

Northern Illinois University

Disability and Accessibility Tutorial

Written by Ad Hoc Committee on Disabilities (Co-Chairs, Greg Long & Bill Nicklas)*
Endorsed by NIU Presidential Commission on Persons with Disabilities (2/21/13)

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Disclaimer: This tutorial is not intended to provide specific legal advice and is meant for educational purposes only.

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Disability benefits students and the larger NIU community

Students who have disabilities bring diversity to campus and raise issues of social consciousness, accessibility, and advocacy. The university's response in welcoming their presence demonstrates a commitment to social justice and inclusion of all qualified individuals regardless of disability status. The increased presence of students with disabilities also encourages greater attention to Universal Design (UD). This philosophy promotes diversity by emphasizing that accessibility be considered at the inception of any construction, technology development, web design, or purchase. Universal Design of Learning is an extension of UD with application to course design, classroom strategies, and student support services' practices. Additional information on these topics is presented later in the tutorial.

Challenges to faculty and staff

It is NIU's commitment and obligation to comply with all applicable state and federally mandated responsibilities to students with disabilities. Visible disabilities, such as mobility impairments or amputations, are obvious, and reasonable and appropriate accommodations often seem to be "common sense." Many more students, however, have invisible conditions which may qualify as disabilities such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), chronic illness, learning disabilities, and mental illness. Without visible "proof" (e.g., cane, service dog, wheelchair) of one's disability, accommodations often seem less obvious. Regardless, students with invisible disabilities are entitled to appropriate reasonable accommodations.

Students who had disability-related services in high school often experience post-secondary disability support services quite differently. Public high schools are mandated to identify students with disabilities and implement services for success. In the college or university setting, however, the obligation is placed on students to disclose their disabilities to the institution and request accommodations. They must be able to talk about their disabilities and often must provide documentation of their disabilities. Students must seek out services, typically through a Disability Resource Center staff member, and must then talk with faculty about approved, reasonable, and appropriate accommodations. It is also essential for students to know what to do if a NIU faculty or staff member disagrees or refuses to provide an approved accommodation. In postsecondary settings, responsibility for initiating services is on the student, not the university.

Tutorial structure

The tutorial consists of three sections (Disability Law, Accommodations, Recommended Practices), each followed by a brief review and quiz.

Disability Law: Disability rights legislation (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Illinois State law) is public recognition that discrimination against persons with disabilities occurs and that it must not be permitted.

Accommodations: Disability-based accommodations have a purpose, processes, and associated responsibilities. In addition, disclosure, confidentiality, eligibility, and roles are addressed.

Recommended Practices: Negative attitudes from other people are often the biggest barriers students encounter. In response, NIU strongly encourages faculty and staff to create an inclusive learning environment through attention to person-first language, disability etiquette, and incorporation of Universal Design principles. This section introduces the philosophy of Universal Design for Learning. It is one of the most effective and efficient ways to include disability access in the educational environment. It emphasizes strategies to increase student success and retention across a wide range of learners and learning styles.

Objectives

Following completion of this tutorial, you should be able to:

Describe the rationale for accommodations and basic legal protections offered to students who have disabilities.

Explain the purpose, processes, and implementation of accommodations.

Use disability etiquette and person-first language when interacting with, writing about, or reporting on people who have disabilities.

Apply principles of Universal Design in your work with students and the larger university community.

Identify campus resources available for faculty, students, and visitors with disabilities.

Additional information

Each of the topics included in this tutorial is linked to supplemental information at the [NIU Disability & Accessibility Portal](#).

Disability and Law

“We know that equality of individual ability has never existed and never will, but we do insist that equality of opportunity still must be sought.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt

What does the law require?

By law, a student who meets a college or university's essential admissions requirements cannot be denied admission on the basis of disability. Admissions criteria are the same for students with and without disabilities.

Federal laws protect the rights of all students to an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from all school programs and activities, including academic instruction, research, occupational training, housing, health insurance, counseling, financial aid, physical education, athletics, recreation, campus events, transportation, and campus-based employment.

Students must be able to meet the essential academic standards of the school if they are provided reasonable accommodations. Knowledge and application of disability law ensures students' access to the curriculum as well as maintaining the university's academic integrity and standards.

What laws protect against discrimination based on disability status?

