

# Inclusive Teaching Practices: A Practical Guide

We aim to provide a practical guide for inclusive best teaching practices, one that covers both course preparation and classroom teaching. An inclusive teaching practice is one that incorporates multiple modes of representation, engagement and expression. This would allow the instructor and TAs to build a broad net that supports a wide variety of student needs, while allowing students multiple ways to access and engage with a course. By anticipating both general and specific student needs, we can make it habit to incorporate their diverse perspectives and experiences into our design of courses, classes and activities.

## Part I. Creating/Preparing your Course:

### Things to Avoid:

1. Blanket bans on use of technology (computers, phones), as this can create obstacles for students with disabilities and single out students with accommodations. To reduce issues of distraction, ask students who choose to use laptops to sit on one side of the classroom and/or set a seating area as a “no laptop zone.”
2. Measuring participation exclusively as speaking up/in front of the class\*, especially in large classes, as this privileges one of many kinds of engagement with course material. Consider the use of iClickers, in-class activities, or attendance in office hours as part of a diversified and distributed participation score. (\*In a seminar where a learning objective may be to discuss the material, expectations for speaking may vary.)
3. “Pop quizzes,” which although recognized as an “accountability tool” create undue anxiety and, without significant scaffolding, pop quiz scores do not always reflect students’ pre-class preparation. Announce all quizzes and enable students with accommodations take the quiz in accordance with those accommodations (e.g. through Disability Services Center). Or, to encourage student reflection on their own preparation, consider having “quizzes” that, rather than being graded, serve as a chance for students to review and check their own understanding.
4. Using overly complex sentences or complex vocabulary (e.g. on exams) that are not relevant to course material/concepts. Clear and simple explanations go a long way, and try to keep in mind that words that may be everyday vocabulary for an experienced academic may not be familiar to students.

### Best Practices:

1. Create a detailed syllabus and try to adhere to it. Although timing may change, make the readings, assignments, and due dates available in advance to students. Such organization and consistency is helpful to all students, and varying too much from the syllabus can create challenges for students who need to arrange accessible forms of

course materials through Disability Services Center.

2. Provide a link to the campus Disability Service Center, and direct students to this center for arranging individual accommodations. Remember that you must comply with individual student accommodations that are arranged through DSC, which are communicated to faculty via DSC-produced faculty letters shared by students.
3. Provide links to other school resources, such as the campus food bank, writing center or counseling center on your syllabus/course website.
4. Create a flexible attendance policy, which can aid students with a variety of obstacles to educational engagement and remove the instructor from the role of adjudicating what is an “excused” absence. Some variations include: Require all weekly discussion sections, but drop the lowest 2 grades; allow 1-2 make-up assignments for students to complete if unable to attend a class or discussion section; allow 1-2 no questions asked absences.
5. Offer ample office hours, and explain to students how they can use office hours. Consider including online office hours and Q&A discussion boards.
6. When sharing course materials electronically, include captions describing each image. If course materials are presented online, provide alt text with image uploads (see more: <http://accessibility.psu.edu/images/alttext/>).
7. Add a header in all documents that contains (as applicable) name of course, week #, name of assignment, page number, etc. This not only helps students with screen readers, but can assist all students in keeping a clear view of the course organization.
8. Use sans serif fonts; avoid smaller than 12 pt font.
9. Use color schemes that are accessible for those with colorblindness or limited vision.
  - Apps such as ColorOracle can help identify adequate color contrast.
  - Try to avoid using color as the sole means to communicate difference/distinction (e.g. with whiteboard markers), especially red and green.
10. Distribute course grade across multiple, lower-stakes assignments, try to include multiple modes of assessment for the course, and use flexible grading schemes. Having few components to an overall course grade creates greater student anxiety if unexpected life events affect their ability to prepare for an exam or complete an assignment. More components that encourage multiple modes of engagement with course material (e.g. exams, assignments, oral presentations, group activities, etc.), can serve to help students learn course material in varied ways and reduce the need to field requests for adjudicating extensions for major “make or break” assignments. A sample flexible grading policy: “turn in 6 reading responses, the lowest grade is dropped.”
11. Use varying types of exam questions: multiple choice, short answer, essay questions, etc. Consider flexible answer types, e.g. “Draw or describe”.
12. Be specific in assessment instructions. Include point values, expectations of response lengths, and descriptions of any figures used.

## Part II. In-Class Teaching

### Things to Avoid:

1. Singling students out, even if it is positively intended or seems relevant to class. E.g.: Asking international students to comment on or serve as representative of their home country; complementing a student's performance given an adversity.
2. Speaking while facing (or writing on) the board. Rather, speak loudly and clearly while facing the students. Use a microphone, if needed.
3. Cold-calling on students. This tactic is often used to encourage student preparation but creates significant anxiety for many students and is just one demonstration of learning. Instead, consider asking students to pair up and offer answers as a team, giving them time to think before responding, or using iClickers for instant feedback. If you still prefer to use cold-calling, give students the specific questions you intend to ask prior to class.
4. Assuming that all students will communicate their needs clearly. Rather than assuming students will be comfortable coming to you if they face an obstacle to engagement in your course, make an explicit commitment toward addressing student needs. Communicate to students that making your classroom more accessible and inclusive is an ongoing process that benefits from student-instructor communication..

### Best Practices:

1. Encourage students to ask questions and approach you with doubts. Pause often and allow time for clarifying questions. Avoid shaming students who need material explained more than once or in multiple ways.
2. Provide daily learning objectives/outcomes at the start of each lecture and review the main topics of the previous lecture. This helps students maintain a big picture view of how course material connects and organize their knowledge.
3. Consider recording lectures and/or making lecture materials available online prior to or after class, which allows students to return to material for clarification. If you have concerns about attendance if you provide these materials, consider building a participation/activity component of lecture.
4. Enable captions for in-class or assigned videos and if available, provide transcripts of videos to students.
5. Consider having captions for your lectures. Both Google Slides (cmd/ctl+shift+C in Chrome only) and [PowerPoint](#) offer instant closed captioning.

6. If asking students to read or write in classroom, provide more time than you think is necessary/than you would take to complete the task. Provide an additional task for students to work on if they finish early.
7. Allow course-correcting possibilities by checking in with students through mid-term evaluations and feedback. This should include feedback on accessibility.

*This document was created by the Inclusive Instruction Working Group, Cultivating Habits of Accessible Teaching series in May 2019 at the University of California, Irvine. The focus of the group was to discuss, design, and practice pedagogical strategies that create learning environments accessible to students across a wide range of abilities, coming from diverse cultural, class, and racial/ethnic backgrounds, and with differing previous educational experiences.*

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