Inclusive and Accessible Teaching Guide

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Content

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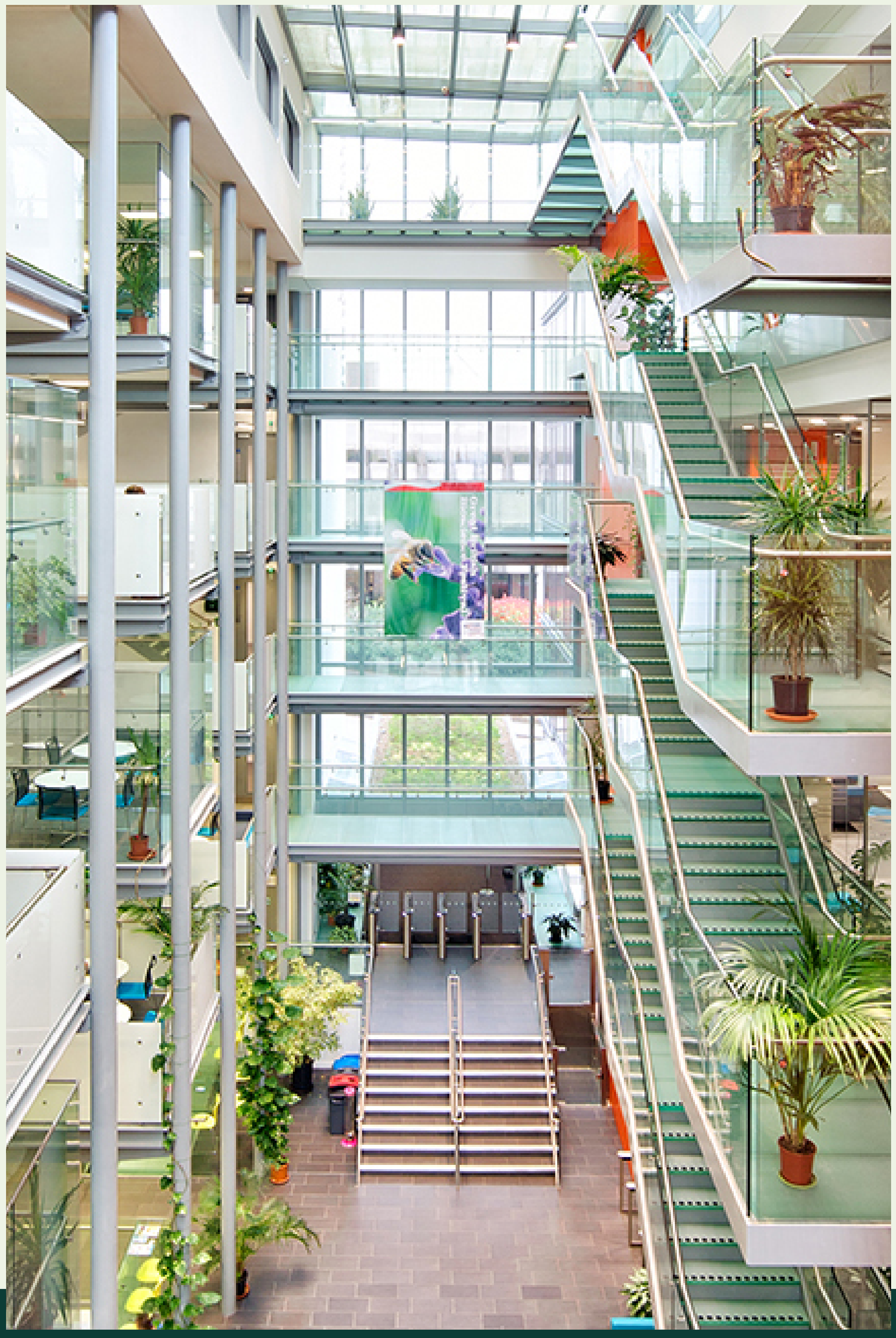
About this guide

This guides collates information from the Digital Education Office and other sources to provide guidance on cultivating inclusive and accessible materials and learning environments. Original sources used in the guide can be found in the ‘Sources’ section at the end of the guide.