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504—First federal law to offer protection against discrimination based on disability.

“No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, as defined in [section 705\(20\)](#) of this title, shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance or under any program or activity conducted by any Executive agency or by the United States Postal Service.”

Section 508, as amended—Technology Access

- All electronic and information technology must be accessible to people with disabilities.
- Students with disabilities must be able to access computer hardware and software, web pages and the Internet, CD/DVDs, video/audio teleconferencing, etc.
- **Note:** Section 508 traditionally only applies to Federal agencies or departments, but may apply to specific grants through the terms and conditions of those grants or the laws that provide for such grants. For Illinois institutions, please see the subsequent information on the Illinois Information Technology Accessibility Act.

Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) and Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (2008)

- Prohibits discrimination against individuals with a disability.
- Applies to everyone: faculty, staff, employees, student employees, students, and applicants.
- Requires reasonable accommodations be provided to ensure access to classes, events, and related curricular activities.
- **Note:** The ADA-AA does not require NIU, or any university, to fundamentally alter essential academic requirements or lower academic standards.

Under Title II of the ADA, however, public colleges and universities are required to provide auxiliary aids and services to qualified students with disabilities. To comply with this mandate, NIU must provide alternative methods of communication and/or alternative methods of meeting course requirements to students with documented disabilities.

Illinois Information Technology Accessibility Act (2008)

- All information technology developed, purchased, or provided by the State of Illinois be accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- Information technology includes Internet and intranet systems, software applications, operating systems, video and multimedia, telecommunications, and computers.
- Examples of Education-Related Technology
 - Accessible websites
 - Captioned videos
 - E-texts and PDFs
 - Podcasting

- Learning Management Systems (e.g., Blackboard)
- myNIU
- Presentation software (e.g, PowerPoint)

How do I know who qualifies as “disabled”?

A student with a disability, as defined by the ADA, has either a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity such as hearing, seeing, speaking, learning, walking, breathing, or performing manual tasks. Every student must also be able to perform the essential functions of the course with or without reasonable accommodations.

A disability alone does not qualify a student for an academic accommodation. The student must demonstrate to the Disability Resource Center (DRC) that the disability impacts the student’s ability to access and participate in the curriculum.

In order to receive approved accommodations, students must disclose and may need to document their disability with a DRC staff member to receive approved accommodations. Documentation requirements vary based on the type of disability.

Students must document their disabilities that are not readily apparent. If documentation is needed, the student is responsible for providing it. Documentation typically includes the following information:

- A diagnosis, made by an appropriate, qualified professional;
- The history of impact of disability; and
- Information that details and supports how the disability impacts one or more daily life activities for the student, including learning.

Based on the student’s interview and disability documentation, the DRC staff member, in collaboration with the student, determines the most effective and timely accommodation(s). An interactive process between the institution and the student must occur as consideration of reasonable accommodations are considered by the University. After determining appropriate accommodations the DRC gives the student a “Letter of Accommodations.” Through Summer 2013 the student is responsible to deliver the letter directly to the faculty member and have a conversation about his or her accommodations. Starting in Fall 2013, the DRDC will work with students to deliver letters of accommodations directly to faculty members; however, students and faculty members should still have conversations about the application of the accommodations.

The majority of NIU students who are disabled have hidden or “invisible” disabilities. Depending on the circumstances, these may include, but are not limited to, mental illness, autism spectrum disorder, learning disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, and chronic illness, e.g., Crohns Disease. These students do not look any different than their classmates who do not have disabilities. Despite being invisible, these types of disabilities impact students’ ability to learn and perform.

To maintain consistency and fairness, only students who have gone through the DRC are eligible for approved disability-related accommodations.

Do accommodations limit academic freedom and classroom integrity?

Academic accommodations should not compromise essential elements of academic courses. Instead, they are intended to provide equal access to the curricula and full opportunity for participation by students who have disabilities. Students with disabilities should be held to the same academic standards as their classmates. Accommodations are designed to promote access; however, they do not promise success.

“Accommodations are regulated by the Disability Resource Center (formerly known as CAAR). If one of your students has been approved for accommodations by the DRC, you must comply with them, whether or not you agree with them. This is not optional and it is not an infringement on your academic freedom. It's the law. Further, common decency and the law, FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act), both require that you protect a student's confidentiality regarding these accommodations, meaning that you may not disclose them or discuss them in public (e.g., not in class, in front of other students or faculty, in the hallway, etc.).”

