

English Subject Centre

Seed Guide

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The
Higher
Education
Academy
English
Subject
Centre

Inclusive Teaching

a guide for higher education English



About Seed Guides

English Subject Centre Seed Guides are short and practical guides especially written for those teaching English language, English literature and Creative Writing within higher education. They are intended to help early career lecturers or part-time tutors finding their feet, and also experienced lecturers looking for fresh ideas, or pointers in an unfamiliar area. The Guides are digests of key information and ideas designed to provide just enough information to 'get you going' and sow ideas from which, we hope, enhancements and initiatives can grow and develop.



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Acknowledgements

The text for this guide was written by Jonathan Gibson, adapting material (including student quotations) from *Staying the Course: The Experiences of Disabled Students of English and Creative Writing* by Kevin Brunton and Jonathan Gibson (Egham, 2009: English Subject Centre Report Series 18, available online at www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/resources/access/practice.php).

The English Subject Centre would like to thank Kevin Brunton (London Metropolitan University) and Simon Ball (JISC TechDis) for reviewing drafts of this guide.



What is inclusive teaching?

'Inclusive teaching' is teaching that is as helpful as possible to the widest possible range of students – teaching that works well for students with different physical and psychological conditions, different skills, enthusiasms and cultural backgrounds, different 'learning styles' and worldviews. It sounds like an obvious ideal to aim for, like the proverbial motherhood and apple pie. But teaching at HE level – even very good teaching – has not always been inclusive. Often in the past, lecturers designed their courses with a particular type of student in mind (if only implicitly): able-bodied, aged 18-21, culturally predisposed to take university study seriously and *au fait* with middle-class western culture. This model is now unsustainable, and not just for obvious ethical reasons: any failure of teaching practice to keep pace with the increasing diversity of the student population could fall foul of legal safeguards now in place (consolidated in the 2010 Equality Act) for a wide range of 'nontraditional' students.

This Guide uses material taken from *Staying the Course*, the English Subject Centre's 2009 survey of the experience of disabled students of English and Creative Writing. Echoing much other recent research, that report found that many of the issues identified by disabled students as particularly trying for them were not disability-specific, but, rather, problems that could be circumvented by small changes in teaching practice that would in fact benefit the vast majority of students. Disability legislation requires institutions to make 'reasonable adjustments' to teaching practice where current practice puts a disabled student at a considerable disadvantage. *Staying the Course* showed that many such adjustments would be unnecessary if English departments taught more 'inclusively' in the first place.

The care our discipline expends on attending to voices on the margin has not always extended into the classroom, as Robert Eaglestone points out in the Foreword to *Staying the Course*:

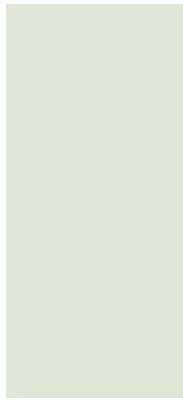
English has been open to philosophical and ideological changes, but sometimes has been resistant to more practical and pedagogic ones: while the curriculum and content of the discipline has shifted, the mechanics of teaching – assessment, writing, marking, lecturing, e-learning – have often remained unexamined.

It is to such nuts-and-bolts questions that this Guide is addressed, and, ultimately, to the betterment of the student experience of English studies. Inevitably, this Guide to inclusive teaching is in effect an anthology of suggestions for best practice in teaching in general: 'inclusive teaching' is good teaching.



More detail on inclusive teaching, including information about specific disabilities, disability legislation, the conceptualisation of disability and useful books, articles and websites, as well as extensive quotations from disabled English students, can be found in *Staying the Course: The Experiences of Disabled Students of English and Creative Writing* by Kevin Brunton and Jonathan Gibson (Egham, 2009: English Subject Centre Report Series 18), available online at www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/resources/access/practice.php





Making independent study inclusive

The premium placed on out-of-class work such as reading and essay-writing by English degrees can be difficult to manage for first-years used to more contact time at school. Student-specific factors such as language difficulties, socio-cultural unease, anxiety about sexual identity or disability only make things worse.

In setting out-of-class work, aim above all for clarity: breaking down complex tasks into their component parts and explaining the rationale behind teaching strategies will obviate many difficulties.

Provide materials in an accessible format

- For easy access, ensure that as much of your teaching material as possible is available in electronic form, online: students with different requirements will be able to customise it as appropriate, changing text, size, colour and contrast or using the digital file as the basis for the production of audio or Braille materials. Don't forget also to circulate hard copies, as the use of computers may be problematic for other students.
- Some students will not be able to read conventional books and will have to access primary and secondary sources using other media: electronic books, online text (sometimes of dubious provenance), audiobooks (sometimes abbreviated) or podcasts. Discuss the issue with any of your students who is working in this way, and help them to find the best solution. JISC TechDis publish a guide to obtaining textbooks in alternative formats (<http://bit.ly/JISCTechDisAltFormat>).
- Check out which publishers are most flexible in providing alternative formats in the database at www.publisherlookup.org.uk
- Saving texts for download in 'rich text format' (with an .rtf extension after the filename) rather than as Word (.doc) or PDF (.pdf) files will be helpful for many students, as rich text files are easier for 'assistive technology' software to access. Other formats include programming code invisible to the naked eye which interferes with software trying to read the text.
- Use a sans-serif font such as Arial or Verdana in point 12, avoiding italicisation, underlining and capitalised text as much as possible. Align text to the left and do not justify line-endings. Make sure that the material you provide is clearly structured and that its usefulness is obvious to the students. Use the 'headings' function in Word to create a clear structure for your document that users will be able

to access by viewing the 'document map'. You can also use hyperlinks. (For guidance on formatting hyperlinks, see www.barrierbreak.com/accessible_hyperlinks.php)

