

Importance

Why is accessibility important?□

It's about more than just following the law

Roughly 1 out of 10 students at colleges and universities has a disability, yet research has shown that many students do not declare their disabilities when they go to college. With a growing number of writing courses offered online, instructors, now more than ever, need to adequately address accessibility in the design of their online courses.

Online learning environments that aren't accessible to all risk losing student engagement and the ability to learn.

Although restrictions such as time, money, and available resources can prevent instructors from implementing accessible course materials, it is important that they do what they can for accessibility. There are three main reasons why accessibility is an important issue:

- Making courses that account for disabilities often benefits all learners, not just those with disabilities
- Accessibility is the law
- Creating course content that is helpful for all students is the right thing to do

Disabilities in the classroom

Most people think about the most severe forms of disability first, but everyone can be disabled at different times. Do you wear glasses or contacts? Do you have a hearing aid? Do you have to read captions on a video because you are in a quiet place? Are you left-handed? Reading your phone on the bus? Don't understand technology? Can't read well? English is not

your first language? Internet is slow? All of these show a need for accessibility.

While instructors should certainly account for the more significant disabilities when designing their courses, it is important to consider that there are also subtler and more temporary disabilities that impact more people.

Main reasons for accessibility

There are many reasons why accessibility is important for online courses, but the three main reasons include:

Accessibility enhances learning for more than just those with disabilities.

An accessible course makes learning inclusive for all students, not just students with disabilities or a particular learning style. Similar to the way automatic doors help those in wheelchairs *and* those pushing a cart or carrying bags, various accessibility techniques help those with learning or physical disabilities *and* those experiencing low internet bandwidth, bad technology, or those with different learning styles. The benefits of creating equal opportunities for those with disabilities can extend to all.

Accessibility is the law.

Civil Rights Laws exist to protect people with disabilities from discrimination. For higher education, this means creating content that does not discriminate against people with special learning needs or work styles. The Office for Civil Rights investigates complaints to ensure colleges and universities adhere to these laws. It is best to be proactive about accessibility in your online classroom.

Accessibility is the right thing to do.

With the high number of students experiencing disabilities in educational settings, it is a socially responsible consideration to make online courses accessible for everyone. Each person rests on a transient point on a spectrum of ability. The goal should be to design online environments that reach everyone on that spectrum, so that no one is excluded from learning.