Professor Alan Rosenbaum
President of the Faculty Senate and Executive Secretary of the University Council
[*Faculty Matters—May 2012*](#)

Can I talk to students about their disabilities?

Yes and no. Students’ disability information is confidential. The student’s right to privacy is protected by law. It is their choice to disclose their disabilities. Disclosure is necessary only when requesting an accommodation with the DRC.

Students will notify faculty about approved accommodations by discussing the accommodations listed on their letter. Students are not required to show individual faculty

members their disability or other medical documentation. In fact, many prefer to keep the specific nature of their disability private.

As a general suggestion, follow the student's lead. Some may openly discuss their disability during class while others prefer confidentiality. It is always the student's choice to decide how much information to share publicly. Students are, however, encouraged to discuss the educational impact of their disability with their instructors. Anything beyond that is the student's decision to share. Therefore, it is imperative to also understand that students have a civil right to expect that university officials, faculty, and staff will not publicly identify them as receiving disability-related support services. It means that you cannot ask students the nature of their disabilities. If faculty received a DRC created letter of accommodation the identified student has already been affirmed as a student with a disability through the DRC. The students' documentation is considered confidential information. It is protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and its regulations from disclosure to third parties and those University employees who do not need to know such information about the student in order to do their respective jobs.

It also means that you cannot publicly question the student's right to an accommodation. As required by federal law, faculty are expected to provide approved requested accommodations. If you have questions and/or disagreements about the accommodation request(s) please contact both the student and his or her DRC staff member privately.

In the classroom, do not discuss, treat differently, or otherwise acknowledge that a student has a disability without prior consent. Disclosing a student's disability status may create a hostile classroom environment because it is uncivil and often stigmatizing. In most cases, it is also illegal. If the instructor knows about the student's disability via DRC, that information is protected from public disclosure under FERPA regulations.

Do accommodations need to be applied retroactively?

That decision is within the instructor's discretion. NIU encourages students to contact DRC regarding accommodations prior to the start of the semester. However, students may request accommodations through DRC at any point in the semester. Some students may prefer not to disclose their disabilities unless necessary. If they do poorly on the first exam, for example, they may be inclined to seek assistance through DRC. Any approved accommodations a student receives at that point are not required to be retroactively applied. Students may ask, for example, to use their accommodations and re-take an exam given earlier in the semester; however, instructors are not obligated to agree to do so.

Disability Law—Review and Quiz

Review

- The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 were the first laws to promise educational access for academically qualified students who have disabilities.
- Disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity.
- Accommodations provide access and opportunity for full participation. They do not, and should not, compromise classroom standards or integrity.
- A student's disability information is confidential. Documentation, when needed, is shared with the Disability Resource Center, not with individual faculty members.
- Classroom disclosure of a student's disability status (without the student's prior consent) is potentially illegal and likely offensive.
- An "accessibility statement" placed in course syllabi helps meet NIU's obligation to inform as well as create a more welcoming atmosphere for students with disabilities. (A copy of the current syllabus accommodation statement is provided in the following section.)

Quiz

True or false: Academically qualified students who have disabilities have a federally protected right to attend NIU.

True or false: If I disagree with a student's approved accommodation, I can refuse to provide it.to provide it.

True or false: A student's disability information is considered confidential.

True or false: I have a right to request a student's disability documentation.

Accommodations

“Independence is measured not by the tasks one can perform without assistance but by the quality of one’s life with help.”

Ed Roberts, founder
Independent Living Movement

Don’t accommodations really just give some students an advantage over other students?

No. Academic accommodations provide accessible opportunities for students with disabilities to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and capabilities so that they have an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, the programs and activities of the university. Academic accommodations also allow students to demonstrate what they know rather than being academically limited by the effects of their disability. Providing auxiliary aids and services is not considered special treatment.

Accommodations are reasonable, right?

Northern Illinois University is committed to providing inclusive learning environments. Equal access can often be achieved through course design; however, barriers to learning may still exist for students with disabilities. Members of the NIU community are expected to provide reasonable and appropriate accommodations and related resources to decrease those barriers.