- Lecturers making extensive use of VLEs and other forms of online learning material will need to be aware of the international guidelines on web accessibility produced by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) and other key resources in this area: see www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/



The JISC TechDis website includes advice on using technology to develop new and alternative teaching practices, guidance on making old materials accessible and advice on how to use sound and images effectively (www.jisctechdis.ac.uk)

- You will sometimes want to use e-learning materials that, while not fully accessible to all potential students, will materially help your current cohort. Don't hesitate to do so – but do try to think how you might adapt the materials if a student unable to access them joins you next year.
- Course materials on VLEs are not always presented in a very clear way. Consider using more text to explain what is going on. For more detail on VLE accessibility see JISC's page at <http://bit.ly/gajqWN>

Help students with out-of-class reading and note-taking

All sorts of physical and psychological blocks can make extensive reading difficult. International students, for example, may need help in adjusting to the working practices of an academic culture very different from the one they are used to. You can help by making sure that you have explained the requirements of your modules as clearly as possible – explaining in reading-lists (sent out early) and/or other course material which books (or parts of books) are compulsory reading and which are optional, and highlighting the precise benefits of optional wider reading.



'Sometimes I find it hard to read a lot because of an obsessive concern with pronouncing each word perfectly in my head, especially speech. I have to go over certain words many times so they feel right.'

Note-taking can be just as difficult for students, but is a topic very rarely explicitly addressed by tutors. Structured tuition on it need not be a mechanistic or boring remedial process. There are many creative and interesting strategies you can use:

- Ask students to keep a reading log (assessed or not) in which to record their immediate reactions to their reading, either in a structured way related to the themes of the course or as completely free 'response statements'. The log could also take a number of different forms: a physical logbook, a Word file, a blog, a video or audio diary.



For an example of a structured approach to log-books, see the English Subject Centre case study by Joanna Moody, 'Studying Literary Texts: The Learning Process' at www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/publications/casestudies/assess/literary_texts.php

- Use small-scale assessment tasks linked to out-of-class reading.
- Ask students to post reports on their reading on an online discussion forum. This could be structured or free, and perhaps form part of the assessment. Students could be asked to post after reading a certain number of lines or chapters, and/or post answers to specific questions, on particular topics, or in the personae of characters from the book.
- Run a special note-taking seminar for first-years, in which everyone discusses different ways of reading and annotating a particular passage.
- Encourage or require students to form out-of-class support groups ('peer-assisted learning' or 'PAL' groups) linked to particular classes.
- Direct students towards one of the many study skills books on the market, or online resources designed to support note-taking. Try discussing (and critiquing) the recommendations in a special session—or experiment with different methods with students and discuss the results, linking the activity to specific themes/structures in set texts.
- Use multimedia (eg. videos or podcasts) as an alternative or supplement to the traditional course handbook.
- Get your students to be proactive about time-management. Encourage them to break down large tasks into smaller elements, and to take advantage of calendar software and other online resources.
- Some students will struggle physically to use books, whilst access to the library might be very difficult for others. You might be able to arrange longer access to short term loan items for some students. Discuss the situation with your librarian.

Help students plan and write essays

Many students will need help in getting to grips with lecturers' expectations for written work. Many courses now include essay-writing sessions either as modules run within the department or in an external student support centre. Whatever the provision at your institution, try to incorporate in your own modules activities specifically designed to develop essay-writing skills. For example:

- Run a session for first-years discussing the course handbook's guidelines on essay-writing and/or the official assessment criteria, perhaps complemented by sample essays (either genuine student essays from past years, used with permission, or specially-composed models). The discussion need not be abstract – it could be integrated into discussion of a particular author/text.
- Ask students to unpick and analyse the arguments of a critical essay – perhaps one of your own publications. Explain to students how you came to make particular arguments about texts and the thinking behind your rhetorical strategies.



For a wealth of ideas about running discussion fora on English courses, see *Online Discussion in English Studies* by Rosie Miles et al. (Egham, 2010: English Subject Centre Report Series 21, available online at www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/resources/technology/report.php)

- Provide students with a framework, or 'writing frame' (in the form of headings and/or the beginning of sentences). Focused on a particular topic, this could be designed to stimulate thought in all students rather than prescribing a simplistic essay structure.
- Let students submit essay-plans and/or drafts: on a one-to-one basis, perhaps, or as in-class peer assessment, in lieu of detailed feedback on the final essay, or as part of a portfolio. You could redesign the assessment structure of a module to include a two-stage assessment, the first part involving notes/preparatory materials such as an essay plan and a second part consisting of a formal essay.
- Encourage students who might benefit (not just dyslexic students) to use graphical organising (or 'mind-mapping') software to think through their ideas and plan their work visually. Programmes such as 'Inspiration' and 'MindManager' allow students to view information both as visual images and in written form, enabling 'Word' documents to be reformatted diagrammatically.
- Let students submit written work online.





Underpinning the recommendations in this Guide is the central (and obvious) importance of treating all your students as unique individuals and of avoiding pre-judging them as stereotyped representatives of a particular set of circumstances, whether in terms of race, culture, medical condition or sexual preference. Do not ask them in class discussion to 'speak for' or represent people in that category more generally – and don't assume that teaching practices that work well for, say, one student with a specific learning difficulty, will work for all other students in that category.

