



## ACCESSIBILITY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

### WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO USE IT



#### WHAT IS IT?

According to the *York University Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (DEDI) Strategy 2023-2028*, accessibility is “a foundational principle for proactive and universal design and implementation of policies and practices to remove barriers that limit the equitable and meaningful access to participation and opportunities for people with labelled disabilities and variations in functioning and aptitude, which include cognitive, neurodiversity, learning, visual, motor, auditory, and medical disabilities, as well as disabilities of mental health” (p.10). Within the context of teaching and learning in post-secondary education, contributing to accessibility is one way to make the campus more inclusive. Rather than mere compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) to create an inclusive environment, a commitment to accessibility can help students foster a sense of belonging within the classroom and the broader university community.



#### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

A commitment to accessibility in teaching and learning involves recognition and acknowledgement of the lived experiences of learners and makes a conscientious effort to ensure more equitable learning environments for as many students as possible. Consistent with the principles of [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#), an accessible learning environment aims to support everyone more fully by opening up multiple avenues of learning. Accessibility is an iterative process. Although it is not possible to create perfect learning environment where no student is left behind or left at a disadvantage, implementing small changes in the classroom enhances accessibility for the benefit of students and these small changes can have a huge impact on their learning experience. In doing so, educators can make steady progress towards creating more inclusive learning environments for as many students as possible. .



#### HOW CAN INSTRUCTORS IMPLEMENT FINK'S TAXONOMY IN THEIR TEACHING?

For instructors who are interested in incorporating accessibility into the classroom, consider the following suggestions:

1. **Ensure that course materials are inclusive and presented in accessible ways.** Presenting course materials in multiple formats, such as Word Documents and PDFs, can help ensure wider capacity for software access and increase their capabilities to work with e-Readers and text-to-speech devices. For example, using the [accessibility checker](#) in Microsoft Word and Power Point to ensure that certain [features of documents](#), such as font size, the use of headers and styles, and the inclusion of [alt-text](#) for images, can help students using screen readers access the material as intended. Although this software is not perfect, these tools can serve as a preliminary way for instructors to assess the accessibility of course content.
2. **Provide students with written transcripts for audio files and closed captions for video files.** If you are [recording lectures via Zoom](#) so that students can access them asynchronously, enabling these accessibility features provides students with multiple ways to engage with course material and supports different learning preferences. In fact, many video platforms, such as YouTube, automatically generate transcripts on their content which adds an additional layer of accessibility for users. Moreover, this practice helps create a learning atmosphere that is one

step closer towards fuller accessibility in the classroom. For more information on closed captioning support offered at York University, [check out the York libraries](#).

3. **Implement flexible deadlines for course assignments.** While it is still necessary to enforce deadlines for administrative purposes (e.g., submitting final grades), providing students with a few days grace, or even a submission window, to submit their assignments is another way to support accessibility in the classroom. Given that some students may require more time to process information needed to complete their work, having time to fully engage with course content without additional stresses can have a tremendous impact on students' ability to complete the course requirements and get the most out of the learning experience.
4. **Be explicit in assessment design and offer different modes of instruction and feedback.** In addition to providing clear and explicit written instructions for students when designing and preparing course assignments, consider creating a short audio or video clip outlining the instructions so students can access the course requirements in a different medium. Similarly, when providing written feedback on student assignments and tests, consider giving students the option to receive verbal feedback via audio recording on eClass if that is preferable for them and more accessible to them. Having explicit instructions provided in multiple formats can help ensure students fully understand course expectations and can help them realize the learning outcomes of the course.
5. **Offer students multiple ways to engage with course content and with each other.** Providing students with multiple means to engage with course material is another way to support accessibility in the classroom. For instance, if fostering dialogue between students is a core learning outcome for a course, provide students with a chance to contribute to classroom discussions asynchronous via forums on eClass and/or synchronously in breakout rooms on Zoom. Increasing the options available for students to learn simultaneously works to increase accessibility because it creates more opportunities for students to learn instead of limiting them.



#### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (Internal)

York University Accessibility Hub. <https://www.yorku.ca/accessibilityhub/>

York University Centre for Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion. Accessibility & accommodation/disability. <https://rights.info.yorku.ca/accommodations-for-persons-with-disabilities/>

York University. Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-2028. [https://www.yorku.ca/vpepc/wp-content/uploads/sites/310/2023/03/22-201\\_DEDI-Strategy-2023-28\\_EN\\_r3.pdf](https://www.yorku.ca/vpepc/wp-content/uploads/sites/310/2023/03/22-201_DEDI-Strategy-2023-28_EN_r3.pdf)

York University Libraries. (n.d.). "Library accessibility services." <https://www.library.yorku.ca/web/ask-services/accessibility-services/>

York University Student Accessibility Services. <https://students.yorku.ca/accessibility>

#### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (External)

##### Explore in 15-30 Minutes

Accessibility for Ontarian with Disabilities Act. AODA requirements for educational institutions <https://www.aoda.ca/aoda-requirements-for-educational-institutions/>

National Deaf Center. (2020). Rebecca's experience: what is an accessible learning environment?  
 YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8YP3f6YLiI>

Ontario's Universities Accessible Campus (n.d.). Innovate: creating accessible learning environments.  
<https://accessiblecampus.ca/tools-resources/educators-tool-kit/innovate-creating-accessible-learning-environments/>

Ontario's Universities Accessible Campus (n.d.). Introduction to accessible education.  
<https://accessiblecampus.ca/tools-resources/educators-tool-kit/introduction-accessible-education/>

#### Explore in 30-60 minutes

University of Toronto Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation. Teaching Assistants' Training Program. Fostering accessible teaching and learning. <https://tstp.utoronto.ca/teaching-toolkit/effective-strategies/accessible-learning/>

University of Waterloo Centre for Teaching Excellence. Accessibility in teaching.  
<https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/resources/accessibility-teaching-0>

University of Western Ontario Centre for Teaching and Learning. Accessibility in teaching.  
<https://teaching.uwo.ca/teaching/accessibility-in-teaching.html>

#### Explore in 60+ minutes

Dolmage, J.T. (2017). *Academic ableism: Disability and higher education*. University of Michigan Press.

eCampus Ontario. *Digital accessibility toolkit*.  
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/digitalaccessibilitytoolkit/>

Stienstra, D. (2020). *Disability rights* (2nd edition.). Fernwood Publishing.

## Would you like to learn more?

Contact us at Teaching Commons for additional resources, handouts, applications, courses, workshops, examples, advice, assistance, one-on-one consulting, and everything else related to teaching and learning. We are happy and eager to assist you!



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