This guide is paired with the Inclusive and Accessible Teaching Checklist, to aid reflection and review of teaching content and activities.

We acknowledge that approaches, language, and guidance for inclusive teaching evolve. It is important to use these resources in light of these changes and with an understanding of the context in which this document was created, and recognise this as a working document that will be updated over time.

If you have any questions, suggestions or feedback about the guide, please don’t hesitate to contact Dave Lawson at david.lawson@bristol.ac.uk.

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What is Inclusion and Accessibility?

Accessibility is about designing environments and systems that can be used by the widest range of people possible, and removing barriers that prevent people from taking part.

Inclusion is a broader term that goes beyond accessibility with the aim for all parties to feel valued, respected and have equal opportunities to participate.

In higher education, particular adjustments and recommendations often relate to one or more of the disabilities, learning difficulties, and other health and mental health conditions, but the benefits don't stop there.

Improving inclusive and accessible design in education by addressing the needs of students with various disabilities, neurodiversities, and backgrounds, creates a rich learning environment for all.

Crucially, the accommodations put in place not only benefit these specific groups, but fosters greater engagement, understanding, and success for all learners, regardless of their personal characteristics.

Disabilities and Neurodivergence

- Mental Health Difficulties
- Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs)
- Visual Impairments
- Unseen Impairments and Medical Conditions
- Physical and Mobility Impairments
- Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Deaf or Hard of Hearing

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Lectures

Crafting a lecture that is inclusive and accessible goes beyond just content delivery; it entails thoughtful planning that accommodates diverse learning styles, abilities, and backgrounds. Below, find strategies to make your lectures more universally engaging.

Outline the intended learning outcomes and session outline of at the start.

Speak with a slow pace and clearly so students can follow and take notes.

Outline lecture structure and revisit this throughout

Give the students breaks to catch up on notes or to do something interactive.

Make sure your face, especially your mouth, can be seen by the audience.

Finish the presentation on a summary slide, which highlights the key takeaways of the lecture.

Slides

Use single colour backgrounds for slides. Don’t use patterns or images as backgrounds in slides. Avoid all white backgrounds where possible which can be too dazzling.

Ensure there’s sufficient contrast between colours for background and text. Dark coloured text on a light, but not white background, is preferable.

Use sans serif fonts, such as Arial/Calibri/Open Sans, as these are more easily readable.

Avoid walls of text, use short sentences and bullet points.

Keep a general consistency in slide format and logically order the content.

Avoid images with important text, which won't be picked up by screen readers, write these out instead.

Classroom Climate

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An inclusive and accessible classroom acknowledges, values, and addresses the diverse backgrounds and abilities of all students, and ensures all students have equal opportunities to participate.

- Aim to finish at an appropriate time, so students have enough time to get to their next session.
- Consider letting students know in advance if you're intending to ask for their input during teaching and give them time to consider contributions.
- Avoid pointing out students who arrive late.
- Don't assume universal experiences.
- Establish ground rules to encourage respectful and equitable participation.
- Actively invite students to share their own cultural, academic, and personal experiences as part of the learning process.

- If a student asks a question, repeat the question to the class before giving your reply.
- Response positively to all questions, e.g. "Good questions, I'll revisit that concept..."
- Use generic language to denote times of year, e.g. winter/spring break rather than Christmas/Easter break.
- Avoid using phrases such as "It's easy to see..." or "I'm sure you know..." or "It's a no-brainer", which can discourage students from asking clarifying questions.
- Avoid using unexplained idioms or slang.
- Use "everyone" or "students" rather than "ladies and gentlemen" to create a more inclusive environment that respects all gender identities.