Accommodations are not required if they are seen as:

- “unreasonable”
- a “fundamental alteration” of a program and/or
- imposing an “undue” financial or administrative burden. **Note:** The “financial or administrative burden” falls to the university, not individual programs. As such, proving such a burden upon the institution is a very high standard to meet.

How do I let students know about availability of accommodations?

To make sure that students know about the availability of accommodations, put the NIU accessibility statement on the course syllabus. Using this statement also creates a more welcoming environment and encourages students who have disabilities to meet with you.

The Disability Resource Center (DRC) and NIU's Presidential Commission on Persons with Disabilities have both reviewed and endorsed the use of the statement and strongly recommend that you use it in all of your course syllabi.

Accessibility Statement

Northern Illinois University is committed to providing an accessible educational environment in collaboration with the Disability Resource Center (DRC). Any student requiring an academic accommodation due to a disability should let his or her faculty member know as soon as possible. Students who need academic accommodations based on the impact of a disability will be encouraged to contact the DRC if they have not done so already. The DRC is located on the 4th floor of the Health Services Building, and can be reached at 815-753-1303 (V) or drc@niu.edu

How do I create an accommodation for a student?

“Disability is not a brave struggle or ‘courage in the face of adversity.’ Disability is an art. It’s an ingenious way to live.”

--Neil Marcus, playwright

You do not need to create accommodations on your own; that is the area of expertise of the DRC. As such, direct students to the DRC to obtain approved accommodations. The DRC can collaborate with you and other departments and faculty across campus to implement accommodations as well as create a more universally designed learning environment.

Academic accommodations commonly occur in these areas:

Auxiliary aids or assistance

Auxiliary aids may include the use of an adaptive computer, FM hearing system, and/or alternate format of materials (e.g., Braille, enlarged print). Assistance may include priority registration, route-training, note-takers, interpreters, service animals, human guides, personal care attendants, and real-time captionists. Please note: NIU is not responsible for providing personal care attendants.

Reasonable modification of policies and procedures

The reasonable modification of policies and procedures can also be an example of a reasonable accommodation to a disability. Please remember that a modification to a policy or procedure is not considered reasonable if it would fundamentally alter the underlying program.

Consideration for absences

The Office of Civil Rights has determined that, under certain circumstances, it *may* be appropriate to modify course attendance policies. When attendance policies are in place, the faculty or staff member should be able to justify why attendance is an “essential function” in the class. Faculty are encouraged to consult with the DRC on the question of attendance policies.

Exam and testing accommodations

Exam accommodations for students with disabilities minimize the impact of the disability by affording students an equal opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and ability. Eligibility for exam accommodations is determined by DRC staff on the basis of the student’s disability documentation and informational interview. Some of the most typical accommodations include an alternate format such as an auditory version, large print, or Braille version of the exam; a low distraction room; extended time; and scribe assistance.

Non-curricular accommodations at NIU include:

Accessible Housing—NIU Residence Halls offer rooms and facilities that are accessible to students with disabilities.

Accessible Parking—Arrangements for parking permits are made through NIU Campus Parking Services.

Accessible Transportation—The Huskie Bus Line runs throughout campus and some areas of the DeKalb community. The Freedom Mobile offers an accessible paratransit system that runs during the same hours as the Huskie buses and provides on-call door-to-door service throughout the DeKalb community.

How do I make sure that students’ accommodation needs are met?

Everyone has a role to play in making sure that students’ accommodation needs are being met at NIU. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and its amendments (ADAAA) requires students, faculty, administrators, and the DRC to each fulfill certain responsibilities to ensure that courses are accessible. The following sections highlight the responsibilities of each group.

Students

- Students work with the DRC to obtain academic accommodations or assistance. To initiate this process, students schedule an interview with a DRC staff member. During the interview, students may provide disability documentation and discuss how the

disability impacts their education. Any additional necessary documentation is provided by the student at his or her expense.

