



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
WINNIPEG

# **Accommodating Learning (and other) Disabilities in the Classroom**

[uwinnipeg.ca/accessibility](http://uwinnipeg.ca/accessibility)

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## Important points to remember:

Avoid making assumptions about a person's disability or capabilities; while there are generally accepted or common characteristics and accommodations, everyone is different.

These suggestions may also assist students with other disabilities, and are general best practices.

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## Prior to the start of the course

- › Choose course materials early to allow sufficient time to convert the documents into alternative formats, or for students to request the formats they need.
- › If possible, provide accessible electronic versions of course readings. This will enable students to convert the reading into the format required, whether they use a screen reader, an enlarger or another technology. Be as precise as you can regarding the texts and pages that will be used.
- › If possible, provide advance course notes, copies of overhead slides, PowerPoint presentations and other materials.

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## When the course begins

- › Encourage students to attend Accessibility Services regarding any accessibility concerns. You can do this verbally early in the semester and by including an accessibility statement on your syllabus. Indicate that such conversations are confidential and are strictly for facilitating any learning needs or accommodations, and that students do not need to share their specific diagnosis, only the general nature of their disability and their functional limitations.
  - » If a student talks to you directly, keep it confidential and do not ask for a diagnosis
- › Identify and clearly express the essential course content, and recognize that students can express understanding of essential course content in multiple ways. Diversify assignments or allow for exceptions to enable all students to demonstrate their specific talents (for example, oral presentations, written assignments, etc).
- › Insist on professional, civil conduct between and among students to respect people's differences and create an inclusive environment. You can reference the *Respectful Working and Learning Environment Policy* in your syllabus, at the beginning of class, and/or as needed.
- › Provide your classes with information about the accessible features of their immediate environment (for example, automatic doors and accessible washrooms).
- › Provide a recording of your lecture. This is a universal design feature that benefits all students, especially those with disabilities.
- › Provide an organized, well-written and complete syllabus including required readings, assignments, due dates and defined expectations as early as possible. Students can miss verbal instructions for various reasons.
- › Ask for volunteer note takers. Volunteer note takers are greatly needed and receive a reference letter.

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## While in session

- › Put the lecture in context of where it fits into the overall course and how it relates to earlier materials. Consider beginning each class with a review of earlier materials.
- › Summarize important points at the end of class, by using a PowerPoint slide, board, overhead projector, etc.
- › Provide both verbal and written instructions with reminders of impending due dates for assignments or exams.
- › Be patient - sometimes communicating with someone with a disability can take a bit longer, requiring you or the other person to repeat comments several times.
- › Allow scheduled breaks during lectures, tests and exams.
- › Include captioning (or captioning capability) in online lectures or videos. Captioning is a universal design feature that assists a variety of students.
- › Point out the important sections in course plans, textbooks and readings to guide test and exam preparation; when possible, provide samples of tests and exams.
- › Allow for the use of adaptive technology.
- › Allow students to audio-record lectures, or record Zoom/online course.
- › Allow for preferential seating, either to facilitate better listening or to allow for proximity to an electrical outlet.
- › Arrange to meet with the student to discuss specific learning needs, strategies for success, alternatives to course assignments, and methods of evaluation when the student provides his or her letter of accommodation.
- › Provide personal feedback on academic performance in a respectful way (do not criticize or blame).

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## Tests, exams and evaluation

- › When possible, allow the use of a calculator, dictionary, computer and word processor with spell-check, as needed.
- › When reasonable, allow the use of memory aids for formulas or definitions.
- › Offer alternatives to traditional course work and methods of evaluation (such as an oral exam or presentation instead of a written exam, or an essay instead of multiple-choice and short-answer questions).
- › Allow extra time on tests and/or exams (generally via Accessibility Services).
- › Provide a separate, distraction-free room for writing tests and/or exams (may be via Accessibility Services).
- › Allow for the use of adaptive technology (for example, screen-readers or screen-enhancement software such as screen magnification) (generally via Accessibility Services).

*Tips adapted from <https://accessiblecampus.ca/tools-resources/educators-tool-kit/teaching-tips/teaching-students-with-learning-disabilities/>*

## Tips for approaching students

If you suspect a student is struggling or they are disruptive in class due to disability you can ask to speak with them privately.

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Ensure you approach the student respectfully and maintain confidentiality if they disclose anything.

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Ask them how things are going, tell them you support them and would like to ensure they get any assistance they need. You can simply ask, "can I help/how can I help?"

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Speak normally, clearly and directly. Be patient if they take a bit longer to understand and respond.

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Listen carefully to their suggestions and work with them to provide information in a way that will best suit their needs.

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Refer them to Accessibility Services if they disclose they require accommodation, or let them know that it is an option for students.

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Do not ask for a diagnosis.

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Remember also that your role is not to determine their medically related accommodation needs - Accessibility Services will generally handle the process.

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Never blame the student for their disability-related symptoms or behaviours. Do not assume the student can control their symptoms.

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Do not blame or penalize the student for not attending Accessibility Services sooner. People may self-accommodate, don't realize they need or can access support, or their medical condition is new or variable.

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