything other than minor changes to a student's work.
- Proofreaders are not obliged to phrase their comments in a way which provides pedagogical guidance to students in order that they can improve their own English.

Course Teams

Course organisers should make it clear to students whether or not external proofreading is permitted for specific coursework assessments.

Students who engage a proofreader
- Are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the work they submit;
- Are ultimately responsible for deciding whether or not to make any changes based on the proofreader's comments;
- Are responsible for checking with course organisers whether it is appropriate to use a proofreader in their assessments;
- Must refer their proofreader to these proofreading guidelines and should declare the use of a proofreader in their work;
- Must retain copies of their work directly before and immediately after proof-reader input (i.e. with all comment or track changes comments added) in case they are called upon to show the extent to which a proofreader has influenced their work;
- Must proofread their own work before sending it to the proofreader;
- Must plan enough time to check over the proofreader's comments and decide upon which changes, if any, they will make to their work before submitting it.
- Must never use a translation tool to generate the text which is sent to a proofreader.

What about Peer review and Peer assessment?

Peer review and peer assessment are separate processes to proofreading. More information about peer review and peer assessment can be found via the Institute for Academic Development website: https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/learning-teaching/staff/assessment/resources/techniques/peer

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