
Teaching Disabled Students

Information and guidelines
to help you ensure that your
teaching is accessible to all

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People to help you

Talk to your students and find out what works best for them.

Your Faculty's Learning Support Coordinator

offers support and advice on curriculum issues and ensures that academic and support staff are aware of their responsibilities towards students with disabilities.

Your Department may also have a disability advisor (**Learning Support Tutor** or **Special Needs Coordinator**).

There is a variety of facilities and equipment throughout the University to support students with disabilities.

If you want specific advice or training, please contact the Welfare and Disabilities Office.

The Welfare and Disabilities Office

Advise students to seek support/diagnosis at **the Welfare and Disabilities Office**, TheHub, Jordan Well entrance.

disoff.ss@coventry.ac.uk

Tel 024 7765 8029

Equality and Diversity Manager

equality.per@coventry.ac.uk

Tel 024 7688 7148

IT Services Advisor

service.its@coventry.ac.uk

Library Disabilities Advisor

ask-a-librarian.lib@coventry.ac.uk

“ If you want specific advice or training, please contact the Welfare and Disabilities Office. ”

General Information

Students with disabilities include those with specific learning differences (e.g. dyslexia), physical, visual and hearing impairments, medical conditions and mental health issues.

Do not assume that you know the implications of a particular disability; these will be different for each student.

Disclosure

Students should be encouraged to disclose a disability.

Some students are reluctant to disclose due to fear of prejudice. Others wish to *reinvent* themselves and prefer to try to cope without support. Some may not be aware of **Disabled Students' Allowance** which funds support and equipment to help them.

Appropriate statements that aim to encourage disclosure can be added to the module guide and course handbook.

NOTE: If a student has disclosed a disability to you, seek advice from the Welfare and Disabilities Office, without naming the student.

Know who has a disability

Look up disability information on Universe or ask your Learning Support Coordinator/admin team. Many disabilities are *invisible*; you may not know otherwise.

Communicate with disabled students

Talk to the student directly and listen to whatever the student says.

It is sometimes necessary to explore different ways of working to find out the most effective way of supporting students.

Agree on a strategy with the student.

Communicate electronically to announce changes in lecture room/time.

Course Materials

Make your materials available electronically wherever possible.

Online materials all boost accessibility of information and really help poor organisers.

Where possible:

- provide an outline of your lecture and materials in advance. This is especially important for documents your students must read during a lecture/tutorial, e.g. case studies
- use *Styles* in Word to allow your students to change the look of a document easily
- use short line lengths and an unjustified (ragged) right margin
- avoid placing text over a background illustration or pattern
- avoid icons and graphics that move on electronic presentations
- use at least 20pt font size for OHP and presentation slides

Consider also:

- use of colour
- plain English
- shorter sentences
- accommodating text reading software

See Coventry University's guide:

Inclusive e-Learning, available in Curve:

<http://curve.coventry.ac.uk>

Vary your style of delivery

A multi-sensory approach will help all students.

For example: lectures, seminars, videos, presentations, podcasts, audio, group work and projects.

Allow students to use assistive learning technology

For example: laptops, audio recorders, note takers, colour overlays, appointments in mobile phones, etc.

Assessing Disabled Students

The implications of the Equality Act (2010) are that we should:

- anticipate the requirements of disabled students
- make *reasonable adjustments* to assessments
- ensure that our assessment procedures neither disadvantage, nor advantage disabled students
- not compromise academic standards

The QAA guidelines specifically refer to the need to protect the rigour and comparability of the assessment.

When a disabled student has disclosed, it is the Module Leader's responsibility to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment on the module is appropriate.

Describing a module's assessment methods

Having a variety of assessment methods is good practice for all students and can be helpful for some disabled students.

Build in flexibility by using the word *usually* (e.g. *will usually be assessed by*) when referring to assessment in module descriptors (MIDs), module guides, etc. If you are clear about what is being assessed, it should be easier to make modifications without compromising standards.

“ Build in flexibility... in module descriptors. ”



Sheltered Examination form

A disabled student may be entitled to arrangements such as:

- Extra time
- Reader/scribe
- Rest breaks
- Use of a computer

Please remind your students to download the Sheltered Examination form from the Registry page on the Student Portal, complete it and email it to: sheltered.ss@coventry.ac.uk

Arrangements will only be approved where relevant medical/diagnostic evidence has been seen.

Reasonable adjustments

There will, on relatively few occasions, be circumstances where Module Leaders and the Learning Support Coordinator will need to discuss with the individual student how reasonable adjustments can be made. Where it is necessary to provide an alternative assessment for a disabled student, the aim should be to:

- minimise the impact of the disability on the student's performance
- accommodate the student's means of communication, learning style and physical abilities.

Marking

When marking students' work, it is helpful to make constructive comments. Explain your comments in a clear, straightforward way. If you correct English, explain why the correction is better. If there are potentially many points in a submission that could be corrected, do not correct everything; this could be very demotivating. Oral feedback (in addition to written comments) may be easier for some students to understand.