- Students collaborate with the DRC to get letters of accommodations from the DRC to faculty that identify their approved accommodation(s).
- Students are encouraged to meet with the faculty member privately to discuss their accommodations. There may be times when a student needs more specific accommodations in relation to a particular course than the approved accommodations provided by the DRC. If a question of whether an accommodation is required arises, conversations between the faculty member, the DRC and the student should occur to make a determination on what reasonable accommodations need to be made.
- Students are asked to request any accommodation(s) as early in the semester as possible. It is a student's right to disclose and request accommodations at any time. Accommodations are not required to be applied retroactively.
- Students with disabilities are expected to meet the same academic and conduct standards as their peers.

Note: Students are not required to pay for academic accommodations.

Faculty

Faculty may have multiple roles including employee, classroom instructor, employer, and web/technology developer. Accessibility must be a consideration across all professional activities.

- As an employee, faculty members have the right to any reasonable accommodation needed to do their job. Requests regarding job-related accommodations should be directed to Human Resources.
- As instructors, faculty should expect students with disabilities to meet the same academic and performance standards as their non-disabled peers. Strategies to increase accessibility include but are not limited to:
 - providing approved accommodations.
 - adding a syllabus statement notifying students about disability-related support services.
 - verifying the accessibility of online technology and websites. (If uncertain, contact the Disability Resource Center for consultation)
 - demonstrating attitudes of dignity and respect.

- incorporating principles of Universal Design.
- As employers, faculty involved in hiring processes must make sure that hiring practices are not discriminatory and that appropriate accommodations are provided to employees who have disabilities.
- As web/technology developers, faculty should verify that all software and web content is accessible to students who use screen readers.

Administrators

NIU encourages its administrators to work with the DRC and Human Resources to meet the University's legal obligations as well as create a welcoming and accessible environment for students who have disabilities.

- Administrators are expected to have fundamental background knowledge of disability legislation and university policy regarding disability law, particularly the ADA. They are also expected to educate and inform faculty and staff under their direction about the University's policies and procedures for students who have disabilities. They have a similar responsibility to assist in responding to accommodation requests made by students.
- Chairs and administrators may also need to serve as a coordinator or liaison between the student, faculty member(s), and DRC when disagreements arise.
- Accessibility is required of all purchased goods and services, including technology. Physical accessibility of all locations where classes, programs, and events are held is also required to the extent provided in law.
- Departments and programs are responsible for providing accommodations for meetings, events, and presentations that are open to the public.

Disability Resource Center

The University has designated the DRC as the entity to verify, determine, and provide appropriate accommodations for qualified students.

In addition, the role of the DRC is to:

- consult regarding reducing barriers for persons with disabilities.
- ensure the effective delivery of accommodations.

- increase the recruitment, transition, retention, and graduation of students with disabilities.
- promote and facilitate access through creative outreach and training, collaborative partnership, innovative programs, and proactive solutions.
- maintain test security and provide proctors for exams and quizzes taken in the DRC office.
- engage and support the campus community in progressive system change.

What if I have questions or disagree with an accommodation?

Faculty members may have legitimate questions or concerns about a student's specific accommodation. Concerns should be shared with DRC and the student jointly. While the dispute is being resolved, the student maintains the right to the original accommodation. When disagreements arise the University and student should engage in a conversation regarding the student's request for accommodations in an effort to identify reasonable accommodations that the University can provide. Students should not be put in the position of "negotiating" his or her accommodations by themselves.

What do I tell students if they have a grievance or concern?

If a student has a disability-related academic grievance or concern about a department, faculty, or staff member at the University, he or she can:

- contact his or her DRC staff member who may be able to assist the student in resolving the problem.
- speak with the NIU Ombudsperson
- file a written grievance with the Chair or Director of the department involved.
 - Written complaints should state the concern, the steps already taken to resolve the issue, the results of those steps, and the requested resolution to the problem.
 - If the student is not satisfied with the resolution, the student may appeal to the appropriate Dean and then to the Vice-Provost. The decision of the Vice-Provost is final.

Non-academic grievances or concerns may be addressed through the Office of Community Standards & Student Conduct as described in NIU's *Student Code of Conduct (revised August 2012)*. Within this process, students file an incident report. If they are not satisfied with the resolution, they may appeal to an Administrative Hearing or Conduct Board. Disagreements with the Board's decisions may be appealed to the Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management whose decision is final.

Students may also contact the Office of Affirmative Action and Diversity Resources as an additional option for complaints based on discrimination and/or harassment.

What campus resources are available to me and my students?

