

## Web accessibility: A quick primer for lectures and tutors in Universities

Now that basically every course has at least some online components, making your web resources accessible is important. Because students with disabilities may have more trouble getting to or experiencing the whole face to face class, web resources can be doubly important to them, while often being doubly inaccessible. I'm assuming you are stuck using your university systems, so these are things you can do without a lot of technical skill or time. (If you have more time, technical skill or freedom, see <https://researchvoodoo.wordpress.com/2017/12/14/online-teaching-resources-accessible> for the full list).

### Top Suggestions:

**Good design is accessible to everyone.** Clear, easy to see stuff, easy to find and navigate around, presented in multiple modes, is best for every student, regardless.

**Design with real people in mind.** If you can't design for half a dozen real students who you have known, make up some personas. Imagining your class there trying to engage with your online teaching really helps. Take on feedback (which includes complaints, survey responses, and analytics that show no one is reading your stuff)!

**The levels and impacts of disability are many and varied.** Starting with something generically accessible helps, but doesn't mean you might not have to adjust further when a particular person comes into your class.

### If you only have time for a few improvements, start here:

- Can someone easily go back over a small section of content they found difficult the first time?
- Can people access information in a couple of ways? (I know we all hate learning styles, but there is value in doing things by listening and a diagram and text, for everyone, but particularly someone who finds one of these less easy!)
- How easily can you customise the experience for a student who needs it? How easily can a student customise the experience for themselves?

### Intersections:

- Does your online content work on handheld devices for those who need to travel long distances to class?
- Does your online content require a really good internet connection? Does it require a lot of mobile data?
- Is your content accessible to people who speak English as a further language?
- Do you avoid ableist, and other exclusionary language? Do you include trigger warnings?

- Do you include information about accessibility in your introduction/course guide/first lecture (rather than waiting for people to ask)?

### **Adjustments for specific kinds of needs.**

#### **Visual impairments (blindness, reduced vision, colour blindness, migraines etc).**

- Are you using a clear font in a large size with sufficient white space?
- Are your colours black and white; or deep blue and white?
- Is your hyperlinked text easy to understand with a screen reader (give them descriptive names like [Link to course guide](#), not [Click here](#).)
- Do any significant content images and diagrams have descriptive alt texts? (Images purely for decoration do not need alt text, no-one needs a load of 'picture of building' descriptions).

*Remember: visual diagrams, images and maps are really useful for many students, don't stop using them just because the information also needs to be accessed in another way.*

#### **Hearing impairments (deafness, partial hearing loss, tinnitus, etc):**

- Can you put the speaker's face on recorded video or lectures, so students can lip read?
- Do you have any audio clips? (Lecture capture is essentially a long audio clip). Are they transcribed or do you provide lecture full text?

*Remember: aural information is excellent for students with, for example, dyslexia. Don't stop using it just because the information also needs to be accessed in another way.*

#### **Hand impairments (sprained wrists, shaking hands, arthritis etc):**

- Are things easy to click on? (Big buttons not tiny boxes!)
- Does anything require difficult movements like dragging, careful clicking etc? (Rewinding video, drag and drop quizzes) Can it be made easier? Can it be done another way?

*No-one likes lots of hunt and clicking—this is a win for everyone.*

#### **Brain fog (Chronic fatigue, side effects of pain medication, lack of sleep, trauma reaction etc):**

- Is your content searchable?
- Is your content easily chunked into small sections?
- Is your content logically arranged so it can be easily found?
- Can the information be sent direct to the student as well as being centrally housed (e.g. send an email as well as being on the LMS)?

*Everyone has a short attention span—this is a win for everyone. Don't use up their efforts on getting the assessment questions, use it thinking about their answers!*

**Implementing any of these adjustments will make a difference to students. You can also use these points to advocate with the university for more accessible online tools.**

*I've been a casual academic submitting 7 timesheets a fortnight across the university, stuck using a clunky learning management system and basic lecture capture and working in a team of similarly overworked people. I never managed to do all of these things, but I was able to do some of them, and to push for others when a specific student turned up in my classroom. I hope this helps you to do the same!*