“ Reasonable adjustments... should accommodate the student's means of communication, learning style and physical abilities. ”



Teaching Students with Physical Disabilities

Context

There are many reasons whereby a student may have a physical disability and some are not visible.

Many conditions are stable, but a few are degenerative or may be variable, with good and bad periods.

Many with moderate physical difficulties may be coping without one-to-one support, though most students with severe problems will have a support worker.

Issues

Students with physical disabilities may have missed out on some vital stages of their education due to long periods of treatment or rehabilitation. If a programme of study has *life skills* elements such as work placements, students who have not been exposed to these over their lifetimes may need extra support to develop skills and experience.

Sitting for a long period of time can be tiring and painful for those with spine, joint and back problems.

Certain medication which relieves pain can affect the student's ability to stay still and to concentrate.

Students may have fine motor control problems with tools, writing, page turning and using a computer.

New and stressful situations can increase muscular tension and decrease students' dexterity and control. This can particularly affect those with cerebral palsy.

Some students will require considerably more time than others to complete tasks. A task might demand disproportionately huge amounts of effort and energy from that student.

Be Aware

Do not automatically challenge a person in a wheelchair for being late as this may be due to limited lift accessibility.



Teaching Students with Dyslexia

What is Dyslexia?

The 2012 British Dyslexia Association (BDA) definition is that:

Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling.

Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed.

Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor co-ordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation.

In addition to these characteristics, the BDA acknowledges the visual and auditory processing difficulties that some individuals with dyslexia can experience... dyslexic readers can show a combination of abilities and difficulties that affect the learning process.

Strengths

Students with dyslexia may have particular strengths in areas such as design and problem solving. They can have good creative, interactive and oral skills. They may have a holistic overview, think laterally and intuitively, be good at recalling patterns, have good visual/spatial awareness, learn through experience and have good practical skills.

“ Students... may have particular strengths... such as design and problem solving. ”

Be Aware

Students with dyslexia may excel in seminars/tutorials/presentations but hand in poor coursework; their ability may not be reflected in written exams. They may be unable to read and comprehend at speed. Although their written work shows good thinking and content, students with dyslexia are not able to spot their own mistakes and this leads to poor presentation, spelling and confused structure of written work.

Some students with dyslexia may have poor short term auditory memory skills and can be disorganised with regard to time and equipment.

They may struggle to take notes and prefer just to listen in lectures or draw mind maps.

Students with dyslexia are often working much harder than their peers to get fairly ordinary marks and can get very frustrated.

Many students with dyslexia work with a note taker but prefer not to sit with the note taker.

Many students use coloured overlays to reduce the *scrambling* effect of words.

Examinations

Students with dyslexia are allowed extra time in examinations (typically 25%). The extra time is there to give the student time to re-read questions, plan their answers more precisely, and read through answers.

A letter is sent out with examination scripts, recommending that markers assess for ideas and content and overlook grammar and spelling, except where these are explicitly part of the learning outcomes and have been taught.

“ Students... may have a holistic overview, think laterally and intuitively. ”



Teaching Students with Asperger's Syndrome

Context

Asperger's Syndrome (AS) is part of the autistic spectrum. Autistic disorders can occur in widely varying degrees, but cover a triad of difficulties:

- social interaction: aloof; indifferent to others; acts in an odd manner
- communication: absence of desire to communicate; echoing the words of others
- imagination: concentration on *fact*; repetitive stereotyped actions

This information is intended also to be helpful in instances of communication difficulties, where a student may not have a diagnosis of AS, but may display some of the same characteristics.

Strengths

People with AS:

- Pay attention to detail
- Are often highly skilled in a particular area
- Have an encyclopaedic knowledge on areas of interest
- Tend to be logical (helpful in decision making where emotions may interfere)
- Are loyal and dedicated
- Tend not to lie
- Are non-judgemental

Issues

Most people with AS avoid direct eye contact. This means that they often lose the sense of the conversation, as they cannot look, think and listen at the same time.

People with AS often react favourably to bright or shifting light, and dislike the dark.

Some find large, quiet, empty spaces disconcerting. This may happen in a large exam room, or lecture theatre, where they can hear everyone turning pages and the scratching of pens.

People with AS typically do not pick up on nuances of expression and body language.

They may take ironic or metaphorical statements absolutely literally, and completely misread situations.

People with AS tend to like routine and can be distressed if there is an unexpected room change.

Many AS students have trouble when it comes to group work, as they do not understand interactive situations, and can cause a group to under-perform.

People with AS can appear to be argumentative and may not understand when it is time to stop questioning.



Strategies

- Arrange for someone to take a student around the buildings and rooms for the first few weeks each year and/or as timetables change.
- Many AS students learn better from imitation, rather than instruction. If you do give instructions, give them clearly in writing, wherever possible.
- Most students with AS have a note taker as the student would tend to concentrate on neat handwriting. The note taker may also act as a *buddy*, an advocate or a study supporter.
- Having an academic tutor who can meet regularly with the student as a mentor has been beneficial.
- If a student with AS persists in asking questions, a good approach would be to say, *That's an interesting question - can I see you after the session?* and give a specific time.

