

Checklist for accessible curriculum design

This 12 point checklist can be used at any point in the curriculum design stage, from initial conception of a new or revised module or course through to the approval stage, and beyond to the design of sessions and course materials.

	Question	Comments
Learning	1. Have you anticipated different learning styles, preferences, abilities, and needs?	<p>Variety in learning activities can support a diverse student body to learn in ways that suit them. Engaging in different types of activity, such as problem solving, discussion, hands-on exercises and presentations helps to ensure that students will each experience learning opportunities that support their particular ways of learning, thus reducing the need for ad hoc adjustments and feelings of alienation. However, keep in mind that students will always find particular learning activities difficult.</p> <p>Tips: Try to present the same content/teaching point in two or three different ways, for example, using text, visual images, and sound; offer clear examples in different ways; use narrative and story; use games; offer collaborative learning opportunities; use demonstrations which allow students to watch and observe; allow students opportunities to create, experiment and ‘have a go’; communicate key points as clearly as possible using text as well as your own voice; offer suggestions for follow up learning for those who learn more slowly over time. Use a variety of teaching methods throughout the module, and avoid using too many in a single session, which may be disorienting.</p>
	2. Have you allowed students an element of choice in how they learn?	<p>Research shows that students do best when there is an element of choice in how they learn. While you may have plenty of variety in the learning activities on offer, it is also important to acknowledge that not all students will find each activity easy, whether the activity is listening to a lecture, watching a video, reading a set text, or working with a group. A degree of optionality in how students engage with the content can not only support different learning needs, but can also help to empower students and minimise worry among students.</p>

		<p>Too much choice can overwhelm students, so it's about ensuring a balance across the module/course, and providing some optionality in how students engage with the content, rather than excessive choice. If you are not providing much choice in how students learn, reflect on the rationale for this, and provide students with clear information on what is expected of them at the earliest possible stage.</p> <p>Tips: Allow students to choose different activities during a session; offer the same teaching point in two or three different formats; encourage both active and more passive participation where possible.</p>
	<p>3. Is the structure of teaching sessions communicated to students in advance or at the start of each session?</p>	<p>'Signposting' students to the structure of each lecture or seminar in advance or at the start of the session is crucial to support students with different learning requirements. Most students will benefit from having key information about what the session will cover and what is expected of them.</p> <p>Tips: Use module study guides to convey key information about learning outcomes and structure of sessions where possible. Send out any handouts, slides, or materials at least the day before the session to enable students to become familiar with the session beforehand, and to download material to their personal devices to help them 'follow along' during the session. Can you communicate significant changes in the pace of the course to students in a supportive way?</p>
<p>Assessment</p>	<p>4. Are a variety of assessment options available (including topic and format, e.g., online assessment, portfolio, video clip, blog, podcast, oral presentation, team project)?</p>	<p>Review activities and assignments for the course and consider whether they advantage or disadvantage students with particular learning styles, abilities, or conditions (for example, students with an anxiety disorder, students with low reading speeds, students who are blind or partially sighted). The AccessAbility centre provides information for staff who are teaching or supporting students with disabilities or learning difficulties. Offer students a choice in how they are assessed. If choice in format or assessment is not appropriate, can you articulate why this is so (subject benchmarks, employer expectations, etc.)?</p>

		<p>Tips: If assessments are mostly text-based, consider whether a non-written form of assessment can be offered as an additional option, such as an oral presentation. Consider different types of assessment to allow students to demonstrate a given learning outcome, and offer these to all students rather than singling out students for special treatment.</p>
	<p>5. Is the pace of assessments broadly even, allowing time between assessments to rest and plan ahead?</p>	<p>All students benefit from a curriculum that is carefully paced to avoid multiple deadlines bunched together, and which allows them a chance to digest their assessment feedback before another assessment is due. This can help to minimise anxiety and support students who find it difficult to organise their time.</p> <p>Tips: Space assessments out within a given module. Where this is not possible, give students extra support with planning ahead and formative feedback on their work.</p>
<p>Materials</p>	<p>6. Are course materials accessible, and designed to support different learning styles?</p>	<p>Course materials includes PowerPoint or other visual presentations, handouts, online learning activities, distance learning materials, course texts, and suggested reading. All course materials should be accessible to students with different needs, abilities and preferences. Use a sans-serif font like Arial, on a plain background, and use an appropriate font size to enhance readability. Use recommended accessible style formats for PowerPoint.</p> <p>Tips: Providing brief details in the ‘Notes’ section of PowerPoint, for example for the provenance of an image, is helpful to students who wish to reference these or explore further. If you are using lots of images in a PowerPoint presentation, always give a text description of the image and some context where possible. This can assist with learning through pre-session familiarisation and post-session revision.</p> <p>Choose an online platform that is fully accessible. Are online and distance learning modules accessible by mainstream screen readers? Are all core materials available from the Library in accessible formats, for example, as screen-reader friendly e-books? If materials are not available in accessible format, can alternative resources be suggested? If videos are used, can transcripts be provided as a matter of course to all students?</p>

	<p>7. Are session materials made available to students in advance?</p>	<p>Providing slides in advance enables students, particularly those with specific learning difficulties, to follow the structure of the presentation with greater ease and clarity, and helps students make annotations and formulate questions ahead of the session.</p> <p>Tips: Adopt a policy where session materials are always circulated to students in advance of a session.</p>
	<p>8. Are recordings of lectures made available to students after a session?</p>	<p>Recording sessions through Lecture Capture or other means enables students to re-access content for revision purposes. Additionally, making lecture notes available to students is also beneficial.</p>
<p>Information</p>	<p>9. Is key module information disseminated to students in a timely manner?</p>	<p>The levels of flexibility and choice in teaching methods and assessment options should be clearly communicated to students in advance of the module start date.</p> <p>Tips: Consider providing key module information at the earliest possible stage, after students have been accepted for a place at University, so that they can begin to prepare. Consider differentiating between need to know (required) and nice to know (optional) information. Review module specifications for clarity and helpful, student-facing language that enables students to understand the nature of the learning and assessment on each module.</p>
	<p>10. Are expectations clearly communicated to students?</p>	<p>Ensure that students can assess the best options for them ahead of the module start date. This can involve assessment requirements, but also other physical requirements. For example, are students expected to sit for the whole session or will there be opportunities to move around and take regular breaks?</p> <p>Tips: If the class is taking a study visit, some students will be unable or uncomfortable travelling by coach. Can optionality be built-in to the travel arrangements? Will students be at a disadvantage if they are not able to go on the coach?</p>

Evaluation	11. Are students able to present their own feedback at different stages of the module?	Consider enabling students to present feedback in the middle and at the end of the module. Be aware that some students will not want to spend an entire session on feedback, but might complete a survey or feedback form.
	12. Are students encouraged to participate in module design as well as providing feedback?	Involving students at the course design stage ensures students have a voice in how they are taught and assessed. This could be achieved through surveys, focus groups, or involving students in the design of course elements such as assessment questions or learning activities.

Adapted from the following resources: Chapman, V., 'Top 10 tips on Inclusive Assessment', University of Worcester, 2012, Centre for University Teaching, 'Implementation Checklist for Inclusive Teaching Practices', University of Ottawa, 2013, Teachability, 'Evaluating Practice: Creating accessible course or programme design and structure for disabled students', The University of Strathclyde, 2000-2005 and Universal Design for Learning, 'Universal Instructional Design Quick-Start Checklist', University of Guelph, Ontario, 2003.