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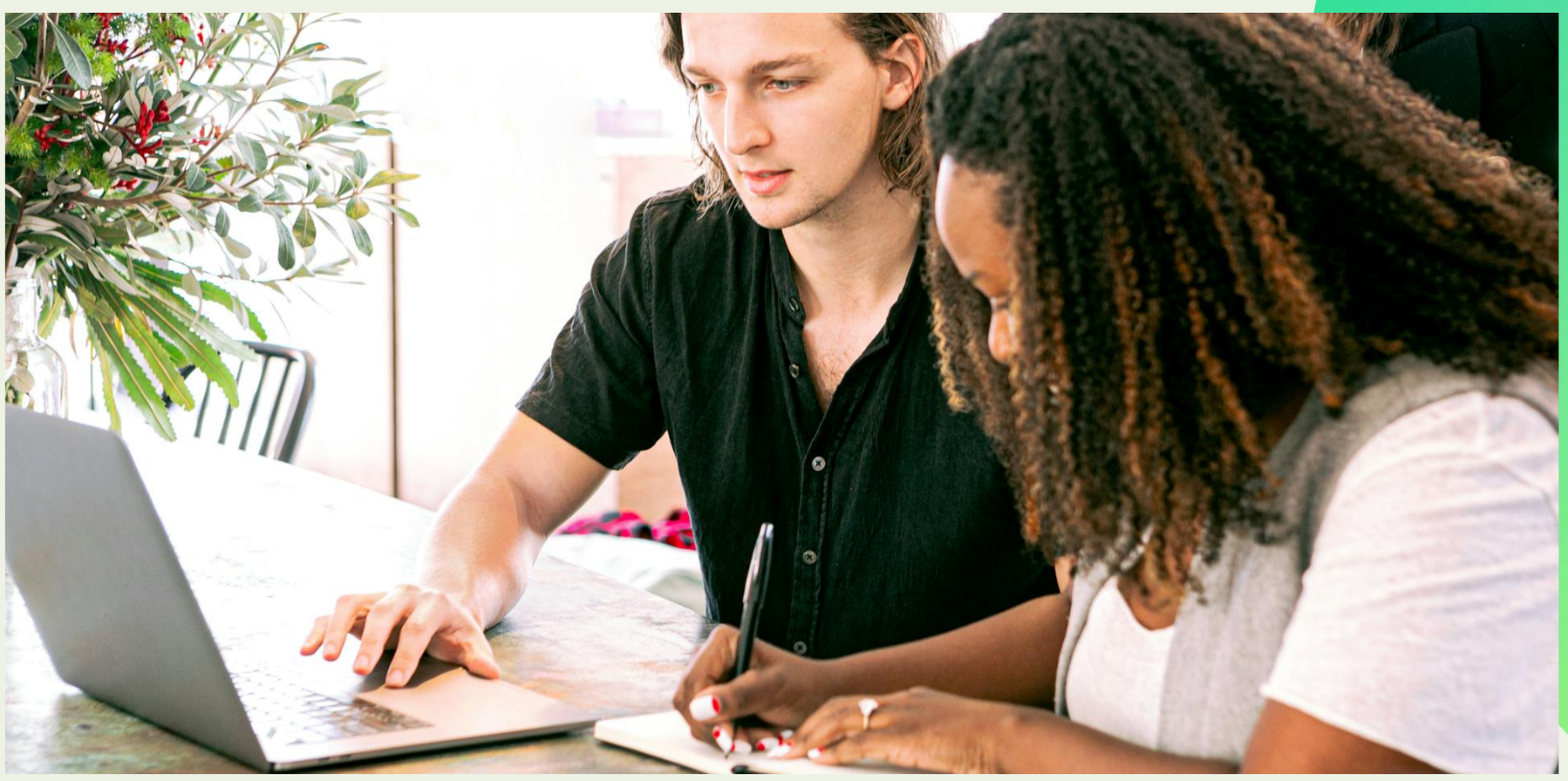
Online Content



Effective online learning design is distinctly different from conventional in-person teaching. It requires a fresh approach, shifting the focus from content being the central element to creating engaging learning activities for students.