Consider alternative modes of assessment

You can also address students' difficulties with essays by rethinking your assessment régime, cutting back on the number of essays required and using a range of other forms. Go back to first principles. What skills and knowledge are you trying to instil in your students? It is likely that some of these qualities (including incipient essay-planning and essay-writing skills) can be assessed (and developed) using assessment methods other than the essay. Possibilities include:

- Small-scale writing exercises, such as reviews, critical bibliographies and critical/creative work.
- Vivas, as an alternative to essays, either as presentations to a class or as recorded one-to-one conversations with a tutor, perhaps supplemented with a portfolio of other work.
- Group-work outside class in teams (for example, 'problem-based' or 'inquiry-based' learning). The allocation of different roles to different members of a team of this sort can help unlock individual skills, and counter the loneliness felt by some international students and disabled students.
- Assessed contributions to an online forum.
- Online exercises or projects, perhaps involving work with internet text archives such as Early English Books Online (EEBO) or Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO). Adequate 'scaffolding' – ideally through one or more hands-on sessions in a classroom equipped with computers – will be essential.
- Student-produced videos or podcasts: either pieces of creative work or filmed/recorded argument (e.g. in the form of an interview or mock radio programme).
- Computer quizzes (using, for example, the quiz function in a VLE).



For some exciting examples of how multiple-choice computer quizzes can test sophisticated knowledge about literary texts, see the sample quizzes posted on the HumBox website by Matthew Sauvage, at <http://humbox.eprints.org/374/>

Variation in assessment will only work if the purpose and nature of each assessment is crystal clear to students: a multiplicity of insufficiently-glossed tasks will only cause confusion and anxiety. Providing a varied diet might not be sufficient for students with some particular conditions, who will need special permission to meet learning outcomes in a different way from their peers.

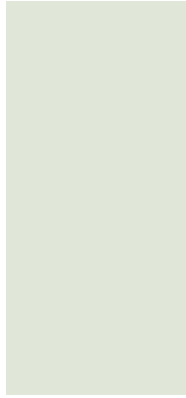
Help individual students

Disabled students in receipt of funding in the form of the DSA ('Disabled Students Allowance') and whatever replaces it, have access to a bewildering range of potential sources of support, including personal assistants (dyslexia helpers, academic mentors), 'assistive technology' and mental health mentoring. If you can find out from a student what special devices or means of support they are using in their work outside the classroom, you may be able to tailor both the requirements and learning materials of your modules accordingly. You will also have a clearer sense of how their work has been produced – something that may prove invaluable during marking and feedback. You might have to make the first move: many students with special requirements are shy about asking for the help they need. Details of individual adjustments are often circulated by, or are available from, university disability services or faculty disability co-ordinators.

- Some students may need to know about the requirements for a module before other students, as their preparations for it (accessing texts, etc.) may be particularly protracted.
- It will help some students with particular problems or requirements to be given extra time for out-of-class work; for others it might compound their anxiety. Check with the individual student.
- Some students will benefit from a reduction in required reading (provided that they can still fulfil the module's learning outcomes), focusing in depth on a limited number of texts/topics.
- If one of your students employs a personal assistant, it would make sense to make sure that the help s/he provides is appropriate to the module in question – that, for example, guidance on essay structure is consonant with your idea of good written work, and that you are happy that the student is being given sufficient opportunity to satisfy your learning outcomes through their own best efforts. The same applies to the use of assistive software such as proofreading programs like 'Editor'.



Disabled students not in receipt of the Disabled Students Allowance may not know about the full range of assistive technology devices available. The EmpTech website (www.emptech.info/) is a good source of information. For a list of free software, see the JISC Regional Support Centre Scotland North and East page at www.rsc-ne-scotland.ac.uk/eduapps/accessapps.php



Making lectures and seminars inclusive

Provide supporting material for lectures

Guidelines about the accessibility of learning materials are given above, on p.2. Some lecturers routinely take along coloured handouts and a few handouts in large print to lectures, just in case they are needed by any students in the audience. Ideally, try to remember accessibility when suggesting in seminars or lectures texts for further reading outside the classroom.

Standard guidelines for the use of 'PowerPoint' in lectures are as follows:

- Use a sans-serif font, preferably Arial or Verdana at point 30.
- Make sure there is a sharp contrast between text and background. Dark blue and cream are particularly easy to see.
- Don't use upper case alone; use mixed case (ie. capitals at the beginnings of words only).
- Use bold, but not underlining.
- Text should be left-justified.
- Be careful not to use colour to make meaningful distinctions.
- Write no more on each slide than you would on a postcard.
- Avoid using too many animations.
- Use the 'slide design' options: this will keep the text accessible.
- You can use the 'notes' field to gloss the slides: this will be useful for people viewing the presentation after seeing or without having seen the presentation.
- Read out what is on the slides. This will help students unable to see them.

If you use other technology in large lectures (e.g. electronic voting systems), try to think about accessibility issues in advance.

Lecturers have sometimes in the past been unwilling to provide recordings or complete texts of their lectures, interpreting the idea as a block on their creativity. Yet students do not necessarily expect or need a complete text

of every lecture. What they do want is accessible material contextualising the lecture and helping them to understand it better, such as:

- Lecture 'notes' of some kind, presented in any number of forms or combinations of forms, including: headings on a sheet (provided either before or during the lecture) under which students write their own notes; a paraphrase of the lecture's argument (perhaps omitting detailed examples); a 'taster' set of notes circulated before the lecture to give students an idea of what to expect without giving away the details of the argument; notes in diagrammatic form created with graphical organizing software such as 'Inspiration'.



Often you will be aware of a student's disability when teaching in small groups. (If you are not, and the student is seriously disadvantaged by some aspect of your teaching, you are quite likely to hear about it.) Lectures with big audiences, on the other hand, are likely to include attendees with disabilities about whose individual requirements you know nothing, and who will not necessarily tell anybody about their problems. The legal position is that if a student has told any individual staff member of an institution about their condition, that institution is deemed to know and about it and is legally obliged to make accommodations. For large-scale lectures, then, an 'inclusive' approach is essential.

