

MAPPING ACCESS

ACCESSIBLE TEACHING IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

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-Aimi Hamraie-

As universities declare class cancelations and mandate a shift to online teaching, instructors have the opportunity to design online course materials to be as accessible as possible from the beginning. This will also ensure that your course materials are accessible moving forward.

All of the below suggestions come from disability culture and community. Disabled people have been using online spaces to teach, organize, and disseminate knowledge since the internet was invented. Disabled people are leading survival praxis in apocalyptic times. Please recognize that the very types of remote access that universities now mandate for classrooms and conferences have been denied to disabled people. Please also recognize that disabled people have long engaged in refining methods for remote access to protests, classrooms, doctor's offices, public meetings, and other events. Mention this in your classes so that students know they are benefitting from crip technology and praxis. Commit to accessible teaching because it is crip technoscience and disabled ingenuity that has made remote participation possible.

ONLINE TEACHING AND ACCESSIBILITY

Shifting courses online is an opportunity to build in accessibility from the beginning. If you already use an online course manager, you may be familiar with some basic accessible teaching strategies:

- Image descriptions and alt-text for all images and videos
- Captions and/or transcripts for all videos.
- PDFs with OCR (Optical Character Recognition) for screen reader access

- Checking for screen reader accessibility with a tool such as [Webaim](#)

IF YOUR COURSE IS LECTURE-BASED...

You may be recording or livestreaming a lecture. Apps such as [Otter.ai](#) or [Thisten](#) can help generate transcripts from audio. They can also be integrated with Zoom conferencing.

You may consider assigning a student to take notes for the class in Google docs or similar platforms. This will help others focus while one person documents what was said.

Consider alternatives to video as Zoom may not be able to handle the extra load of so many more users. Alternatives could be: discussion boards, small group discussions on Google docs with report-backs, small groups with text chains and report backs.

IF YOUR COURSE IS DISCUSSION-BASED...

Video may be unwieldy depending on the size of your class. Encourage all students to self-identify (“Hi, this is __ speaking”) as they begin comments to make clear who has the floor.

You may set up discussion boards with pre-set questions to release at the appropriate time using your university’s course management software. Some versions integrate grading capacities, which can double as counting attendance.

You may also consider using platforms such as [GroupMe](#) or Google Docs for discussions.

Small group discussions in large classes can be done easily by sorting students into groups and having them email or text one another. You can ask them to report back in a shared document or on a discussion board.

Consider crip time. Do you want students to participate during regularly-scheduled class time or will your policy be flexible? Discussions do not have to happen in real-time during class times. They could be due at the end of the week. Students who are sick may not have the energy for a 90-minute discussion board or lecture. Consider adding in extra time for completing discussions and assignments.

Consider giving students credit for discussion if they turn in lecture notes or critical discussion questions.

Do not penalize students for spelling or grammatical mistakes. The extra cognitive load of so much typing (or text production via voice transcription technology) may make things difficult for them.

IF YOUR COURSE ASSIGNS TESTS, QUIZZES, AND PAPERS...

Tests and quizzes should be easy to set up in your university's course management software.

Turning in papers online should also be built-in. Consider the energy it will take to grade papers or use a screen for a long time. If necessary, adjust assignments to prevent fatigue.

IF YOUR COURSE ASSIGNS PROJECTS...

Shifting online could be an opportunity to encourage digital projects such as podcasts, maps, and interactive timelines. Remember to check for accessibility and include image descriptions!

IF YOUR COURSE ASSIGNS PRESENTATIONS...

Use class presentations as opportunities to encourage students to incorporate image description and plain language, to pre-circulate electronic access copies,

and to think about the form of presentation. For more resources, visit <https://u.osu.edu/composingaccess/>

AS YOU PREPARE FOR ONLINE TEACHING:

USE A QUESTIONNAIRE TO CHECK IN WITH STUDENTS

SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

1. Do you have reliable internet and a computer at home in case we need to shift online? Does your computer have a camera in case we need to do Zoom or another video conferencing option?
2. Do you have any accessibility requests for me regarding online teaching (for example, readings available in a different format, transcription of conversations, specific approaches to discussion boards, or a preference of video discussion vs. discussion boards)?
3. Please let me know if you need help accessing any resources, including basic needs (food, shelter, medical care), psychological care and counseling, childcare, a ride, or access to technology.

For a more in-depth survey, [Lauren Cagle has shared hers at this Google Doc.](#)

CHECKING IN ABOUT NEW ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS

Check in with your students about their access needs around online material. They may have not disclosed these previously if the course was primarily in person. They may need screen reader access, reduced screen time, live transcription, or other measures.

Consider reducing screen time for folks who get migraines or have other issues (I ration my screen time to 1-2 hours per day max). Making text available for

printing out, or making it possible to participate in Zoom calls with voice only and no image can help reduce problems.

CHECK IN ABOUT INTERNET ACCESS AND TECH AVAILABILITY

Ask about internet connection availability and available technology. Do not assume everyone has access to fast internet or cameras for livestreaming. Plan for the failures of livestreaming.

CHECK IN ABOUT WELL-BEING AND BASIC NEEDS

Ask your students if they are having trouble accessing housing, food, water, health care, mental health care, or other necessary resources. Class cancellations put housing-insecure students at risk.

CONDUCT A SYLLABUS HACK-A-THON OR DESIGN CHARRETTE

Distribute mid-semester course evaluations. Ask students to collaborate in small groups (accessed digitally) to participate in hacking and tinkering with the educational process. Use the opportunity for course redesign to teach them valuable lessons related to your topic.

BUILD SOLIDARITY, MUTUAL AID, AND FEELINGS OF CONNECTION

Build in elements of pleasure and connection to counteract social isolation. Begin class by asking how everyone is doing. Encourage them to check in on each other.

SUPPORT DISABILITY JUSTICE

If you have used and benefitted from this guide, please consider donating to Disability Justice Culture Club ([@disabilityjust1](#)), the [Disability Visibility Project](#), the [Harriet Tubman Collective](#), and [Sins Invalid](#).

Please also consider hiring disabled access workers, including ASL interpreters, transcribers, and access consultants.

This blog post was compiled from an earlier Twitter thread by Aimi Hamraie. To join the discussion, visit

<https://twitter.com/AimiHamraie/status/1237057301204197377>. Follow the Critical Design Lab on Twitter at [@criticaldesignl](#) and Instagram at [@critical_design_lab](#)