# Teaching remotely: supporting disabled students

## Transition to remote learning

Many disabled students are likely to find the transition to remote learning more challenging than their peers. For example, students with autism, or a mental health condition, are likely to find it difficult to adapt to change.

Consider providing these students with a 1:1 virtual meeting or telephone meeting to answer questions they may have about remote learning and find out from them what their concerns and preferences are, as this will be helpful to you when thinking about your approach.

The following may be helpful to support all students’ transition, but will be particularly beneficial to some disabled students:

• Be as clear and explicit as you can at the beginning of the course about how you intend to communicate with students (by email, Canvas discussion forum, Microsoft Teams, etc), and what types of teaching and learning activities and interactions you are planning and what the objectives will be for each type. Some changes are likely as you find out what works well and what works less well in this new context, but when changes are made, these can be communicated clearly to students in advance.

• Communicate to students that you understand that they will not be expected to make a seamless adjustment to a new way of working immediately, and when problems arise there are people they can ask for help.

## Accommodating individual needs

• Students with disabilities are likely to have additional requirements relating to remote learning. For students who have Student Support Plans, for some of the reasonable adjustments recommended, it will be clear how they translate to a remote learning context. However, there will be additional adjustments that need to be made within this new learning context.

• Make contact with disabled students to gain their perspective on their likely additional needs for remote learning, and be prepared to check in with them to review how things are going after a few weeks and consider any necessary changes.

• There is more information about the [impact of different disabilities on study](https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/implications-study) in our guide for supporting disabled students: [www.ox.ac.uk/disability-guide](http://www.ox.ac.uk/disability-guide). There are also [further resources](https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/teaching-and-learning-reasonable-adjustments) on supporting disabled students in a remote learning context, including specific advice on the following impairments: [hearing impairments](https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/files/remote-learning-accessibility-hearing-impairmentsdocx), [visual impairments](https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/files/remote-learning-accessibility-visual-impairmentsdocx), and [Autistic Spectrum Condition](https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/files/remote-learning-accessibility-asc-studentsdocx).

## Examples of inclusive approaches that will be beneficial for disabled students

Note that while these practices are essential for disabled students, using them for all your students is likely to be of benefit to many, not just those with a registered disability. There is more detailed advice on [inclusive teaching in a remote learning context](https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/files/inclusive-remote-teachingdocx) available.

1) Agree with colleagues who are teaching on your programme some key principles and methods for remote learning and the technologies to be used, so it is likely that students can expect some consistency.

Some systems, tools, or ways of working may be inaccessible to some disabled students who use specialist assistive technology, so be prepared to agree alternatives for those students in consultation with your local Disability Coordinator/with advice from the Disability Advisory Service and local IT support.

2) Keep to the previously planned timetable/schedule for tutorials, supervisions and lectures as closely as possible.

### This is particularly important for those who need the help of support workers (BSL interpreters, etc), but is helpful to everyone, and particularly those who need to keep to a fixed routine (e.g. some people with Autism Spectrum Condition).

3) Consider the pace and duration of remote teaching sessions

If you are using video conferencing to conduct a virtual tutorial, consider providing extra time for students to take in meaning, to take notes, and to respond to questions. Some students may take longer to process information and will need more time to absorb the meaning of discussion in an online tutorial. These students will particularly benefit from mini-breaks during a session, timed so as to enable them to complete a task or to develop a response to a question. Reiterating key points from the discussion is also helpful. Students who have physical disabilities that affect their ability to type or are using voice recognition software may need more time if they are providing written responses. For the same reason, it may be beneficial to have shorter, more frequent sessions than would normally be the case with face-to-face teaching sessions.

4) Be flexible about how students choose to engage

Due to their impairment, some students may be unable to make contributions via Microsoft Teams in a virtual tutorial if both video and/or audio are turned on, and they may prefer to type their contributions via the 'chat' function. Some students may need to use the audio function if a physical impairment restricts or prevents typing.

5) Provide teaching materials (e.g. handouts, slides, primary or secondary resources, supporting information) well in advance of a virtual learning session or deadline to submit formative work.

This creates better access to learning for students with a variety of conditions. For further details see the Disability Advisory Service’s [guide to providing materials in advance](https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/files/guidetoprovidingteachingmaterialsinadvancedocx) (downloadable Word doc). It is also good practice to provide an overview of the session in advance with objectives, main subjects to be covered, and information about further learning.

6) Choose accessible formats for documents.

An accessible format can be read by 'assistive' or 'enabling' technologies (e.g. screen reader programs). It is searchable, selectable and screen-readable, and provides flexibility over how the text is read (e.g. the formatting can be changed by the user to enable easier reading, or the text can be converted into another format such as electronic Braille).

Word documents, accessible pdfs and html files have this functionality. To learn how to get the most out of accessibility in Word and to create accessible pdfs, read the guidance on the [Accessibility pages](https://www.ctl.ox.ac.uk/accessibility-teaching) of the Centre for Teaching and Learning website.

If scanning a hard copy handout to make it available remotely, use OCR (optical character recognition) software to ensure the text is machine-readable rather than saved as an image.

Staff and student can also convert files into their preferred formats using the [SensusAccess tool](https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/using/sensusaccess). This tool may be particularly valuable for teaching staff who wish to share a handout/learning materials that was produced some time ago and is in an inaccessible format. Inaccessible PDFs and texts saved as image-based files can be converted to tagged PDFs and word documents using SensusAccess.

If you are using Canvas, the following guides are available:

[Making Canvas courses accessible](https://www.ctl.ox.ac.uk/accessibility-teaching#collapse1852441)

[Setting up inclusive Canvas courses](https://www.ctl.ox.ac.uk/accessibility-teaching#collapse1860061)

7. Follow the advice below on how to create good quality audio and video: this will benefit hearing impaired and visually impaired students, as well as providing a higher quality experience for all students that will aid concentration. Please see our specific guidance on this for supporting those with visual impairments and hearing impairments.

[Tips on audio and video recordings in Panopto](https://help.it.ox.ac.uk/sites/ithelp/files/resources/Tips%20for%20Audio%20and%20Video%20Recording%20-%20Long%20V2.pdf)

[Best practice guide for using Panopto manual recorder](https://help.it.ox.ac.uk/sites/ithelp/files/resources/Best%20practices%20for%20using%20Panopto%20Manual%20Recorder.pdf)

[Advice on creating high quality recordings](https://support.panopto.com/s/article/Create-High-Quality-Recordings) from the Panopto support site

This IT Services page on organising [remote committee meetings](https://help.it.ox.ac.uk/nexus365/remote-meetings) has lots of useful advice on how to set up a Teams meeting so it runs smoothly and is accessible.