Eliminate background noises from recordings wherever possible.

Ensure any videos have closed captions, which can be added through Mediasite/Re-play

Font size should be 12-14 point or equivalent.

Organise Blackboard sites clearly and consistently to ensure simple navigation.

Lecture-style content should be concise (15-20 minutes), up-to-date and integrated alongside more active tasks.

Give images, photos and diagrams alternative text which describes the item.

Provide a variety of formats for documents, e.g. Word and PDF files (PDFs are often less accessible).

Make links descriptive, e.g. hyperlink the descriptive text rather than saying, “Click here” or copy pasting a long URL.

The Digital Education Office have a number of resources to enhance online content in their Online Teaching Resources.

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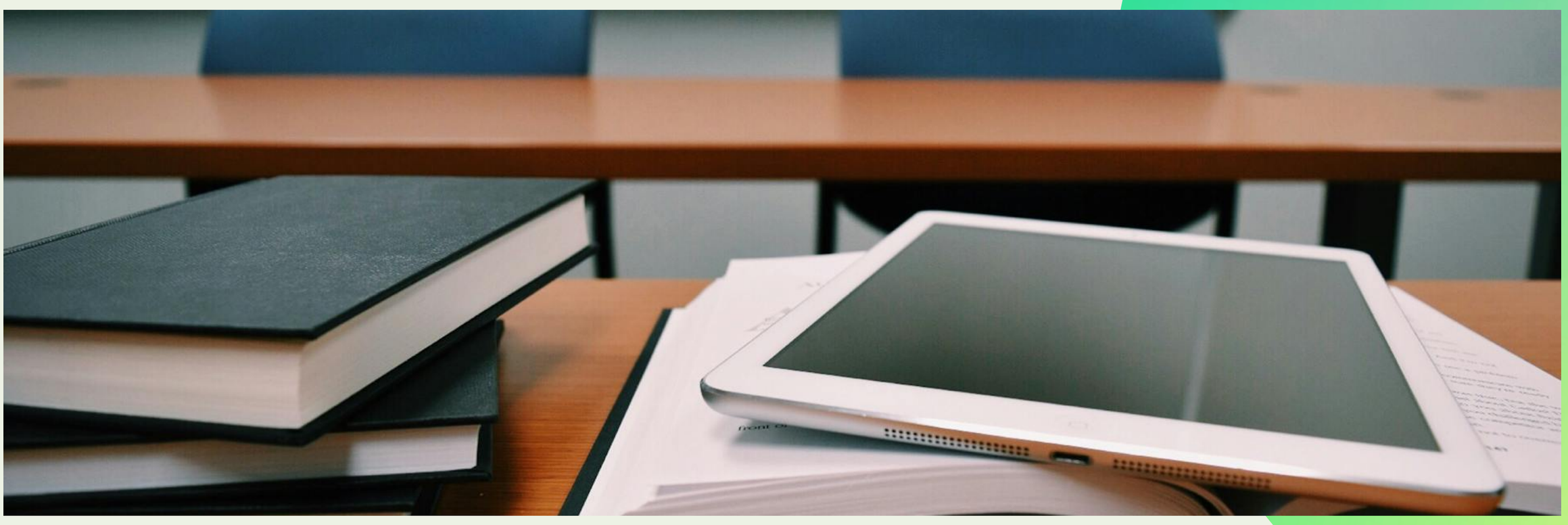
Unit Information

For some students, knowing where to find the right information and navigating different systems can be difficult. Below are some actions to provide consistency and ease for students looking for unit information.



Don't Just Rely on Emails

Ensure any unit-related information sent to students via email can also be found in the appropriate section of the unit's Blackboard. While emails are useful to highlight information at particular times, all important information should be accessible and easy to find through the unit's Blackboard. Emails should not be the sole source of important information.

