

Accessible Communication

Introduction

Accessible communication is an umbrella term to describe communication that is clear, direct, easy to understand and that can be made available in multiple formats so that all users have equal access. It takes into consideration the various barriers to accessing information, and removes these or provides alternative formats for the communication to take place.

Oxford University is committed to providing equal access to education for its disabled students, who represent 18% of our student community. Any barriers to accessing teaching and learning communications is a critical barrier for many disabled students.

In a university context, accessible communication encompasses a whole range of issues from the way a lecture is structured, to the style of language used, to the way course information is provided, to the way learning materials are formatted and made available to students.

Accessible communication guidelines

Below is an overview of accessible communication guidelines and further resources on how to plan your communications with accessibility in mind, which cater for the diverse range of needs users have. These steps benefit students with hearing impairments, visual impairments as well as students with Specific Learning Difficulties and other types of neurodiversity.

Language, Formatting and Structure

- Use plain English in communications - the active voice, avoid unnecessarily complex sentences and unnecessary technical jargon. This does not involve simplifying meaning.
- Provide glossaries of new terminology to be used in advance of teaching sessions.
- Avoid using acronyms and abbreviations, and when used, always use the full version the first time the term is used.
- When using Oxford specific terminology in communications with students who are new to the University (in their first year

- and for admissions and access communications), explain their meaning clearly and link to the [glossary of Oxford terminology](#)
- Clearly mark out the structure of documents and communications by using headings and sub-headings and giving contents information clearly, for example, using the heading styles in Word and by providing meaningful hyperlink text.
 - Ensure that feedback is presented in different ways and any handwritten feedback is legible. Handwritten feedback can be difficult for students to read, especially those with Specific Learning Difficulties, so typed feedback, followed up with an opportunity for the student to ask questions about it, is preferable.
 - Ensure that accessible formatting guidelines are followed for hardcopy and electronic documents. A clear, sans serif font such as Arial, Calibri or Verdana should be used in at least 12pt font, with left aligned text. Use multiple spacing between lines (ideally 1.5) and avoid italics and underlining where possible.

The [Dyslexia Style Guide](#) from the British Dyslexia Association provides a very useful overview of steps that can be taken to make written texts more readily accessible for everyone.

Availability of information, learning materials, and flexible formats

- Make course handbooks, and other course/programme information such as timetables, available in electronic format (as well as hardcopy where applicable) in a consistent place, such as within Canvas.
- Ensure that students have more than one opportunity to learn of an instruction or new information about their course. For example, if a change to a deadline is communicated verbally at the end of a teaching session, a written message reinforcing is also sent and the deadline information amended in the relevant Canvas course. These updates and instructions should be communicated in a consistent way.
- Allow students to record teaching sessions or use the University's lecture capture service to record your lectures.
- Make learning materials available electronically in a flexible format at least 24 hours before a teaching session. Electronic versions should be in Word, PowerPoint, Open Document Format or HTML, or

accessible PDF. If materials are provided in a flexible format students will be able to use Assistive Technology to read the materials and have the opportunity to adjust the formatting without the need to request an alternative format.

- The University has subscribed to the [SensusAccess tool which is now available on the Bodleian Library website](#). SensusAccess enables students and staff to convert files into a wide range of alternative formats: including audio books (MP3 and DAISY), e-books (EPUB, EPUB3 and Mobi) and digital Braille. It can also be used to create accessible documents from inaccessible files. For example, an image-based pdf or .jpg can be converted into an accessible Word document.

You may wish to read the relevant glossary entry on [alternative formats](#).

Communication tips for students with sensory impairments and neurodiversity

Building the guidelines above into your normal practice will make your communications with students more effective, and will create an inclusive environment for students with impairments that affect communication and reduce the need for individual reasonable adjustments.

Students with sensory impairments have specific needs relating to communication and it is important to talk with them about their needs and preferences, and read their Student Support Plan. Our implications for study guides on [Hearing Impairments](#) and [Visual Impairments](#) provide general introductory information about what students may need, but this will vary from student to student.

There are also tips on effective communication in remote teaching contexts for students with [Visual Impairments](#), [Hearing Impairments](#) or [Autistic Spectrum Condition](#).

Teaching materials

The Centre for Teaching and Learning has produced guidance on making teaching and learning materials accessible, including for [lectures](#), [videos](#), and other teaching materials such as documents and PowerPoint presentations on its [accessible teaching page](#). There is also [accessibility information](#) for tutors on CTL's teaching remotely webpages.

Further information

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-publish-on-gov-uk/accessible-pdfs>

<https://poet.diagramcenter.org/>

AbilityNet's guide to [creating accessible documents](#)

[https://cdn.bdadyslexia.org.uk/documents/Advice/style-guide/Dyslexia Style Guide 2018-final-1.pdf?mtime=20190409173949](https://cdn.bdadyslexia.org.uk/documents/Advice/style-guide/Dyslexia%20Style%20Guide%202018-final-1.pdf?mtime=20190409173949)

<https://poet.diagramcenter.org/index.html>