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Creating Accessible Documents Using Universal Design Techniques

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Tips to Reach All Students with a Universally Designed Syllabus

You can get your students off to a good start with a universally designed syllabus. When you create your next syllabus, start with the traditional methods and then add new features.

Tip	Traditional	Universal Design
Present information in at least two formats	Write the course schedule in paragraph or table form.	Highlight due dates on a calendar graphic.
	Write the main concepts to be covered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List the main concepts in bulleted form. Create a simple map showing how concepts connect.
Give students as many resources as possible	List required texts.	List places where students might find the text.
	Reference online resources.	Provide website addresses for each resource.
	Include a disability statement.	Include a brief statement that acknowledges diverse learning styles provide websites and phone numbers to students' services on campus as well as a map indicating where these services are physically and virtually to support students' learning experiences.
Provide lots of background information—but be brief	List your name and contact information.	Give students a brief overview of who you are and why you are teaching this topic.
	List the course's name.	Include a picture, graphic, or short sentence explaining the meaning of the course's name.
	List the required texts.	Give short explanations of why you chose each text or background on the author.
	List the assignments and general requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use rubrics to introduce and explain the importance of assignments. Provide examples of good assignments, highlighting what each does well.
	State the purpose of the course.	Use an essential question to frame the course and meetings. Come back to this question at major points in the syllabus.
Build in flexibility	State your office times and location.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show your schedule on a calendar graphic. Provide a map of your office. Give directions from the classroom to your office.
	Hold office hours in your office.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold office hours immediately before or after class in the classroom. Hold virtual office hours (email, instant messaging chat, phone).
	Require that students complete assignments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer students a choice of assignments (e.g., give a presentation or write a paper). Let students choose a subject related to the material that interests them. Create a rubric for this process.
	Require students to submit their assignments in class.	Give students the option of submitting assignments via email, a course website, or a drop box.
	Assignments are due on a specific date.	Give mini-assignments (cumulating in the large one) with flexible due dates. Check in with students about their progress.
Go digital	Hand out your paper syllabus on the first day of class.	Distribute the syllabus on a course website, in an email, on a CD, etc.
	Select traditional paper texts.	Choose textbooks that also come in digital format (CD, on a website, etc.). Inform students that the text is available in both paper and digital formats.
Less is more	Put everything about the course on your syllabus.	Too much text and information is overwhelming. Give only the facts of the course. Make a separate handout with extra information. Post it online or pass it out when appropriate.
	Go over the entire syllabus at the beginning of the course.	Go over only the most crucial information—concepts covered, required text, expectations, and assignments (briefly). Cover the rest as it comes up.