Use Blackboard Announcements

If you need to send information about a unit via email, do so through the unit's announcements system on Blackboard, this ensures there's a record stored in the unit's announcements section on Blackboard.

Store All Assessment Information on Blackboard

Ensure all relevant information about a unit's assessments can be found in the unit's Blackboard assessment area (Unit Blackboard > Assessment, submission and feedback > Assessment information).

Let Students Know of Updates

If important information is added to a unit's Blackboard during a given week (i.e. not added to an unreleased content block), send an announcement via Blackboard to let students know, to save students checking the same BB area multiple times.

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Assessments

Not all students demonstrate their understanding in the same way. This section delves into how educators can adapt and vary assessment techniques to better cater to the diverse academic needs and abilities of their students.

Ensure the assessment topic and format align with the unit's Intended Learning Outcomes.

Use examples to highlight high and low quality work.

Share marking criteria or grading rubrics with students to help learners understand the requirements of the assessment.

Offer students multiple lower-stakes opportunities to demonstrate the skills and knowledge assessed prior to the summative work.

Consider if the assessment disadvantages any particular groups. Remember that assessments should assess the relevant skills, knowledge and understanding of the learners, not their speed, memory, dexterity or familiarity with a testing format.

Where possible provide students with choice in the format or topic of their assessment. This empowers students to leverage their strengths, interests and perspectives, making the assessment more equitable and engaging.

Feedback

Give students an opportunity to discuss their feedback with whoever marked the work.

Provide clear, actionable and timely feedback so students know how to improve next time.

Reflect on the feedback given to students and modify teaching accordingly if there are points where the students are struggling.

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Presentations

Presentations can be a source of anxiety for students, with many having related adjustments in their Study Support Plans (SSPs). Here we outline some ways to make these activities more inclusive and accessible.

- Explicitly communicate the purpose of the task.
- Make time to introduce how presentations can be prepared and delivered. Clarify the expectations for all participants.
- Share the details of the presentation task as far in advance as possible. Ensure students have ready access to a written record for reference.
- Consider whether group or individual presentations are most appropriate, and potentially give students a choice.
- If the presentation is to be marked, publish clear marking criteria which are specific to presentations in advance.
- Highlight that any students who have difficulties with the task or who may be feeling anxious may approach the tutor, their personal tutor/senior tutor or the Wellbeing Service for advice and help.
- Consider offering all students options for presentation formats, such as a pre-recorded narrated PowerPoint.

Study Support Plans

Students may have reasonable adjustments related to groupwork or presentation in the SSPs, which can relate to methods for assigning groups, limiting presentation audience or to discuss groupwork in advance. If your unit has a groupwork or presentation component, contact these students well in advance to ensure that the student will be able to contribute meaningfully. Contact your School Disability Coordinator if you have any SSP-related questions.

Study Skills Support

The Study Skills team support students with their presentation skills, including practical ways to reduce anxiety around giving presentations. Students can book individual tutorials; attend presentation skills workshops; or the team can create and deliver (either with you or alone) workshops tailored to the needs of your cohort.
Email study-skills@bristol.ac.uk for more information or go to www.bristol.ac.uk/studyskills.

Groupwork

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Groupwork develops key employability skills, allows authentic ways of learning and supports knowledge constructions among peers. However, managing expectations, dynamics and individual contributions is difficult. Below are some tips to promote equitable participation by all students.

- Check unit Study Support Plans and contact students with groupwork-related adjustments well in advance.

- Share the details of the groupwork task as far in advance as possible, such as how groups will be assigned with a written record for reference.

- Match the groupwork to the intended learning outcomes. Explicitly communicate the learning goals and how groupwork can help meet those goals.

- Consider carefully how groups are assigned, often instructor-assigned groups are preferable, but remind students that they can request changes.

- Explain the learning benefits of working in diverse groups.

- Devote in-class time to building teamwork skills.