Disability Resource Center

The mission of the Disability Resource Center (formerly the Center for Access-Ability Resources) is to create an accessible, inclusive, sustainable learning environment, where disability is recognized as an aspect of diversity that is integral to the campus community and to society. The center is located on the 4th floor of the Health Services Building, and can be reached at 815-753-1303 (V/TTY) or drc@niu.edu.

Disability and Accessibility Online Portal

The NIU Homepage has a link that provides additional information, resources, and websites to supplement material in this tutorial.

Assistive Technology

Information Technology Services provides adaptive technology in computer labs in multiple locations across campus. All assistive technology stations feature screen reading software, screen enlargement software, text-to-speech software, and scanners.

Library services for people with disabilities

The NIU library system offers specialized library-use assistance to any person with a disability. Assistance will be specifically tailored to the needs of the individual. Assistive equipment is available in a specialized study room. The coordinator of library services for individuals with disabilities is available to discuss paper topics, library assignments, etc.

Presidential Commission on Persons with Disabilities (PCPD)

The Commission serves as a university-wide advocate promoting awareness, educating the university community, and assisting individuals on disability-related issues. The PCPD's vision is to have a university community characterized by dignity, respect, and equal access where all individuals are valued members of NIU's living, learning, and working environment.

Accommodations—Review and Quiz

Review

- The purpose of academic accommodations is to provide full and equal opportunity for students with disabilities to participate in all activities, events, programs, and classes offered by the University.
- Academic accommodations may include but are not limited to:
 - auxiliary aids or assistance (e.g., adaptive computers, note takers, sign language interpreters).
 - consideration for absences.
 - exam and testing accommodations.
- Students must take the initiative to obtain accommodations. They must first meet with a DRC Coordinator to discuss and potentially document their disability. After appropriate accommodations have been determined, students then share this information with their instructors via a letter from DRC.
- Typically, students must register with DRC to implement accommodations.
- Faculty and staff have a responsibility to honor approved accommodation requests. Disagreements about a student's specific accommodation should be shared with DRC and the student jointly. While the dispute is being resolved, the student maintains the right to the original accommodation.
- Administrators are expected to have a working knowledge of disability legislation, particularly as applied to higher education. They must ensure that faculty and staff under their direction are informed and educated about the University's policies and procedures for students who have disabilities. They are encouraged to inform students about the availability of accommodations as well as assist in responding to accommodation requests.

Quiz

True or false: Faculty decide what disability-related accommodations a student receives.

True or false: The Disability Resource Center makes the final determination in all academically related disputes.

True or false: Faculty are strongly encouraged to include an “accessibility statement” in their course syllabi.

Recommended Practices

What can I do to be more successful in working with students with disabilities?

The following recommended practices create and maintain a welcoming, accessible, and diverse university community. Small changes may make big differences in students’ ability to access information, demonstrate their knowledge, and participate fully.

- Include the NIU Accessibility Statement in course syllabi (http://niu.edu/disability/accessibility_statement/index.shtml)
- Use disability etiquette and person-first language to demonstrate respect and support for students who have disabilities. Disability Etiquette and Person-First Language are described more fully later in this section.
- Involve and include individuals with disabilities in planning and decision making.
- Implementing Universal Design (UD) emphasizes accessibility and usability in planning, design, and implementation. UD benefits everyone. It is important for students who have disabilities but do not request accommodations as well as students with diverse backgrounds and learning styles. See Universal Design below.

Disability etiquette

People who have disabilities report that other people’s attitudes are far more disabling than their own impairments. Public opinion polls identify “admiration, pity, and embarrassment” as typical attitudes held by the public toward people with disabilities.

It is common for people to feel uncertain about what to do or say when interacting with someone who has a disability.

Examples of etiquette questions

Q. How do you know if someone has a disability?

A. You do not. The vast majority of disabilities are invisible (e.g., disabilities based upon mental illness, deafness, learning disabilities, chronic illness)

Q. When you first meet someone who has a disability, is it all right to ask about it?

A. No. Wait until you get to know them first. The only exception is if you need to ask about a potential accommodation.

Q. Are there certain topics you should avoid?

A. Yes. Do not tell the person that they are inspirational or that you have sympathy for them. Also, don't tell them about all the other people with disabilities you know.