Don't forget, meanwhile, that many students want to maintain a low profile so that they will not be considered 'different' or 'special' by their peers. It is important to respect the student's intentions in such cases – though you will need to explain to them potential problems that the lack of disclosure could cause.

- An online copy of 'PowerPoint' slides, supplied after the lecture.
- A complete text, or video, or podcast of a lecture. Providing this will only be useful if students simultaneously have access to all the other elements in the lecture ('PowerPoint' slides, handouts, a clear view of any videos, etc.).

Give lectures inclusively

Clarity is, again, the key criterion here. It is not the same thing as 'dumbing down': there is no reason why clear signposting and structure should prevent lectures from being subtle, exciting and thought-provoking.

- Make the structure of each session obvious to the students, perhaps in visual form (on a slide, or in a handout, or on the board); recap from time to time (and at the end), and mark transition points clearly. (Verbal 'signposts' in a lecture will make it easier for students recording it to bookmark their recordings for later transcription.) If you have made notes on the board, leave them up at the end of the session, so that students can copy them down or take a picture using their mobile phones.
- Don't go too fast: allow enough time (perhaps programming in some deliberate pauses for reflection) for the students to absorb each point.
- Hold the students' attention by switching the focus of the discussion or the medium of delivery every 15 minutes or so. This will help students with poor concentration, but also many other students too.

Student Voices

'When I had ME hour-long lectures were really hard. Getting myself onto campus and into the lecture room sometimes made me too tired to actually listen to the lecture. I missed lectures and seminars on a regular basis.'

- Whenever you use new or unusual terminology (or a new writer's name), write it down on the board. When you have written it down, spell it out.
- Use a variety of different delivery methods and of different media (video, images, maybe passing round a physical object) to capitalize on differences in 'learning styles' between students.
- If a student asks a question in a lecture, make sure you repeat it (so that everyone else can hear it) before giving your reply.
- Speak clearly (not too fast) and face the audience (this will help lip-readers); use a microphone if available (it may be linked in to aids worn by hearing-impaired students). Don't speak when you turn your back to write on the board. If you are using boards/overhead projectors, explain what you're doing as you do it. Don't move around the room too much – some students will find it very difficult to track you. Adjust curtains/blinds to avoid appearing in silhouette. If you dim the lights to show slides or a video and you need to speak, make sure that your face is illuminated.
- If you use an overhead projector, use printed rather than handwritten transparencies.

Student Voices

'The worst part for me is the note taking. I am often unable to keep up with writing fast, as my arms cramp, or can lose feeling. In most other classes, it is easy to copy someone else's notes since it's usually a list of facts, but I think notes in English are much more individualised (usually) and therefore hard to copy from someone else later. A recording device would have perhaps been useful in some lectures, but I could not afford one.'

- Make it clear to students how you want them to engage with the lecture. Do they need to take notes, or have you provided them with enough supplementary materials (handouts, online resources, etc.) to allow them simply to listen? If you want them to take notes, pause from time to time to allow enough time to do it properly. Many of the respondents to the Subject Centre survey of disabled students in *Staying the Course* were under the impression that they were supposed to take very extensive notes in every lecture: that this was in fact their lecturers' intention in every case seems doubtful. Supplying more materials in support of the lecture should help counter some of this anxiety.
- Using electronic voting systems ('EVS') is an excellent way of gauging student understanding and will help you adjust lecture content accordingly. For an example, see the English Subject Centre case study by Nuria Yáñez-Bouza, 'Enhancing interactive learning in the classroom with 'Turning Point'', available online at www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/publications/casestudies/technology/turningpoint.php
- Allow students to record the session if they want to. You may feel that it would be more useful for a student to access the content of the session in some other way (and if so, you should tell them this). If a student insists, however, the law is probably on his/her side.
- Try to make sure that students who need to be close to the lecturer (for example, for lip-reading) are able to be.

Student Voices

'In lectures I must write down almost everything the lecturer says, so as to not forget any valuable information. This is restricting, because by writing I am not wholly listening to the argument, which limits my understanding – my notes often do not make sense to me, as I struggle to keep up with the lecturer. I also find that when reading I cannot keep my place on a page, so I make every effort not to read aloud in class. This in particular has made me rather quiet in seminars, as I must read slower than my peers, which limits my capacity to comment on texts.'

- Be careful about using unexplained idioms or slang phrases that may confuse international students.
- Don't assume that all your students watch the latest soap operas or follow the latest bands: popular culture references can be just as alienating as high culture ones.

Run seminars inclusively

A student might be unable to participate effectively in a class discussion for a number of reasons: working in a second language; socio-cultural anxiety; poor memory; inability to process others' contributions quickly enough to respond; inability to read others' body language or intonation; physical problems in speaking; bewilderment at the cultural norms of an alien academic environment (perhaps less deferential than the one the student is used to)... the list is endless and multifarious. There are, though, steps you can take to make it easier for most of your students to keep track of the discussion and to engage with it:

- Make sure that you know all your students' names – and perhaps also use ice-breaking exercises. The first step towards inclusive teaching is treating each student as an individual.
- If you can, arrange the chairs in a seminar room in such a way that students can see each other's faces.
- In longer sessions, provide breaks: avoid making them gruelling experiences.
- Make sure you plan your session: thinking about what you will be going to do will help you anticipate possible problems facing particular students.
- In a free-flowing seminar, in which frequent student contributions change the course of the discussion, record the main ideas as they develop on a board (or ask a student to). Revisit the board at the end of the seminar.
- In your seminars, provide a variety of tasks, to allow different students to use their specific skills: i.e. periods of individual reading/analysis (perhaps involving small-scale written tasks), periods of small-group activity and periods of plenary discussion.



