

How accessible is your classroom?

Use this tool to identify possible barriers to learning in your classroom. What are you already doing to accommodate a variety of learning needs? What could you do in the future to improve accessibility?

1. Attitudinal barriers

Attitudinal barriers are behaviours, perceptions and assumptions that discriminate against persons with disabilities. These barriers often emerge from a lack of understanding, which can lead people to ignore, to judge, or have misconceptions about a person with a disability (Council of Ontario Universities, 2013).

Checklist:

- Staff do not make assumptions about a student's disability or capabilities.
- Students with disabilities can come forward and speak to instructors about the way they learn and what may be "disabling" in their course, classroom or teaching.
- Discriminatory language or behavior is challenged.
- An inclusive environment is created, in which all students respect people's differences.

2. Organizational barriers

Organizational barriers are policies, procedures or practices that unfairly discriminate and can prevent individuals from participating fully in a situation. Organizational or systemic barriers are often put in place unintentionally.

Checklist:

- The essential course content and learning outcomes are expressed clearly
- There is flexibility so that students can express their understanding of essential course content in multiple ways.
- Assessments evaluate the knowledge and skills that are directly related to learning goals and instructional methods. For example, if the learning outcome is to have a knowledge of health and safety procedures, students will not be penalized for slow writing speed or incorrect spelling.
- When student supports are not directly related to a learning goal, assessments provide students with those supports when they are being evaluated (e.g., text-to-speech tools for an assessment of history or science understanding, no TTS tools when assessing reading ability).

3. Architectural or physical

Architectural or physical barriers are elements of buildings or outdoor spaces that create barriers to persons with disabilities. These barriers relate to elements such as the design of a building's stairs or doorways, the layout of rooms, or the width of halls and sidewalks.

Checklist:

- Classrooms are accessible to students with disabilities (e.g. elevators, ramps, wide corridors).

- Adjustments can be made to lighting in the classroom, such as eliminating glare by closing blinds or drapes.
- Background noise can be limited, by turning off noise machinery or closing doors/windows.
- Assistive technology is available to improve accessibility.
- Alternative classrooms are available, if you cannot meet the learning needs of all your students.

4. Information or communications

Information or communications barriers occur when sensory disabilities, such as hearing, seeing or learning disabilities, have not been considered. These barriers relate to both the sending and receiving of information.

- Lesson goals and objectives are presented in varied and flexible ways (e.g., orally, in print, in digital text with read-aloud options, and/or as a graphic).
- Multiple and varied media are used to present concepts and content (e.g., text, images, graphics, audio, video, and multimedia).
- Materials and media provide visual equivalents for auditory information and vice versa as needed (e.g., captions for videos, text outlines for lectures, text-to-speech or digital voice tools for text).
- Students have the opportunity to practice new skills in a realistic context, through classroom demonstrations and simulations.
- Critical features, big ideas, and important relationships are highlighted to guide attention and learning (e.g., concept maps, highlighted text, outlines, diagrams, multiple examples with non-examples)
- On-going, relevant feedback is available to students (e.g., peer-to-peer conferencing in person and online, digital "worklogs" or portfolios with teacher/student exchange built in). Students exhibit self-monitoring skills and take advantage of ongoing, relevant feedback provided to revise their work and discuss it with peers.

5. Technology

Technology barriers occur when a device or technological platform is not accessible to its intended audience and cannot be used with an assistive device. Technology can enhance the user experience, but it can also create unintentional barriers for some users. Technology barriers are often related to information and communications barriers.

- Handouts and course materials are available in electronic format
- Course websites and online learning environments can be accessed using screen-reading software
- Technology is used to provide alternative teaching methods, through audio, visuals and web-based lessons
- Technology is used to give students alternative methods to respond and demonstrate their knowledge, through text to speech software and voice recognition software
- Technology aids such as spell checkers, alternative keyboards and recording devices, help students to engage more effectively in learning and increase their confidence and sense of independence
- Both students and instructors receive effective training on the use of technology