- Build in self-assessment and individual accountability, such as through periodic reflection on their own and others' contributions to the group in relation to a set of collaborative learning goals.

- Talk openly about accessibility and acknowledge a diversity of learners.

- Encourage students to visit the Study Skills Resources for Groupwork.

Clarifying expectations of groupwork

In addition to making your own expectations clear, it can be helpful to motivate students to establish their own norms for working in groups by considering questions such as:

- What are some positive and negative aspects of group work?
- What is the group's approach to accomplishing the project goals?
- How will group members communicate with each other?
- What are the expectations for group meetings?
- How will the group manage situations where a group member(s) does not meet expectations, and how will conflict be addressed and resolved?
- Who will be responsible for what tasks? Will roles rotate?
- How will the group share work?

Practicals

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Some physical impairments may require very specific adjustments, so these will need to be discussed in advance of a practical with teaching lab teams.

Teaching Lab Managers and Lead Demonstrators are best placed to know if particular students have requested adjustments previously, or have relevant reasonable adjustments as part of their SSPs.

Upload instructions and any PPT slides in advance of the practical to the DLM. Don't leave it until the practical to let the students know what to expect.

Remind students at the beginning of the practical that they can ask for adjustments if required – give examples, so students know what they can request. Don't assume students will take the initiative, they may be worried about your response.

Have clearly defined Intended Learning Outcomes. Don't leave the goal of the session open to interpretation.

Make sure instructions are concise and easy to understand. Don't include too much information, unless clearly shown as optional.

Use a combination of written, verbal, and pictorial instructions with scaffolding. Don't only provide instructions in one format, e.g. only verbal.

Make sure to explain *and* demonstrate difficult techniques – you can use the camera to allow all students to see. Where possible provide alternative formats, e.g., a pre-recorded video or YouTube. Don't assume that all students learn in the same way, especially for practical tasks.

Avoid designing a practical so an average student could complete it in the full allotted time – plan for students who need extra time to set up for and complete lab work. Optional unexamined tasks could be incorporated to challenge a subset of students.

Ask a person with a disability if they want assistance before you provide it. Don't assume a person with a disability requires help.

Respond to adjustment requests flexibly where possible. Don't be inflexible unless it's really necessary e.g. lab safety.

Provide class feedback and/or answers – e.g. an MCQ quiz, general feedback, a short video, etc. for students to assess their performance. Don't fail to supply some form of feedback that goes beyond the individual – students commonly complain that they haven't been able to talk to a demonstrator or the lecturer to assess their answers, or ensure their recorded data is meaningful or in the correct format.

Practicals

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Specialist equipment and arrangements:

Teaching labs will likely already have equipment that can help students with some physical impairments. For example, some labs have **height adjustable** benches, so this can accommodate wheelchair users, but also may be more accessible comfortable for students who need to sit due to health impairments, as well as those who are particularly tall or short.

Portable **hearing loop** equipment may also be available, so students who use hearing aids can have instructions delivered *via* the microphone amplified in their hearing aids.

Many labs have **microscopes** with tablet connection screens, to allow students with visual impairments to see a sample on a slide more clearly.

Magnifying glasses are also available for students with visual impairments. It's often possible for specimens and images of microscope slides to be made available in an alternative format.

Instructions / handbooks can be printed on different **coloured paper** to help students with dyslexia, or overlays can be used.

Seating

Seating arrangements may need to be adjusted, for example, students who lip read, or are those who visually impaired may prefer to sit near the front. Students who struggle with sensory overload, or social anxiety, may prefer to sit near the back. If changes are requested, please discuss with Teaching Lab Managers and/or Lead Demonstrators, and these will be accommodated where possible.

Potential Challenges in Practicals

Sensory overload

- Some students may find aspects of Practical classes trigger sensory overload. For example, the lighting, noise, smell, and use of PPE such as gloves may be difficult.

