

SGUL Word Count Limit Policy for Assignments

(Updated policy approved by Senate 14 June 2023; operational from 2023-24 onwards)

This policy applies to **all** students following programmes of study leading to a St George's, University of London award. For programmes run through an institutional agreement with another institution, this policy applies to the modules taught and assessed by SGUL.

1. Word limits in assignments

A maximum word limit is set for most assignments. Students are advised that when a word limit is set, they should ensure any work submitted does not exceed this limit. The maximum word limit is stipulated in module/course handbooks and advised to students at the time the assignment is set.

2. The significance of adhering to a word limit

Writing to agreed and stipulated word limits is a skill which students are expected to develop and demonstrate. Submitting an academic paper or a funding application requires an adherence to word limits. There are also many non-academic contexts where word limits are applied to permitted submissions.

3. The “words” that should be counted

The word count is defined as any and all words included in the text of the assignment¹. The word count will **INCLUDE** all text, including (but not limited to):

- the main body of text (including headings)
- all citations (both in and out of brackets)
- text boxes
- footnotes and endnotes
- questions set by the Module Leader*

*Where the assignment has to include specific questions set by the Module Leader, the word limit will be set to allow for inclusion of the specified questions.

4. The “words” that should not be counted

The only words **EXCLUDED** from the word count will be:

- assignment title
- tables and graphs
- figures and diagrams
- the reference list/ bibliography
- AI log

¹ Students should be aware that word counting tools count words differently according to file format and submission package. Students should be clear that their count method includes all the words listed in para 3.

- appendices (including multimedia)
- headers and footers
- the abstract (if applicable)

5. Specific guidance for any particular assignment on word count restrictions

For each assignment, specific guidance on restrictions, as required, will be outlined in the relevant module handbook. Students requiring additional clarification should seek this from the Module Leader.

6. Stating the word count

Students should state the word count in accordance with the instructions issued by the programme.

Examples of instructions which may be issued include (though are not limited to): (i) students will be asked to state the word count in the header of any assignment they submit, (ii) students will be asked to declare the number of words on an assignment cover sheet, (iii) Students will be asked to confirm that they have not exceeded the stipulated word limit for that assignment.

7. Verifying the word count during the marking process

All submissions will be eligible to have their word count verified. Where there is any concern that a word limit has been exceeded and/or inaccurately declared, the word count of that submission will be checked. Word counts will be verified from the electronic file submitted for marking (the electronic file may be only part of the submission requirement, which may include hard copies).

Markers should check the word count of a submission by downloading the work from the submission package (eg Canvas). Markers should be aware that electronic word counting tools can count words differently. Markers must ensure that any checked word counts reflect the words to be counted listed in para 3.

8. Failing to provide a word count or providing an inaccurate word count

Where students fail to provide a word count or are found to have provided an inaccurate word count, SGUL reserves the right to invoke the Disciplinary Procedure on the student.

Where a student has clearly abused the spirit of the word limit restriction, the assignment will be treated in the same way as if the word limit in the assignment had been exceeded (see below).

9. Assignments which are significantly below the word limit

Assignments which are below the word limit set for an assignment will not attract a specific penalty.

Assignments submitted which are significantly below the word limit are unlikely to meet all the assessment requirements or cover all of the points expected by the examiners. Although a formal penalty is not applied, they are normally self-penalising and this will be reflected in the grade awarded for the assignment.

Where a range has been defined for the word limit for a given assignment (e.g. 'between 2000 and 3000 words'), it is deemed unlikely that a student will be able to write adequately on the topic of the assignment in less words than the lower end of the

stipulated range. As above, such assignments are normally self-penalising and this will be reflected in the grade awarded for the assignment.

10. Assignments which exceed the word limit

Students who exceed the prescribed word limit will have their work marked but markers ***will stop marking when the word count exceeds the maximum word count set*** for that assignment. Markers will indicate on the text² the point at which the limit is reached which is, by definition, where they have stopped marking. Hence, any words written beyond the stipulated limit will not be read by the examiners; no marks will be awarded and no feedback provided for any text beyond the prescribed limit. Although a formal penalty is not applied, a mark will be awarded only for the content up to this point.

Overall responsibility for policy: QAEC
Operational responsibility for policy: Academic Registrar
Amended June 2023
Amended 4 September 2023 v2

² The exact nature of this “text” will vary depending on the file format and software package used for assignment submission; the facility used by the marker to indicate where the word limit has been reached in the “text” will vary according to the tools available in the software, e.g using the annotation function in SpeedGrader™