

Guideline accessible online education

By: Student & Academic Affairs Office and Platform Unhindered Studying, Utrecht University, based on the guidelines of the Diversity Office, Leiden University. 28 April 2020

Accessible education is important for everyone, but especially important for students with disabilities that sometimes require additional provisions to be made. This guideline describes various points of attention and concrete tips for providing online education in an accessible way.

Overview of pre-existing initiatives and information sources

- [General information and combined initiatives](#) within and outside UU can be found on the UU website.
- [Educational Consultancy & Professional Development](#) has compiled a dossier consisting of a collection of information and tips for providing remote teaching and testing.
- There are daily online [webinars and Q&A sessions](#) on remote teaching. The recordings can be viewed afterwards.
- Educate-it has a remote teaching [FAQ page](#) with an overview of answers to practical questions regarding remote teaching and a page with [tips & tricks](#).
- [ECIO Expert centre on inclusive education](#) (formerly handicap + studie) has a very extensive collection of information regarding students who need support.
- Questions on remote teaching can be asked via the [support desk of Educate-it](#). Specific questions on disabilities can be asked to the Study Advisors of your faculty.
- Would you to talk to an experience expert? [Platform Unhindered Studying](#) is a network for and by students with disabilities within UU that can also be contacted by lecturers.

General

- Many disabilities are invisible. Please realise there will nearly always be at least 1 student with a disability in the group, who will experience being hindered in education.
- Verify whether or not all students have stable internet connections, have access to suitable laptops or computers and have sufficient available software to participate in online education. This may be a matter-of-course, but it is not a fixed standard.
- Be on the lookout for signals from students who are not actively involved in online education, express their concerns about deadlines or indicate that home environments are not ideal. Be attentive to this, enter into a conversation with the student in question and consult with Study Advisors if needed. You are not expected to solve all problems, but you can contribute to an early detection of problems.
- This crisis situation requires much from all involved parties. In a normal situation, studying requires proportionally more from students with disabilities than from other students, for instance due to regulatory burdens, limited energy and medical appointments on top of the education schedule. So in this additionally straining period, please consider students with disabilities' circumstances and think along with them on tailored solutions if needed. Consult with the Study Advisor if needed.
- All students benefit from accessible online education and many students with disabilities do not like being put in an exceptional position. So please try to be inclusive without specifically emphasising that, and normalise accessible education instead.
- The most important rule of thumb is that students themselves know best what they need, and students with disabilities are no different. Create various possibilities for students to indicate this, actively ask about this and let them know that you are open to think along with them on this.

- Do you have any questions on someone's disability? Most students do not mind answering questions. Do ask these questions in a safe environment and in a respectful way. Respect it if students do not want to talk about it.
- Do you have a question on a disability you would rather not ask a student in person? A Study Advisor can answer your questions as well. However, he or she cannot explain a student's personal situation due to confidentiality.

Preparation

- Clear communication is important in this stressful period. Inform students as clearly as possible on the new planning and form or forms of the course, like in an email or a message on Blackboard. Also communicate clearly which communication resource you will use as a standard for communication towards students.
- Make the materials and additional content of the education activity available in advance, in order for students to optimally prepare and process the subject matter. Is there a possibility that publication in advance will undermine the education you are going to provide? If so, publish the materials/content afterwards, in an edited form if needed.
- The less static, the better students can keep up with you. So make the image quality and sound quality as clear as possible. This is important to, among others, deaf and hearing-impaired students in order for them to properly listen and read lips.
- Ideally, all online content comes with subtitles and detailed notes.

Tools and insight

[Microsoft Teams](#) provides an option for real-time subtitles. Attention: this function only works when English is spoken. Stichting Accessibility did [research](#) that showed Teams is reasonably accessible, although the many functions for people like the visually impaired can also make it complicated to use. Other tools such as Google Hangouts primarily provide more comfort. Please also read the [quick wins for lecturers](#) by the Expert centre on inclusive education.

Interaction with students

- Online education is more tiring than classroom education. Schedule short break moments, check regularly whether or not students can still keep up with the pace and ensure that the education never takes longer than scheduled.
- Overstimulation is lurking in online education. A clear structure, clear agreements on image and sound (such as muting the microphone and/or shutting down the image if someone is not talking) and pointing out moments for interaction in advance will result in the education being easier to keep up with.
- Split up pre-recorded classes into multiple fragments so students can take breaks in between.
- Try to keep as much individual attention for a student as possible, for example by letting another lecturer or teaching assistant answer questions during or after the class or working group.
- If students are provided with the subject matter in multiple ways, it improves their learning processes. Check out once in a while if there is space for a more interactive work form in the provided online education. Interactive work forms contribute to students' motivation.

Tools and insight

- Some of the tools that improve the interaction with and between students are [Kahoot](#), [Socrative](#), [Mentimeter](#) and [Peergrade](#).
- Educate-it has set up a [tool guide](#) that can help you in choosing a tool for education.

PowerPoint presentations

- A clear PowerPoint presentation is of essential importance in order to pass on information properly. Take the following rules into account:
 - Start the presentation with an overview of the contents (you can include this in those slides if you want).
 - Do not put too much information on one single slide. Use the 7 x 7 rule for slides. That means no more than 7 lines per slide and no more than 7 words per line; less is even better.
 - Explain important concepts both in written and spoken form, and summarize the most important information on the last slide or slides (take home messages).
- When using images, videos or other visual content, provide a clear description in both the text and the explanation. A so-called 'thick description' helps all students to better understand the explanation. Also only use images or other visual material if they contribute to the knowledge you want to pass on.
- One of the things that matter to visually impaired students is that PowerPoint presentations have a high contrast between the background colour and the text.
- Use the split/share screen function to show both the lecturer and the presentation.

Tools and insight

- [Microsoft](#) offers practical tips and a practical explanation for creating accessible PowerPoint presentations.
- Consider using short knowledge clips that briefly explain the core of the subject matter. For instance, it is possible to add [spoken text to](#) PowerPoint.

Accessible texts

- Guidelines for an accessible text: sanserif font (such as Helvetica, Arial, Verdana and Calibri), minimum letter size 10, minimum line distance 1.5 and using headers and paragraphs. Make sure to use the Word function Styles in the Home tab (instead of enlarging texts manually), or students' supporting software will not pick up this layout.
- When using images, videos or other visual content, provide a clear description in both the text and the explanation. A so-called 'thick description' helps all students to better understand the explanation and provides students who use supporting software with access to the image. Also only use images or other visual material if they contribute to the knowledge you want to pass on.
- Word can check texts for accessibility by means of an automatic check. To do this, go to File > Info > Check for problems > Check accessibility.
- Preferably use Word documents over PDF files where possible, as this enables the use of text-to-speech software programmes. This not only increases the accessibility for blind and visually impaired students, but for dyslexic students as well.

Tools and insight

- ECIO has elaborate accessibility guidelines for [Word](#) and [PDF](#) files.

Examination and testing

- Inform students well in advance on the planning of online classes and examinations (at least 5 work days). This enables students with disabilities to tailor their planning, energy distributions and other obligations to this.
- Consider forms of testing that are less time restricted, such as (short) essays and essay questions.

- Stay in conversation with students and lower the threshold for contacting the Study Advisor as much as possible. This gives students the opportunity to ask their questions on matters such as applying for provisions.