“ People... tend to be logical (helpful in decision making where emotions may interfere). ”

- Some people with AS strive towards perfectionism. They may need to be told that they have done enough to pass an assessment, for example limiting the time to give a presentation.
- Some AS students need to be helped to see the relevance of deadlines. Give a reasonable explanation why it is necessary, e.g. less time for the next assignment, your marking schedule.
- If intermediary steps in solving a problem are required by the student, in order to demonstrate understanding for assessment purposes, this will need explaining.
- Is there a way other than group work that they can meet the learning outcomes?
- Most students with AS need room or time adjustments for examinations. Students may also need clear advice and support on how to use their time between exams.

Teaching Deaf or Hearing Impaired Students

Context

Some students may have been born with a hearing impairment; others may have become impaired gradually or suddenly as a result of an illness or accident. Most have residual hearing; only a very small proportion has no hearing at all.

Many pre-lingually deaf people use a sign language, for example, British Sign Language (BSL) and belong to the Deaf community. (Note that a capital D is used here.)

A variety of techniques may be used to communicate: speech, lipreading, signing and/or a hearing aid.

What is used depends on age at onset of deafness, personal preference and degree of deafness.

Issues

A student's writing may follow BSL conventions rather than standard English ones and often contains errors that are similar to those of writers who have dyslexia.

Word endings and inflections are often incorrectly written, or missing, for example, walk, walks, and walked all look the same when lipreading, as do most *ing/ed* pairs, and may therefore be used incorrectly.

Only about 30% of words can be lipread.

A lot of concentration is needed to understand. Lipreaders therefore follow conversation by putting things into context and may miss subtleties and nuances.

Hearing aids amplify all sounds, including background noise, which can be problematic.

“ Only about 30% of words can be lipread.
A lot of concentration is needed to understand. ”

Strategies

- Email, texting on mobile phones, amplifiers on standard phones, phones with induction loops, pagers, video-conferencing, etc., can all help communication with and between hearing impaired and deaf people.
- A loop system cuts down background noise for hearing aid users but can pick up interference from neon lights, other loops, and computers. If you are teaching in a lecture theatre with an induction loop, use the microphone.
- Deaf students find computer spelling and grammar checkers, automatic text correction and the thesaurus helpful, in the same way as students with dyslexia.
- Many lipreaders need a lipspeaker, in the same way as a signer may need an interpreter.

- A lipreader needs to see your face; you do not necessarily have to look at theirs.
- Speak at a measured but normal speed (speaking slowly distorts lip patterns).
- Pauses should come after a phrase, not between individual words.
- Approach from the front or side to avoid startling the student and speak to the student, not the interpreter.
- Any videos or films should have written transcripts or subtitles.
- In group work get other students to indicate who is talking.
- Get people to talk one at a time

“ Speak at a measured but normal speed...
Pauses should come after a phrase,
not between individual words. ”

Teaching Students with a Visual Impairment

Context

Some students will have been born with their visual impairment. A far larger number become visually impaired later in life. Visual impairment covers a wide spectrum, from those who are only marginally affected, to a small number who are totally blind. Only a tiny minority has no useful sight.

Be Aware

It takes longer to read large print. Visually impaired students can probably access only two or three words and meaning has to be built up a phrase at a time.

Students with a visual impairment can rarely make notes in the casual way others do, as reminders, prompts, etc., and they therefore have to rely on memory more than others.

Many will use a computer with assistive technology like a screen reader, a screen magnifier or an audio recorder.

Students with a visual impairment may have different frameworks for concepts such as distance, scale, perspective, and dimensions. There is therefore a particular difficulty in making tables, pictures, diagrams, maps and graphs accessible to the students.

Spreadsheets can prove particularly difficult if only two or three columns can be seen at one time. Information that is on both vertical and horizontal axes also causes problems.

Students may have difficulty with the abstractions of number, nor can they always visualise the criteria of position, distance, size, ratio, proportion, colour, fractions, etc., in the same way as a sighted person. They may therefore have difficulty in constructing their own plans, diagrams, charts, forms, etc.

Strategies

- Discuss assessment and other arrangements with the student well in advance.
- Many prefer large print; enlarged on screen, paper or CCTV: but don't assume this. A4 format is easier to handle and file than photocopying on A3.
- The colour contrast of font and background can make a difference, as for learners with dyslexia.
- Avoid placing text over a background illustration or pattern.
- Give a running commentary if you are demonstrating a procedure.
- Try to use videos with voice-overs describing the action where possible, or provide a description which students can access in their preferred way.

- Braille has been mostly superceded by the use of text to speech packages.
- If they need putting into Braille, modified print, or recording; produce materials in advance and contact the Disabilities Office for advice.
- Many books are available in electronic format.
- When students are using screen readers, information should be given in non-tabulated form as the readers may have trouble with columns, boxes, and other graphical conventions. Websites and intranets should follow the same guidelines.

“ Discuss assessment and other arrangements with the student well in advance. ”

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