

Accessibility and Equity

Accessible spaces are open to all, inviting everyone to work, play, and move. Ramps and elevators, symbols of physical accessibility that offer easy options for everyone to move, have changed public space. Creating accessible classroom environments requires a simultaneous commitment to reducing barriers to success and designing activities and assignments that invite all students to participate in an intellectual space. The structure of higher education assumes that students should mostly navigate and overcome barriers to their success on their own. Building an accessible and equitable writing course requires an ongoing conversation between faculty and students to negotiate the course environment that works for everyone in the moment. Some parts of accessibility can be planned in advance; others need to be offered and constructed based on participants' needs. The following ideas and strategies offer opportunities to work with your students on navigating academic ableism.

Normalize Difference: Every student can benefit from accommodating practices; assume variation and design your course with variation in mind.

- Invite discussion of different writing processes, to reinforce that there are often many ways to draft and revise texts
- Provide models of completed work (including unique assignment submissions to show range of outcomes)
- Create accessible course materials (use stylesheets for written documents, provide image descriptions, provide captioned videos, use the Ally tool in the learning management system)
- Diversify assignment and activity types (oral presentations, written assignments, poster presentations) that draw on different strengths
- Use different modes of response (audio recording, video chat)

Offer Flexibility: Whenever possible, encourage student autonomy and choice. This allows students to structure their time and energy in a way that fits their needs.

- Consider flexible timelines/deadlines in addition to ideal timelines
- Allow re-submissions
- Offer a collective notetaking resource

Provide Clear Writing Assignment Support:

Every student benefits from clear and tangible expectations. Inform your students what your expectations are and provide tools for them to meet them.

- Provide organized and well-written syllabus with clearly defined expectations, due dates, and course outline
- Emphasize the purpose or goal with an assignment
- Demonstrate highly specialized tasks—researching, quoting, citation, formatting, etc.
- Scaffold assignments and offer feedback throughout stages of the writing process
- Provide and discuss rubrics in advance of assignment due dates

Foster Connection: To create an inclusive environment for all, explicitly communicate that you understand, accept, and want to work with your students.

- Encourage students to come talk to you about their accessibility needs
- Offer collaborative work experiences to help students create their own peer networks
- Include information about campus resources in your course space or syllabus

Captioning: www.uvm.edu/academicsuccess/captioning

Student Accessibility Services: www.uvm.edu/academicsuccess/student_accessibility_services

Accessible Materials: www.uvm.edu/it/kb/article/accessible-course-materials/

Writing in the Disciplines: uvm.edu/wid

Undergraduate Writing Center: uvm.edu/undergradwriting