

12 Easy and Important Tricks to Make Your Teaching More Accessible to Students with Disabilities

The following are simple, relatively easy to implement steps for teachers that make a world of difference for disabled students. These suggestions are meant to supplement conventional ways to support disabled students; i.e. using [Universal Design](#) principles with course content and including a [diversity/accessibility](#) statement about accommodations on the syllabus.

The 12 Tricks:

1. Do everything in your power to not delay accommodations; i.e., posting in-class readings, distributing accessible practice keys, or transcribing your instructor notes if necessary. If you need help, delegate to Teaching Assistants.
 2. MAKE ALL YOUR SLIDES AVAILABLE ONLINE, WELL BEFORE CLASS. Even if you update slides as you go. Even if they are last year's. Something is better than nothing.
 3. USE VIDEOS WITH (human-made) CAPTIONS. If you make your own videos, make captions and/or provide a transcript. Similarly, provide descriptions and captions for diagrams in the notes. Auto-captioning is too unreliable at the moment.
 4. If possible, post and use typed versions/searchable PDFs of texts for the class, not scanned copies. It makes a world of difference for students who use screen readers.
 5. Make your slides visually easy to read. Use spacing, optimize for largest font size per slide, and use different formatting tricks like highlighting important words, etc. [Example](#).
 6. [Don't ban laptops!!!](#) If you feel strongly about this, consider discouraging them but not banning them outright.
 7. Update everything---announcements, assignments---online **and** in class. Period. Announce on your syllabus and in class if you plan to have surprise attendance-based quizzes or assignments.
 8. Be intentionally redundant with course announcements and links. If you hand out a practice exam key, upload it to Blackboard. Do not be exclusive with content to students that attend class.
 9. Do not offer your opinion on the students' documented accommodations or ask about their disability. Accept them, make a plan, and move on. Do not try to circumvent them.
 10. Provide reading lists, assignment schedules, and/or course outlines well in advance.
 11. Offer make-up exams/quizzes for [reasonable and/or sincere excuses and requests](#).
 12. Make sure all your websites are [accessible](#).
-

Author's Note: As a researcher, Learning Assistant, and former Teaching Fellow at [Breakthrough](#), I get the considerable workload teachers have. I support classroom rigor and I agree that the onus of success in college lies largely on the student. This does not, however, excuse poor teaching or lack of compassion, which are unacceptable. Disability is NOT a weakness; when you fudge students' documented accommodations, you discriminate against them. As a disabled college student, I have my own perspective on policies that harm disabled students. I attempted to include the perspectives of students with many different types of disabilities here, but please contact me if I left something out.

By [Samsara Counts](#)

Visit <https://samsaranc.github.io/sigcse.html> for latest version

Learn more from the perspectives of disabled students and the case for accessible classroom policies

Relevant Quotes from #academicAbleism on twitter

- “Two weeks ago my professor mentioned an assignment in class. No email instructions. No updates to Blackboard. Had a major panic attack.”
- “No break in our 2 hour seminar AGAIN despite me asking and her [the lecturer] promising to. I'm struggling”
- “I was frustrated by the experience [dealing with an accessibility challenge]. I've realised lately that part of the challenge of securing access arrangements as a disabled student in higher education is that it can feel like you need to stick a maximally disabled version of yourself on a pole ten feet in front of you and use it to herald your arrival, to clear the inaccessible brush to create yourself a usable path through the world, through institutions.”
- “Only 9% to 10% of undergraduate STEM students in the United States have disabilities, compared with approximately 20% of Americans overall. Among those who obtain Ph.D.s, the number falls to just 1%”
- “If you're struggling [because of your disability] now, you're only going to struggle later.” The advice given to me early on in grad school.”

Relevant Links and Articles:

- **Twitter:** [#academicableism](#) [#FollowDis](#) [#chronicallyacademic](#) [#ThePricePWDPay](#)
- [When You Talk About Banning Laptops, You Throw Disabled Students Under the Bus](#)
- [Thread on the discourse against certain accessible classroom practices \(ex: allowing laptops\)](#)
- [ASKING FOR ACCESS AFTER DECLARING DISABLED: AN INTERVIEW STORY](#)
- [Helping Students with Invisible Disabilities](#)
- [Why We Dread Disability Myths](#)
- [Suggested Practices for Syllabus Accessibility Statements](#)
- [Disability is not a disqualification](#)
- [To my colleagues, on the death of their students' grandmother\(s\)](#)
- ['Tis the Season of Dead Grandmothers](#)