For more on seminar teaching, including sample seminar plans, see *Small Group Teaching: A Good Practice Guide* by Jonathan Gibson (Egham, 2010: English Subject Centre Report Series 23), available online at www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/publications/reports.php

- If you require students to make in-seminar presentations, provide detailed support and guidance. A complex and useful framework is provided in Arran Stibbe's English Subject Centre case study, 'Emergence: a person-centred approach to oral rhetoric', at www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/publications/casestudies/oralskills/emergence.php
- Small-scale autobiographical exercises, as well as enabling students to make links between their own lives and their academic work, will, if shared with the group, help raise your students' awareness of the diversity of contexts from which their fellow students come, and help avoid stereotyping by assumptions about gender, nationality, culture, disability, etc.

Student Voices

'Presentations have been quite hard, for I get very stressed and anxious. But the worst experiences depend on my mood. If I am feeling bad and I turn up for a seminar, I may feel extremely vulnerable and unable to contribute.'

- One way to gauge students' experience of seminars is to distribute unofficial, mid-module evaluation forms. Student responses should highlight any substantial problems with the room, your delivery of the sessions, etc.
- Run 'problem-based learning' sessions (p.4) without a lecturer present
- Supplement your teaching sessions with 'peer-assisted learning' sessions run by students (see p.3 above).
- Complement your teaching session by using online discussion fora (see p.3 above). Many students (for example, some with disabilities) will find posting to a forum (at the most basic level, in a discussion around a given topic) easier than contributing to a seminar. As live chat can create anxiety, use a threaded forum discussion, to give students time to compose and check their contribution.

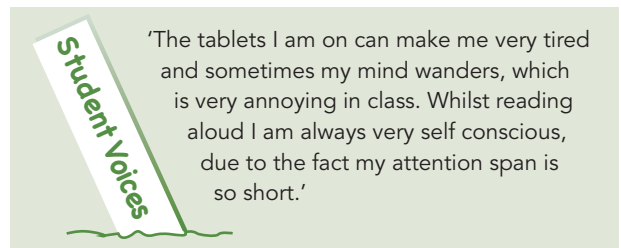


- Run some seminars in rooms equipped with computers: for some students, this will be a particularly comfortable and welcoming environment.
- Try to make your seminar a 'safe space' in which students feel comfortable talking about challenging topics without fearing an unreasoned hostile reaction. Establishing some key 'ground rules' with students at the beginning of the course, to which the whole group subscribes (highlighting, for example, the need to respect other people's opinions and to avoid intellectual bullying) will help.
- Respond immediately and negatively to aggressive and unreasoned intolerance and crude stereotyping if it occurs in your seminar. Bad behaviour can come from any ideological position: often, the most important thing to bear in mind is the power dynamic in the room.

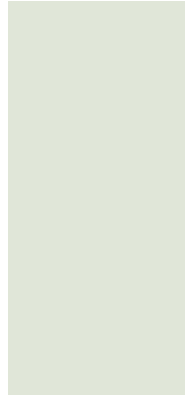
Help individual students

- Failure to attend teaching sessions may be very hard to avoid for some students. Sometimes, you will need to find other ways to achieve the aims of the teaching session: tutorials, perhaps (time permitting), or a worksheet with questions and readings relevant to the topic missed, or even the use of video-conferencing. You could run an exercise in which students compile a record of the session that could be viewed later by the absentee (a live blog, for example, or retrospective seminar notes).
- Storage facilities in the department for bags, etc. will help disabled students move around more easily. Some students will benefit from an area where they can rest and/or take medication between teaching sessions.
- Room allocation can be a problem for some disabled students, particularly if classes are often scheduled in rooms up steep staircases or many floors up.
- Some students will need access to a power source in order to plug in an assistive technology device.
- Some students, while present in class, may not be able to participate in the activities you have planned (discussion in small groups, etc.). If these activities are essential to the seminar, try to think of ways in which their outcomes could be achieved in some other way.
- Sometimes you might have to adjust your teaching approach to accommodate the use of special devices such as modified keyboards. Very basic problems can arise, such as the problem of holding a book on a table: solutions will often be lo-tech, involving assistive technology such as Blu-Tack® or drawing-pins.
- In lectures, wheelchair users will prefer to have a choice of places to go to: not all will be happy to be forced to be at the front (or back).
- If a student wants to bring a helper into your seminar group, and is happy for the other students to know about it, make sure that the other students understand the processes involved and how they can help.
- Some students (for example, those using lipreading or synthetic speech machines) will require prior notice of the topic and main ideas of a seminar: otherwise, they might not understand all the words that you are using. (It would also help if they knew in advance about specific passages of text analysed in detail.) The same will apply to students using personal assistants such as note-takers and signers.

- In seminars involving students with hearing difficulties, try to make sure that students don't talk simultaneously. (You could ask each student who speaks to hold the same pencil in turn.)
- Don't assume that apparently confident students in minority groups can be teased and dealt with robustly: the confidence can be superficial.
- If you have a deaf student with an interpreter in your seminar, allow time for the student to sign to the interpreter and then for the interpreter to speak. Prior consultation with both will often be necessary, so that signs for new/unusual vocabulary can be agreed in advance.