- Possible solutions could include provision of different types of gloves, and the use of a white noise earpiece. Provide areas of the lab with dimmed lighting. Allow students to take a break if they need to, for example they could spend 5-10 minutes in the atrium.

Dissections

- Some students struggle with the dissection of dead animals. This may be due to sensory issues, or beliefs.

- Possible solutions may include the use of gloves if a student does not want to directly touch a dead animal. If a student is very reluctant, they could team up with a partner who is not troubled by dissections, so they can observe instead.

Fine motor skills

- Some students may struggle with tasks that require fine motor skills.

- Where possible, encourage a student to attempt the task, but be sensitive to the student's needs. Accommodations such as swapping tall cylinders with jugs, and use of plastic equipment rather than glass, may allow a student to still undertake the task. Where this is not possible, ask the student if they would like to team up with a partner who can conduct the aspects requiring fine motor skills.

Groupwork

- Be aware that for students who are autistic or have social anxiety, or those who have conditions which make it harder to communicate, for example students who are deaf, or students who stammer, may find group work difficult. This also may apply to some students where English is not their first language.

- See the groupwork section for more recommendations of how to foster effective participation of all students through inclusive and accessible practices.

Representation

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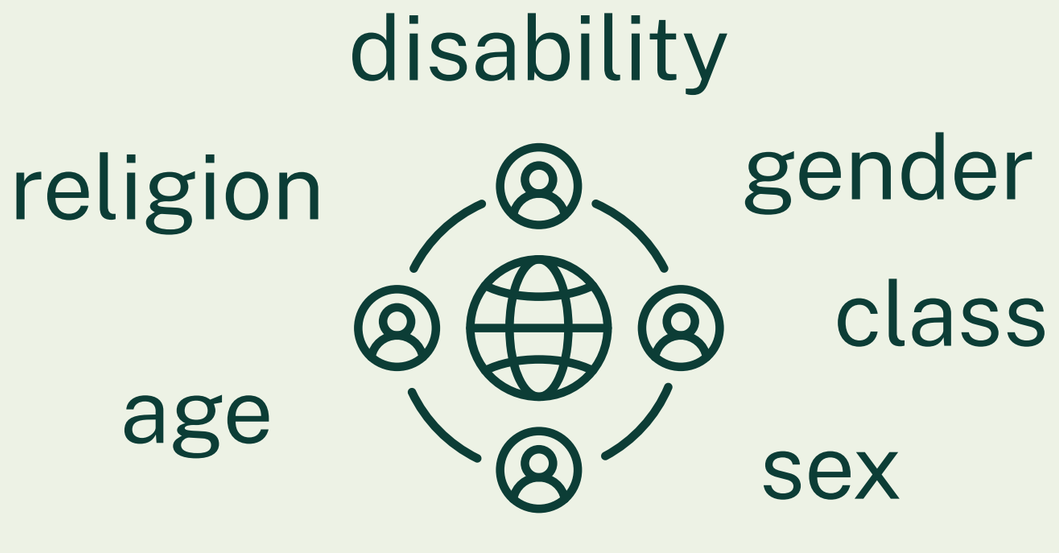
Selecting course content provides an opportunity to highlight role models and prominent figures within the field. Students gain from seeing their own identities among others reflected in the course materials. Here we outline some ways to make teaching content more representative.

Ethnicity often comes to mind when considering representation and diversity, but there are many ways to improve representation in your teaching content. Note that these are intersectional in that these aspects of identity link and overlap.



- Include a wide range of researchers and experts who address concepts in the discipline.
- Indicate the diversity of researchers in the topic with images.
- Ensure examples reflect the diversity of society in a positive way and avoid stereotyping groups of people.
- Highlight the contributions and narratives of people/communities who are typically underrepresented in the field.
- Where possible, invite guest speakers representing different perspectives and backgrounds.
- Be aware of cultural holidays, and don’t be shy to respectfully wish students a happy festive period for different cultural holidays.

