



Online learning presents many great opportunities for students and faculty to collaborate and connect in new ways. At the same time, as these new opportunities emerge, it is critical as a campus community that we plan for access and inclusion as much as possible in order to ensure all students fully benefit from these new online education tools and have equal opportunities for success.

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## Accessibility and Inclusion are early considerations in Successful Online Course Design.

In many cases, online learning can mitigate the need for accommodation (e.g. students with mobility concerns or barriers in getting to a traditional classroom setting).

On the other hand, if not navigated with access and inclusion in mind, new barriers could emerge. (e.g. students with concussions/head injuries may not be able to spend excessive time on the computer; students with hearing impairments that use interpreting services will need to access alternatives; students with motor skills concerns or hand/wrist injuries may not be able to spend excessive time 'clicking' / using a keyboard)

It is also important to note as you design your course that it is a very good sign if a resource or platform is 'AODA compliant.' It does not necessarily mean however it is fully accessible to everyone, particularly hearing, neurological and learning disabilities.

**RESOURCES ON ACCESSIBILITY IN COURSE DESIGN:**  
*The University of Western Ontario* has prepared an excellent resource to help Faculty and Staff better understand and navigate the various disability related barriers in the online classroom:  
<https://teaching.uwo.ca/pdf/teaching/accessibility-in-e-learning.pdf>; AODA Accessibility Guidelines:  
<https://www.aoda.ca/accessible-online-learning/>;  
Princeton University Guide for Accessible Classes:  
<https://mcgraw.princeton.edu/node/3281>

## Accessibility in Online Education is a Shared Responsibility, and a Shared Success.

Faculty and Instructors are experts in their area of teaching and pedagogy; teaching support centres are available to assist with course design questions on all 3 campuses, and the Offices for Students with Disabilities (OFSD) on each campus are available for questions about individual student accommodation plans. There are often creative and unique solutions that instructors can develop collaboratively with students, given their mastery of the material. The OFSDs do not necessarily need to get involved in individual accommodation requests, particularly where questions around academic integrity and 'fairness' are not an issue, and the student is comfortable discussing their accommodation needs directly with the Faculty member. Faculty are encouraged to consult with the OFSD prior to declining any disability-related accommodation requests.

**RELATED RESOURCE:** Centre, Accessible Learning in Distance Education:

<https://www.washington.edu/doit/programs/accessdl/resources-making-distance-learning-accessible>

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## Universal and Inclusive Course Design Usually Results in Fewer Accommodation Requests.

It is recommended that instructors think about inclusive and universal design principles as much as possible from the start as they structure their online courses; as a general rule, courses require less one-off accommodation requests when flexibility and

space is built in for different learning styles and flexible opportunities to demonstrate competency in the course/program material. (e.g. ensuring YouTube videos posted for the course are closed captioned without a student request; ensuring online readings are accessible to screen reader software such as JAWS; letting students choose an essay, presentation or take-home exam to present competency in course material, etc.)

*RELATED RESOURCE:* The *Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training* provides an excellent list of ideas on various disability types and accommodation through inclusive design. <https://www.adcet.edu.au/disability-practitioner/reasonable-adjustments/online-learning/>

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**Flexibility and an Openness to Listening to Student Ideas is Critical.** As a starting point, it is important to distinguish accommodation requests that raise fairness and academic integrity concerns, and requests that do not. For example, a request for extra time on an exam should require a letter of accommodation from the Office for Students with Disabilities (OFSD) as potentially extra time for one student versus another, where it is not warranted by disability, is an unfair advantage. Due diligence is required.

On the other hand, a student request that you provide lecture slides in larger print for readability should ideally be accommodated directly without proof or documentation being required by the student. Students themselves have lived experiences and know their disability; they often have innovative and creative accommodation ideas that are always worth hearing.

**Learning the Language of Accessibility is Critical for Faculty and Staff.** Many Faculty and staff indicate they do not know how to engage in a conversation about accessibility accommodation matters, and express concerns they may say something inappropriate. If a student wishes to discuss a matter with you it is important to focus on the barriers and obstacles a student may be facing in the context of your online course specifically and remain open to understanding what has worked well

for them in the past in other learning situations; discussing a specific disability type or diagnosis is never appropriate. Focus on academic strengths and needs. Online learning may present new barriers for a student, or, it may help a student realize learning strengths they have never experienced before in a traditional classroom or test setting.

*RELATED RESOURCES:* UofT Demystifying Academic Accommodations Document:

<http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as/faculty-and-staff>

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**Online Testing Creates New Opportunities; Keep Accessibility and Inclusion in Mind So Every Student Benefits.** Moving an exam or test online and assuming the same accommodations will be required may be realistic in most cases, but not necessarily in all situations. Students may need fewer accommodations, more accommodations, no accommodations or different accommodations.

For a smoother transition to online testing, it is critical to fully clarify in the course syllabus and other course materials the exact evaluation, teaching and testing formats, in detail. Students then have the information they need to consider their options and prepare appropriately, including consulting their accessibility advisor.

Online testing may be very new for many of our students; providing a not-for-credit quiz or online test is a great way for all students and faculty to take a test run and see what the 'good and bad' may be before the real testing occurs. In certain situations online testing may not have a workable format for students, and you may be asked by Accessibility Services to consider an alternative format (e.g. oral exam by phone, paper exam). It is critical a student be referred to Accessibility Services immediately regarding any concerns around testing related accommodations.

*RELATED RESOURCES:* National Centre on Educational Outcomes (US): Using Computer Based Tests with Students with Disabilities:

<https://nceo.info/Resources/publications/OnlinePubs/Policy15.htm>