- If you use video, remember that you will have either to show a subtitled version, or provide a transcript, if a hearing-impaired student is in your group, and that you will have to use audio or Braille description for a visually-impaired student, or, alternatively, a transcript in accessible format (see page 2).
- Give a verbal description of the seminar room to a visually-impaired student if your group is using it for the first time or if it has been rearranged since your last visit. The other students could perhaps all introduce themselves at the beginning of a session, so that it is clear where everyone is sitting. Say when you are leaving the room.
- If you take your class on an outing or 'field trip', be sure to investigate accessibility issues in advance. Social activities may be particularly problematic: be aware of possible sensitivities around eating and drinking. Some students may not be able to go on such trips – in which case you will have to find another way for them to satisfy the relevant learning outcomes.
- Do not assume that all students share a western liberal approach to ethical, sexual and religious issues, and do not use teaching methods deliberately aiming to shock 'moralistic' sensibilities. (Four-letter words are best avoided, on the whole.) Explain why you want to discuss potentially inflammatory material as part of the course, and be prepared to allow students to avoid certain texts or topics if this does not interfere with the overall learning outcomes of the module. Be ready to think of another area/topic they might focus on instead.



Making exams inclusive

Run exams inclusively

As with essays, consider revisiting your course requirements: to what extent are exams essential to the learning outcomes of your modules? Some of the ends achieved through exams may be equally or better served by other forms of assessment. One possibility is to give students more choice in the extent to which they sit exams. Variations on the standard unseen exam are another possibility.

- If exams are used, make sure that the rationale of each exam is explained in advance, that questions are clear and straightforward and that the exam paper is fully accessible. Be clear about what is being assessed: will grammar and spelling be considered as well as content?
- Ensure that students are able to access past examples of assessment, and that these can be provided in alternative formats if necessary. Various seminar activities can be devised to help students get to grips with exam requirements: mock exams, exercises involving students setting exams themselves, etc.
- Consider whether you could accept answers to exam questions in a number of different forms.

Student Voices

'Revision takes ages. It takes me ages to plan a question and then ages to write it. I haven't ever finished an exam. Because of difficulty in revising I have twice left an exam after 30 minutes because I panicked and couldn't remember anything.'

- Consider 'student-friendly' alternatives to traditional unseen exams, such as open-book exams, take-away exams, open-notes exams (in which students do not bring books into the exam-room but are allowed to bring in notes) and multiple-choice questionnaires. Structured exams of various kinds – in which, for example, one question requiring a short answer might lead from or to another – can, if well designed, be a good way of assessing sophisticated knowledge and skills. If you think carefully about what you want to assess in an exam, one of these non-traditional formats may turn out to be a better method than an exam in the traditional essay-based format.



TOP TIP

For an excellent checklist of things to consider when setting exam questions, see the suggestions in *500 Tips on Assessment* by Phil Race, Sally Brown and Brenda Smith (RoutledgeFalmer, 2005), pp. 29-31.

Be flexible when adjusting exams for particular students

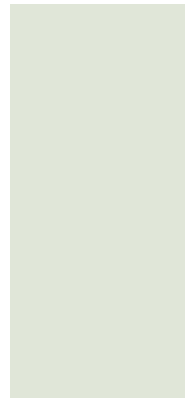
In making specific adjustments to exam procedure to help students with special requirements, try also to take account of the individual student. Don't make too many assumptions

Student Voices

'I did often find the questions in exams too ambiguous to break down.'

about their requirements based on your general impression of what that student's 'impairment' or special circumstances might imply.

- Discuss the exam in more detail with a student who has particular concerns. A different way of meeting the assessment may need extra time.
- You could run a mock assessment to allow a student to estimate how much extra time they need. Practising in advance will also help students who want to use an amanuensis in the exam-room.
- Some students may need to use a computer in the exam room.
- Some disabled students will find it very beneficial to take breaks. It is important, however, that rest breaks are given at the time that the student wishes to take them as an enforced break could do more harm than good.
- Some students will have specific accessibility requirements, such as Braille exam papers, taped questions or the reading aloud of questions before the exam. Other needs will be more easily met, such as exam papers in large print or on coloured paper. Make sure you are ready in advance for any anomalies the use of different formats might create in terms of local policy on, for example, anonymous/blind marking.
- Consider allowing students to redraft their scripts if their handwriting is illegible: following the exam, the student could read their paper to an amanuensis who could then rewrite it, both rough and fair scripts being submitted to the marker.



Making course structure inclusive

Produce clear course documentation

- Course documentation must be as clear and accessible as possible, for the sake of all students (see above, p.2). Details about modules need to be circulated as early as possible.



Making your courses accessible will be greatly helped if you can, at a departmental level, identify the 'core' requirements, or 'competence standards' for admission to and use on your degree programme. In law, a competence standards is defined as 'an academic, medical or other standard applied by or on behalf of an education provider for the purposes of determining whether or not a person has a particular level of competence or ability.' Once a set of core requirements is agreed, it will be possible to think clearly about all the different ways (different ways of teaching, different modes of assessment) in which those requirements can be met. For more on competence standards (which must not themselves be discriminatory), see 'Designing for Inclusion – Competence Standards' by Caroline Davies and Tina Elliott, available online at www.impact-associates.co.uk/docs/designing-for-inclusion-standards.pdf, and Anne Simpson, 'Competence standards', at www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/networks/sig/cs.asp

- Clarity in recruitment material about exactly what adjustments for individual students are possible – and what are not – and about the core competence standards (cf. above) of the degree programme will greatly help disabled students thinking of applying to your department.
- Supplement the standard formats for course description (hard copy course handbooks, pdf files) with other media – videos, podcasts, diagrams.
- Some students can be very seriously affected by last-minute changes to a course schedule. Alterations (change in the timing of seminars, the order of lectures, etc.) can be particularly problematic for disabled students, who will need to know about them as soon as possible (and in as accessible a form as possible).

