

FAQ on Making Online Materials Accessible to Students with Disabilities

Do I need to make my emergency online class accessible to students with disabilities?

It is unclear how much regulatory flexibility we have in this area during the COVID-19 crisis. However, it is very clear that if you have a student with a disability in your class, you **must** make your course accessible to that student. You may or may not be aware of the presence of students with disabilities in your classes if students have not requested accommodations until now.

What percentage of students at FDU have requested accommodations via the Office of Disability Services?

About 14%.

What is the most common recorded disability in students at FDU?

At FDU, the two most common disabilities registered with the Office of Disability Support Services are Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Generalized Anxiety Disorder. These conditions substantially limit some of the major life activities (including learning) and may require academic adjustments/accommodations. Also note that at this time, many additional students may be experiencing anxiety and can benefit from these tips.

The most common accommodation for students in these two categories is provision of more time for quizzes & exams. These disabilities can also cause challenges for students taking online classes.

What challenges do students with ADHD and anxiety face when taking online classes?

Students with ADHD have trouble with executive function. This means that they have a hard time organizing and prioritizing their work, and problem-solving. Students with anxiety can feel overwhelmed, have trouble screening out environmental stimuli, or have trouble sustaining concentration.

Most of this document explains methods to address needs of students with ADHD or anxiety disorders. The changes that you make to support your students with these disabilities also remove barriers to learning for all of your students.

What if I have students with other types of disabilities in my classes?

Students with documented medical, psychological or learning disabilities, who feel they may need in-class academic adjustments, reasonable modifications, and/or auxiliary aids and services while taking your course, should first contact the Disability Support Services (DSS) to discuss their specific needs.

- At the Florham Campus, including the School of Pharmacy & Health Sciences and study abroad programs, contact the Director of Disability Support Services at 973-443-8079.
- At the Metropolitan Campus, online and off-campus programs, contact the Director of Disability Support Services at 201-692-2076.
- At the Vancouver Campus, contact the Deputy Vancouver Campus Executive and Director Academic Support Services at 604-682-4463.

The Center for Instructional Design is working closely with these units and will use their input to prioritize our work with faculty.

How can I help ensure that my class is accessible to my students with disabilities?

- **Cue important information:** Provide a table of contents or site map on written documents to show how information is organized within your course.
 - **Why:** Using a table of contents helps students see how the main points are connected. This helps students structure their study and plan ahead.

- **Be flexible:** For example, offer students a choice of several possible essay questions or provide students a choice in how they will present the final product of a research project.
 - **Why:** Flexibility is a key concept in universal design, as it provides a natural way for students with disabilities to choose a method that best works with their disabilities or learning style.

- **Don't place time limits on exams:** Extended time on exams is a common modification for students with many kinds of disabilities in the brick and mortar classroom. During the COVID-19 crisis, we recommend leaving time limits flexible for all students. If you feel that you must time your exams, you can extend time on tests on Blackboard. We've developed a resource for that, here: [Extended Time Tutorial](#).
 - **Why:** Few of our students will be taking exams under ideal conditions. Others in the family may be working from home, and children or pets may cause distraction. Many of our students may be experiencing anxiety.

- **Practice redundancy:** Describe course content in a variety of ways. Include detailed captions and alt-tags for images and tables. Provide additional notes on PowerPoint slides. If using a video as part of course content, ensure that closed captions are used or that a transcript of the video is available.
 - **Why:** Redundancy will help ensure that your content is accessible to students with a variety of disabilities.

- **Organize your links:** In written materials, organize long lists of hyperlinks into categories, and provide a label and a short description of the site content for each link.
 - **Why:** Long lists of hyperlinks can be overwhelming.
 - **Why:** Hyperlinks presented without explanatory text are confusing to most students.
 - **Example:** Don't provide a "raw" URL such as <http://www.fdu.edu>. Instead, hyperlink meaningful text, like this: [Fairleigh Dickinson University Website](#).

- **Keep it simple:** Avoid using color, flashing text and unnecessary graphics to emphasize points.
 - **Why:** These elements can be distracting to all users, especially those with ADHD.
 - **Why:** About 1 in 12 men and 1 in 200 women have some form of color blindness. Do not rely on color alone to convey information.
 - **Why:** Flashing elements can trigger seizures. About 1% of the U.S. population has a seizure disorder, so it is very likely that some of our students experience seizures.

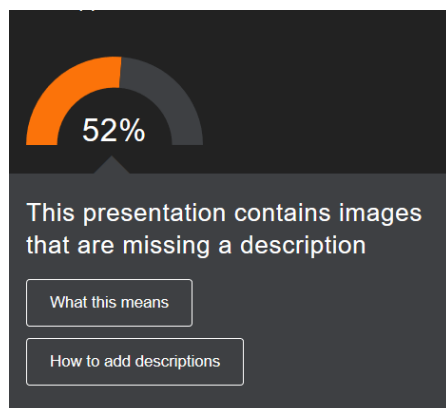
- **Be consistent:** This pertains primarily to courses that are using Blackboard to deliver education asynchronously. Make sure to use the Blackboard content areas appropriately. Do not load all course content into the Announcements or any other single area. The navigation scheme should be used consistently throughout your online course design.
 - **Why:** Transitioning to online learning is already confusing to many students. Keeping a simple, consistent navigational structure will help them focus attention on your course content rather than on trying to find material or understanding the software.
 - **Why:** Structuring materials in a consistent way helps prevent the perception of a "wall of text" which can be overwhelming to all students, not just those with disabilities.

- **Use asynchronous discussion when possible:** Synchronous discussions can be overwhelming for students who suffer from distractibility or factual recall limitations. This may be made worse when using tools that are new to students, such as Zoom. Asynchronous discussions allow all students more time for reflection and clarification.
 - **But bear in mind:** Faculty should continue to focus on effective ways to reach their students during this crisis. If Zoom is working well for you, there is no need to change. But if a student is having challenges with this method you must find a solution. Ask the student to contact Disability Support Services to best coordinate support.
- **Use accessibility tools available to you:**
 - If you use Word documents in your class, click on the lightbulb icon at the top of your screen where you see the words “Tell me what you want to do” and type “Check accessibility.” This will bring up the accessibility checker, which will provide hints for making your document more usable to students with disabilities.
 - If you use Blackboard, check Blackboard Ally scores. In Edit Mode, you should see a “Gas Meter” next to uploaded content, as shown below:



If the gas meter shows as green with the “gauge needle” all the way to the right or “full,” it has passed the Ally accessibility check.

If it shows in any other position, click on the meter to learn more about accessibility concerns with the document and get tips on how to fix any issues.



- Please note that the Word and Ally accessibility checkers will help address some common accessibility concerns, but do not ensure complete accessibility. They provide only limited information that will help address the needs of our students with ADHD and anxiety disorders.

Sources:

[Online Course Design: 8 Tips for Teaching Students with Disabilities](#)

[Academic Accommodations for Students with Psychiatric Disabilities](#)

[What are typical accommodations for students with AD/HD?](#)