

QUICK TIPS FROM STLI:

Easy steps from accommodation for individuals to accessibility for all

with STLI Fellow Leslie Cochrane



A documented accommodation for one student removes that barrier for them, but how might everyone benefit from that same opportunity? Here are some ideas for moving from accommodations for individual students to providing access to everyone. Removing barriers to learning means more rigorous engagement from students! There will always be exceptions and individual needs to address, but fewer barriers means a fairer classroom for students and fewer adjustments for instructors.

| | Accommodation | Accessibility for All |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|--|
| CLASSROOM | Use of technology for note-taking | A no-distraction policy may work better than a no-tech policy. Having a computer screen up in the front of the class can be distracting for students in the back. Asking students with laptops to sit in the back few rows might serve a similar purpose as banning all laptops. Once we explicitly set the expectation that tech must be helpful to learning and <i>not</i> distract the student, the class, or us, we can allow more options. |
| | Use of focus tools | Fidget objects and headphones help all students concentrate. As instructors, we may have to train ourselves not to interpret wearing headphones as being inattentive. Just make sure they're following the no-distraction policy above! |
| | Permission to sit or to move | Allowing anyone to move at their own discretion, rather than asking our permission aloud is actually less distracting to the rest of the class. For example, instructions for formal presentations that include options for sitting or standing can go a long way to easing all students' apprehensions. |
| EXAMS | Additional time on exams | Accessible exams are more focused on key skills and take less time to complete and to grade. We're testing thinking, not speed! Creating a shorter test gives students space to truly demonstrate their skills without unnecessary pressure. For a shorter timed test, try this: Announce that all material may be tested, but focus questions on a smaller subset. To test skills, target a key step of the analysis. To test doing a full analysis or disciplinary writing, assign a take-home paper. |
| ABSENCE | Occasional necessary absences | Accessible attendance policies avoid the need for individual exceptions for accommodations, sports, or emergencies. Set the expectation of regular attendance, then have a clear make-up (such as turning in notes) for unavoidable absences. Participation is the goal. Being ill should not impact a grade, but failing to participate earns a zero. |
| | Flexibility with due dates | Flexible late work policies mean missing a due date doesn't mean skipping learning! With a late policy in place (and a grade penalty to encourage promptness), we have to hear fewer personal reasons and grant fewer individual extensions. Some instructors even use a "best by" date instead of a "due date". |

Questions? Comments? Contact STLI Fellow Leslie Cochrane at lecochrane@wm.edu or STLI at stli@wm.edu

CREATING AN ACCESSIBLE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

REMOVING LEARNING BARRIERS MEANS MORE RIGOROUS ENGAGEMENT FROM STUDENTS

THERE WILL ALWAYS BE EXCEPTIONS AND INDIVIDUAL NEEDS TO ADDRESS, BUT FEWER BARRIERS MEAN A FAIRER CLASSROOM FOR STUDENTS AND FEWER ADJUSTMENTS FOR INSTRUCTORS.

INDIVIDUAL ACCOMODATION



ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL

Use of tech for note-taking



No-distraction policy
Tech at student discretion

Permission to sit or move



Everyone is allowed to adjust their position as needed

Additional time on exams



Create accessible exams that take less time

Flexibility with due dates



Fair yet flexible late-work policy

Created in partnership with



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