Q. What is the correct way to offer assistance or help to someone with a disability?

A. Ask. Do not assume that help is needed. Offer the assistance then wait until the person accepts. Then listen to or ask for instructions.

Q. How do you greet someone with a disability when you first meet them?

A. Offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands. Shaking hands with the left hand is acceptable.

Q. What should you do when you don't understand what was said?

A. Do not be afraid. Ask for clarification.

Q. If someone has a personal assistant, should you talk directly to them or the individual who has the disability?

A. Speak directly to the person with a disability.

Q. What are some strategies for talking with someone who uses a wheelchair?

A. Position yourself at eye level with the individual. Do not touch the wheelchair without asking. It is part of the individual's personal space, much like eye glasses.

Q. How should you act toward someone's service dog?

A. Do not disturb it, it is working. Get permission before petting.

Q. Is it okay to say "See you later" to someone who is blind?

A. It is a common expression. There is no offense.

Q. When you are talking with someone who stutters, should you finish their words if they get “stuck”?

A. No, be patient and continue to look at the person.

Person-First Language—Speaking, writing, and reporting about disabilities

“If thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.”

George Orwell

- Language has power and impacts attitudes. How we say things makes a difference. For example, certain words express bias (e.g., mankind, cripple, affliction).
- Person-first language provides a structure and philosophy for writing, reporting, and talking about people who have disabilities.
- Consider your emotional response to the following:

Typical language

afflicted with Advanced HIV

wheel-chair bound

Person-first

has Advanced HIV

uses a wheelchair

Guidelines

1. Identify the person before mentioning the disability.
My stepson has autism....NOT...My autistic stepson.
2. Mention the person’s disability only if relevant.
3. Do not describe the person as heroic or inspirational.
4. Use the terms “disabled” and “handicapped” correctly. They mean different things.

Disability = impairment (e.g., Deaf, Learning Disabled, spinal cord injury). The disability is an attribute of the person. It does not define the person.

Handicap = barriers. Barriers may be attitudinal (e.g., refusal to provide an approved accommodation), architectural (e.g., inaccessible buildings), and/or technological (e.g., websites that do not work with screen reading software).

Depending on the situation, anyone can be “handicapped.” Imagine that you are in a room with people using American Sign Language. Unless you know how ASL, you are handicapped.

Person-first language is endorsed by multiple professional and consumer groups including the American Psychological Association; World Organization on Disability; and the National Center on Disability & Journalism at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Arizona State University.

Universal Design of Learning

The implementation of Universal Design for Learning is acknowledgement that not all students learn and demonstrate content mastery in the same way. Examples include but are not limited to:

- posting lecture notes online prior to class.
- providing printed materials in alternate format.
- providing options in assignments (e.g., write a report or do a presentation).
- using a rubric for grading and giving the rubric to students when initially describing the assignment.
- using visual, auditory, and written strategies to provide content information.
- using clickers that have text and symbols on them and that have a virtual clicker option.
- setting up furniture in a meeting room/classroom that allows for wheelchairs to navigate.
- using equipment that is adjustable (e.g., adjustable height table; separate table and chair).
- selecting text that comes with an accessible electronic version or selecting it far enough in advance that an alternate format can be made.
- using multi-media materials with captioning.

Recommended Practices—Review and Quiz

Review

- You are encouraged to go beyond compliance and adopt practices that encourage a welcoming and accessible environment.

- Know disability etiquette. The most important “rule” is to ask rather than assume you know what to do.
- Person-first language treats a person’s disability as an attribute. It does not define the person. For example, a person uses a wheelchair; they are not confined by a wheelchair. Similarly, people HAVE disabilities. They are not suffering, afflicted, or victimized by their disabilities.
- Universal Design promotes accessibility for the widest range of people. It is not just for students who have disabilities. Using principles of universal design in the planning, design, and implementation of academic instruction, technology, housing, and student services ensures accessibility for students with disabilities as well as students with diverse learning styles and backgrounds.

Quiz

True or false: The terms “disability” and “handicap” are interchangeable.

True or false: When you see a person with a disability, you should always assist them.

True or false: When you are talking with someone who uses a wheelchair, it is best to remain standing.

True or false: When someone uses a personal assistant, talk to the person, not the assistant.