Reflecting on Course Content

Reflect on your course content and consider the following:

- Which scholars are important to the cannon? What are their social identities?
- How has the cannon changed through history?
- What perspectives are typically prioritised?
- Are there any missing perspectives?
- In what ways could diversity enhance or alter the topics I am currently researching or teaching?

Decoloniality

Decolonisation involves addressing the ways in which European imperialism, colonialism and oppression have shaped our modern world. It is a framework that helps to tackle injustice, and seeks to challenge and remove the structures that embed racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism in our society.

While there is no universal template to decolonise higher education, here we highlight some ways to incorporate a decolonial approach to teaching.

Recognise the Need

- Seek to understand the historical context of colonisation and its influence on science.
- Acknowledge the Eurocentric bias in the discipline and underrepresentation of other perspectives.

Contextualise Teaching Content

- Consider the cultural and historic context of your teaching content.
- Explicitly address past and current inequalities, assumptions and problematic histories.

Challenge the subject, challenge the course

- Identify alternative canons of knowledge which have been marginalised.
- Ensure the content moved beyond purely Western frameworks.
- Encourage students to critically engage with and question established viewpoints.

Remember Decolonisation is a Process

- Recognise that decolonising is an ongoing process and requires a commitment to continuous learning and adaptation.

Useful terms

Eurocentrism – The dominance of European perspectives and values in curricula, often marginalising or excluding non-European cultures, knowledge systems, and histories.

Positionality – The awareness of one's own social and cultural identity (race, gender, class, etc.) and how it influences one's perspectives, teaching, and engagement with students.

Neocolonialism – The process through which relationships of dependency and subservience are created through financial and cultural means.

Colonial Matrix of Power – A structure of control and management that perpetuates colonial ideology through economy, authority, gender/sexuality and knowledge.

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Sources

- **University of Bristol (UoB) Digital Education Office (DEO) | Digital Accessibility and Inclusion:** www.bristol.ac.uk/digital-education/inclusion/
- **UoB Student Inclusion Services | Inclusive writing guide:** www.bristol.ac.uk/style-guides/writing/inclusive/
- **UoB Inclusive Approaches to Presentations (Staff Intranet):** uob.sharepoint.com/sites/staff-info/SitePages/supporting-disabled-students-inclusive-approaches-to-presentations.aspx
- **British Dyslexia Association | Dyslexia friendly style guide:** www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/advice/employers/creating-a-dyslexia-friendly-workplace/dyslexia-friendly-style-guide
- **Plymouth University | Inclusive teaching, learning and assessment**: www.plymouth.ac.uk/about-us/teaching-and-learning/inclusivity
- **Yale | Inclusive Classroom Climate:** poorvucenter.yale.edu/ClassClimates
- **University of Chicago | Lecture Inclusively:** inclusivepedagogy.uchicago.edu/advanced-strategies/lecture-inclusively
- **Oxford Brooks University | Inclusive small group work:** www.brookes.ac.uk/staff/working-at-brookes/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/inclusive-teaching-and-learning/inclusive-small-group-work
- **Centre For Innovations in Teaching and Learning | 7 Tips for Designing Effective and Accessible Group Work:** cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/sites.ucsc.edu/dist/6/1180/files/2021/07/7-Tips-for-Designing-Effective-and-Accessible-Group-Work.pdf
- **University College London | Creating an inclusive curriculum for BAME students:** www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/publications/2020/apr/creating-inclusive-curriculum-bame-students#Contextualise
- **Magistrali, A., Bilca, S., Ali, A., Wong, A., Hollinshead, E., Sandhu, A., and Davis, H. (2022) Decolonising Curriculum in Environmental Sciences Resources: Toolkit. Newcastle University:** libguides.ncl.ac.uk/ld.php?content_id=34285477
- **Times Higher Education | Decolonising the curriculum – how do I get started?:** www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/decolonising-curriculum-how-do-i-get-started

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