Student Voices

'Timetabling for single parent with disability – very, very poor – difficult to undertake a degree with a disability let alone work around childcare issues – many lectures unattendable as clashed with personal responsibilities and no entitlement for help with childcare costs so lectures missed.'

- Some student comments in the Subject Centre survey of disabled students expressed anxiety about module / assessment requirements. Revisit your course materials to check that everything is explained as clearly as can be. Uncertainty about module requirements combined with a tight deadline can cause acute anxiety and exacerbate the effects of a variety of disabilities/conditions.
- Module or course handbooks can be combined with online exercises to help explain to students study skills such as referencing and essay structuring.

Plan course timing inclusively

- A log-jam of assessment tasks can make things overwhelmingly difficult for many different types of student. Lecturers will be aware of the difficulties in ensuring, in a complicated degree programme, that assessments are adequately spaced out. Perhaps a reduction in the number of assessment tasks could be part of the answer? Discuss with your colleagues the best way to build flexibility into the assessment timetable.

Student Voices

'The deadlines are ridiculous sometimes. I had to give in three 3,000 word essays in three consecutive days. So have most of my friends who do the course. It is silly to assume that someone could work to the best of their advantage under this pressure'

- Be sensitive to religious festivals for which some students will have to be absent when planning your course.



The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies has produced useful series 'faith guides' on Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. Each guide provides an introduction to the key ideas and practices characteristic of each faith, as well as a list of festivals and relevant issues for higher education. The guides are online at http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/faith_guides.html

Design course content inclusively

- English modules frequently analyse and deconstruct categories such as gender, race, class and sexuality. But what about disability, a category at the heart of many literary texts? For an introduction to disability studies.
- Gratuitously introducing a variety of cultural (eg. non-western) perspectives across your department's degrees as a whole isn't desirable. But there are sure to be modules that would benefit from complementary material, reflecting culturally marginalised viewpoints.
- Don't assume that students from particular ethnic or cultural backgrounds will want to take modules involving material on those backgrounds. Rather, the reason for providing a diverse module offering in terms of culture, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. is to benefit all students.

Give clear and helpful feedback

- Clarity and accessibility are obviously a prerequisite for all feedback: not all students unable to read or understand your feedback will necessarily feel able to mention the fact. Comments on essays can seem cryptic to students, if how they might act to remedy a deficiency is not specifically pointed out.
- Timeliness is almost as important: the earlier assessments are returned with your comments the better. Students need to have the work fresh in their mind to make sense of tutor feedback.
- The most accessible means of marking hard-copy student work is with a black felt-tip pen.
- Student understanding of feedback can be enhanced by introducing elements of peer- and self-assessment into a module, and by explicit discussion (for example, in a seminar) of assessment criteria. If the students practise reading their own and other students' work (and /or specially-written sample answers) against the criteria, it will help them make better sense of formal staff feedback – and acclimatise them to the cultural norms of the discipline.

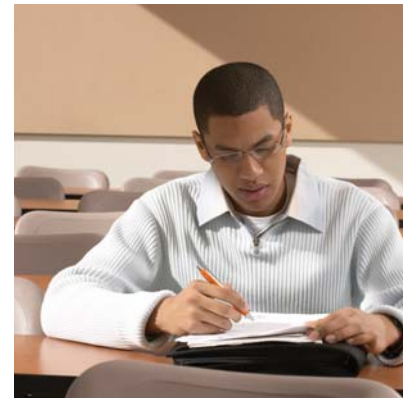
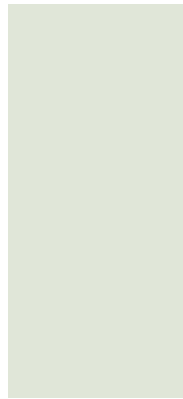
Student Voices

'I have had to wait long periods with no feedback on my work, which causes me stress and anxiety, although the feedback has been comprehensive and useful when I received it.'

- It is sometimes unfortunate when students receive no feedback on their final piece of assessed work on a module, when such feedback could have helped them in their work on later modules. Is there a way in which you can make such feedback available and also make sure that students take advantage of it?
- If student numbers makes individual feedback difficult, consider feeding back to a group of students, picking out key problems.
- Technology can help staff provide feedback in new and involving ways. One possibility is to record an audio file or podcast of your comments on a student's piece of work. Many students will find comments presented to them in this form much easier to take on board than written comments on an essay. Screen-capture software like 'Camtasia' can be used to link a recording of the lecturer's comments to a video recording of the lecturer navigating through the essay in a 'Word' document and highlighting the precise section of text that is being referred to, as exemplified in Russell Stannard's English Subject Centre case study, 'Using screen capture software in student feedback' at www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/publications/casestudies/technology/camtasia.php

Be flexible about the course to accommodate students with particular requirements

- Some students may find it almost impossible to satisfy all the requirements of a reading list. It might be possible to reduce the volume of reading for these students, replacing it with an alternative (one-to-one tutorials, online exercises, etc.).
- Some circumstances may make advance notice of work particularly pressing for specific students: in such cases, particular modules could perhaps be finalised earlier than others.
- It may be necessary to change assessment deadlines for students with some special requirements, meanwhile making sure that they satisfy the learning outcomes of the course.
- It will help students with cognitive difficulties to know which aspect of an assessment task has lost them marks: is it problems with spelling and grammar, or with the organisation of an argument, or are there fundamental problems with the overall approach of the essay?
- Be aware that work by dyslexic students that looks as if it has never been proof-read may in fact have been gone through many times by a student unable to take cognisance of her/his errors.
- Students may have a special cover-sheet or coloured label to attach to their assessed work, provided by the university's Disability Centre. If this is the practice in your institution, makes sure you have a departmental policy on how to deal with such notifications.



