Inclusive and accessible design

Inclusivity and accessibility are vital considerations in any learning environment (including classrooms, company meetings, and conferences, just to name a few), and you have likely already made some adjustments to your communication practice to ensure that you are not excluding any audience members. However, you may not feel equally knowledgeable about supporting everyone, or perhaps you just need a refresher. Either way, here is a summary of some dos and don'ts associated with some of the most common inclusivity themes:

Designing for a diverse audience

Do…	Don't…
Think about whether your language, actions, and content are welcoming to all	Make assumptions about who your audience are, what they have experienced, or what they already know
Use images that show a balance of different genders, ethnicities, ages, etc.	Use imagery that consistently portrays only one type of person
Assign learning resources that incorporate the voices and views of many different types of people	Cover content that excludes relevant groups (e.g., omits perspectives of and contributions by women, religious and ethnic minorities, colonised cultures, etc.)
Provide opportunities for your audience to share their own diverse perspectives	Put people on the spot or expect one person to speak on behalf of an entire group
Actively encourage questions, counter-points, and lively dialogue so that students can learn from each other	Allow people to use hurtful language or express biased views that are not addressed or challenged
Try to create as many asynchronous learning opportunities as possible, to accommodate audience members who have unreliable computer or internet access and/or are located in different time zones	Frequently require people to log in at specific times or for lengthy periods
Check that you are using resources and platforms that are available to all your audience, no matter their location	Provide materials that cannot be accessed by all of your audience
Keep your audience's digital footprint in mind	Ask them to engage with any activities or platforms that might bring them more exposure or attention than they would like

Designing for audiences with visual impairments

Do…	Don't…
Use good colour contrasts and a readable font size	Use lower colour contrasts and a small font size
Publish all information on web pages	Bury information in downloads
Publish downloads in both PDF and DOC format	Publish downloads only in PDF format
Use a combination of colour, shapes, and text	Only use colour to convey meaning
Follow a linear, logical layout	Spread content all over a page
Put buttons / links and notifications in context	Separate actions from their context
Include alternative text to describe and explain visuals	Use images without providing a textual description of their content and relevance

Designing for audiences with hearing impairments

Do…	Don't…
Include captions and/or transcripts with all podcasts and videos	Make use of externally provided podcasts or videos that do not provide captions or transcripts – or, if you do, provide alternative sources of the same information for people with hearing impairments
Check prioritise the sound quality of all recordings you make; try to use a lapel mic or headset to ensure the sound is crisp and clear	Post recordings in which the audio is muffled, garbled, or contains lots of background sounds
Look straight into the camera when recording videos or meeting with people via videoconferencing	Turn away from audiences so they cannot hear you as well or lip-read
Use facial expressions, gestures, and body language to help convey your verbal messages	Speak too quickly, overly loudly, or with exaggerated lip movements – these tactics do not help with comprehension
Ensure that all key facts are prominently shared in written form	Provide core information or unexpected details or changes of plan in verbal form only
Use flow charts, outlines, and to-do lists to help audiences keep track of progress	Suddenly deviate from a pre-existing without providing clear warning

Designing for audiences on the autistic spectrum

Do…	Don't…
Use simple colours	Use bright, contrasting colours
Write in plain language	Use figures of speech and idioms
Use simple sentences and bullets	Create a wall of text
Make buttons / links descriptive	Make buttons / links vague and unpredictable
Build simple and consistent layouts	Build complex and cluttered layouts

Designing for audiences with dyslexia

Do…	Don't…
Use images and diagrams to support text	Use large blocks of heavy text
Align text to the left and keep a consistent layout	Underline words, use italics, or write in capitals
Consider producing materials in other formats (for example, audio or video)	Force audiences to remember things from previous pages – give reminders and prompts
Keep content short, clear, and simple	Rely on accurate spelling for search functions – use autocorrect or provide suggestions
Let audiences change the contrast between background and text	Put too much information in one place
Provide (preferably editable) downloads of on-screen content	Force audiences to access all content via their screens
Use a cream- or light blue-coloured background with black sans serif font	Use brightly coloured backgrounds, dark backgrounds with light-coloured fonts, or fonts with lots of serifs

Designing for audiences with dyspraxia

Do…	Don't…
Clearly articulate intended learning outcomes	Overwhelm people by sharing a large number of expectations
Indicate how you would prioritise various learning tasks, or steps associated with completing a particular task	Give people complicated instructions all in one go (use numbering to indicate order, and introduce new tasks one by one)
Give people plenty of time to practice and check their understanding	Rush people, particularly in association with complex tasks
Show how a particular topic or skill can be used in different contexts, and provide opportunities to experiment with this first-hand	Switch topics before people have had a chance to apply their knowledge in a variety of ways
Provide people with suggested timelines and to-do lists	Assume that people will automatically understand how to approach learning tasks

Designing for audiences with dyscalculia

Do…	Don't…
Explain what you are doing and why.	Just demonstrate something and tell people to 'do it like this'.
Highlight patterns.	Assume that people will see recurring themes on their own.
Revisit and reiterate.	Think it is sufficient to cover a topic or method just once; keep in mind that you can make the repetition more interesting by employing different learning tools or revisiting the same topic during different sessions.
Provide clear feedback on why something is wrong and how it can be corrected.	Say, 'this is wrong,' and then leave people to figure out the solution on their own.
Engineer meaningful successes.	Make learning any more difficult than it needs to be; keep in mind that you can always provide optional challenges for those who want them rather than requiring all people to engage with materials that may be beyond their abilities.

Designing for audiences with anxiety

Do…	Don't…
Give people enough time to complete an action	Rush people or set impractical or unnecessary time limits
Explain all steps of a process and indicate what happens next	Leave people confused about next steps or timeframes
Make important information clear	Leave people uncertain about the consequences of their actions
Signpost people to support they may need to complete a process	Make support or help hard to access
Let people check their answers before they submit them	Leave people questioning what answers they gave
Allow options for anonymous and asynchronous engagement	Force people to reveal their identities, especially when making contributions in real time
Alert people to upcoming icebreakers, pair work, and group work so they can prepare for social interactions	Surprise people with unexpected interactions
Give people an opportunity to form their own pairs and groups	Force people to work with others they may not know, or otherwise feel uncomfortable with

The advice above is not exhaustive, but should be sufficient to help you cater to the majority of your audience members' needs. Although the 'dos' and 'don'ts' are listed in specific sections, tips for overcoming one barrier can also be useful for overcoming another; in fact, it is generally true that adjustments made to benefit one particular individual tend to improve the experiences of everyone else.

They key is for you to remain observant and empathetic, and to engage your audiences in an honest, supportive dialog. You will also want to remember to request specific personal information you may need for each different audience, so that you can prepare accordingly in advance, and encourage your audiences to privately let you know of any needs that they think you should consider.

If you would like more information about inclusivity and accessibility, you may want to consult the following resources:

- [How to respect ethnically diverse names](#) (infographic series)
- [A guide to debiasing](#) (article)
- [Providing content and trigger warnings](#) (article)
- [Accessibility of eLearning](#) (free online course)
- [Introduction to accessibility and inclusive design](#) (free online course)
- [Understanding diversity and inclusion](#) (free online course)

If you would like to share a tip or recommend a resource, please contact us at REC2021@exeter.ac.uk.