Teaching inclusively: a checklist for departments

This is a list of straightforward measures which could be put in place at departmental level, to be communicated to graduate teaching assistants and visiting lecturers as well as to full-time members of staff.

- ✓ Ensure that your department has a clear policy on its relationship with central university bodies such as the Medical Centre, the Disability Centre, the Library, IT Services and the Chaplaincy, as well as with halls of residence. Many departments designate a member of staff as disability co-ordinator.
- ✓ Ensure that your department has a clear policy for informing members of staff about the presence of students with special requirements in lectures or seminar groups.
- ✓ Provide disabled students with many opportunities to disclose their disability.
- ✓ Review departmental materials such as course handbooks to make sure that they are accessible and easy to understand.
- ✓ Create departmental guidelines on the use of 'PowerPoint', handouts and online materials similar to those on p.2 and 5 above .
- ✓ Establish as part of the culture of the department the expectation that some support for each lecture will be available online before and after the lecture (see p.5 above).
- ✓ Investigate the possibility of a more varied set of assessment types (p.4).
- ✓ Establish what the 'core' competence standards of your course are (see p.10 above)
- ✓ Create departmental guidelines on running teaching sessions 'inclusively', making recommendations such as those on p.6-8 above.

Useful websites

English Subject Centre (Royal Holloway, University of London)

www.english.heacademy.ac.uk

As well as an area on student diversity (www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/resources/access/index.php), the Subject Centre website includes case studies showcasing innovative teaching ideas ([.../explore/publications/casestudies/index.php](http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/publications/casestudies/index.php)), a collection of concise seminar tips ([.../explore/resources/t3/index.php](http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/resources/t3/index.php)), advice on seminar-teaching ([.../explore/resources/seminars/index.php](http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/resources/seminars/index.php)) and a set of pages on the student experience ([.../explore/resources/studexp/index.php](http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/resources/studexp/index.php)).

JISC TechDis

www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/

Contains many useful resources on the use of technology to make teaching more inclusive and improve the experiences of disabled students, including information on obtaining textbooks in alternative formats (<http://bit.ly/JISCTechDisAltFormat>), on the use of technologies to provide a more accessible learning experience ([.../JISCTechDisFreeSoftware](http://www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/JISCTechDisFreeSoftware) and [.../JISCTechDisM-learning](http://www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/JISCTechDisM-learning)), on the creation of accessible learning materials ([.../JISCTechDisContentCreation](http://www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/JISCTechDisContentCreation)), and on web accessibility ([.../JISCTechDisWebAccessibility](http://www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/JISCTechDisWebAccessibility)) and on e-assessment ([.../JISCTechDisInclusiveAssessment](http://www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/JISCTechDisInclusiveAssessment)).

JISC TechDis also produce a very useful set of guides to making electronic documents and presentations more accessible, at www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/accessibilityessentials, and a collection of interactive online tutorials on inclusive teaching (<http://bit.ly/gwGCpH>).

Supporting cultural and religious diversity

www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/diversity/

This website from the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies includes a reassuring list of 'frequently asked questions' about teaching and ethnic and cultural diversity, as well as an invaluable set of 'faith guides' on the ramifications of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism for teachers in HE.

Teaching at Nottingham: Inclusivity

www.nottingham.ac.uk/pepl/themes/inclusivity/

Fascinating video and text case studies showcasing many different kinds of inclusive teaching practice at the University of Nottingham.

Making your teaching inclusive (Open University)

www.open.ac.uk/inclusiveteaching/

A very clear and well-organised site, which includes detailed information about specific conditions as well as excellent tips on inclusive teaching, illustrated with video clips.

Inclusive curriculum project (Geography Discipline Network (GDN), University of Gloucestershire)

<http://resources.glos.ac.uk/ceal/gdn/publications/icp/index.cfm>

www2.glos.ac.uk/gdn/icp/index.htm

Useful across all disciplines despite its nominal focus on geography, earth and environmental sciences. Contains detailed guides for academics on teaching students with specific disabilities, as well as guides tailored for heads of department, support staff and lecturers, and a collection of case studies.

Equality and diversity: making inclusivity a real priority in higher education curricula

<http://bit.ly/e8pztL>

A developing set of resources and links from Vicky Gunn (Glasgow University) on diversity in HE: particularly, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered), disability and ethnicity issues.

SCIPS: Strategies for Creating Inclusive Programmes of Study (University of Worcester)

www.scips.worc.ac.uk

Maps problems associated with particular disabilities onto the requirements of QAA Benchmark Statements for different disciplines. English is at www.scips.worc.ac.uk/subjects_and_disabilities/english/

Equality Challenge Unit

www.ecu.ac.uk/inclusive-practice

Useful materials on equality issues affecting disability, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and belief and their effects on higher education.

SPACE project – inclusive assessment

www.plymouth.ac.uk/pages/view.asp?page=10494

Detailed reports from a research project (the Staff-Student Partnership for Assessment Change and Evaluation) on disabled students and assessment across a range of disciplines.

In Curriculum

www.incurriculum.org.uk

Resources to help lecturers devise and think about inclusive curricula for students with Specific Learning Difficulties.

"This is a superb resource.
It will be a very useful and
much used guide."

Dr Simon Ball, Senior Advisor,
JISC TechDis Service



English Subject Centre

*Supporting teaching and learning in
English Literature, English Language
and Creative Writing across UK
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