

Guideline accessible online education

Diversity Office, April 14, 2020

Leiden University decided to move its teaching activities online for the remainder of the academic year 2019/2020. Accessible education is important for everyone, but in particular for students with disabilities. Additionally, educational institutions are legally required to be accessible. How can lecturers and others involved make online education as accessible as possible? This guideline outlines various focus points and concrete advice.

- [Each faculty](#) has a contact person for specific questions concerning accessible online education.
- [ISSC](#) is available for questions of a technical nature.
- [Fenestra Disability Centre](#) provides advice and support with regards to studying with a disability.
- [Expertisecentrum Inclusief Onderwijs](#) offers a helpline for higher education professionals for specific questions and advice regarding studying with a disability (only in Dutch).

General

- The most important rule of thumb is that students know best what they need, including students with disabilities. Create various possibilities for students to report their access needs, proactively ask about them and let them know you're open to thinking along with them.
- Check whether all students have a stable internet connection, a suitable laptop or computer, and sufficient space to participate in online education. This might seem self-evident, but it is not a given.
- Pay attention to signals of students who are not engaged with online education, share concerns with regards to deadlines or indicate that their home environment is not ideal. Be attentive and provide solutions where necessary, possibly in coordination with study advisers and Fenestra.
- This crisis situation is demanding for all people involved. In a normal situation studying is relatively more demanding for students with disabilities, for example because of the regulatory burden, limited energy and medical appointments in addition to their study schedule. Take students with disabilities into consideration in this extra stressful time and support them by creating tailor-made solutions if necessary.
- All students profit from accessible online education and a lot of students with disabilities feel uncomfortable being put in a 'special' position. Try to be inclusive without overly emphasizing it.

Preparation

- Transparent communication is important in these stressful times. Inform students as clearly as possible about the new schedule and layout(s) of the course, for example via email and Blackboard.
- Provide course materials and other content before or after the educational activity, so students can prepare and process the teaching material to their best ability.

- The less interference, the more students can follow. Provide as clear imaging and sound as possible. This is especially important for Deaf and hard of hearing students, so they can listen and speech read ('lip read') well.
- Ideally, all online content is equipped with subtitles and detailed dictates. Kaltura offers subtitles in Dutch and English with an accuracy rate of 90%, offering partial access. If subtitles are not possible, consider using the *notes* functionality of the online classroom offering students the option to read the lecturer's notes.

Resources

- The [Microsoft Teams app](#) offer real-time subtitles. This functionality only works when English is spoken. The apps [Otter.ai](#) and [Thisten](#) offer live subtitles as well.
- Stichting Accessibility [researched](#) the accessibility of various videoconferencing tools, including Microsoft Teams, Skype and Google Hangouts (only in Dutch).
- [This short clip](#) discusses the do's and don't's of accessible online presentations. See also the [quick wins for lecturers](#) compiled by Expertisecentrum Inclusief Onderwijs (only in Dutch).

Interaction with students

- Online education takes more energy than education in a classroom. Schedule short breaks and frequently check if all students are able to keep up.
- Overstimulation is lurking when online education is involved. Online education benefits from a transparent structure, clear arrangements regarding imaging and sound (for example muting the microphone when one is not talking) and scheduling moments for interaction in advance.
- Divide pre-recorded lectures in multiple fragments so student can take a break in between, rather than recording it all in one go.
- Try to maintain attention for individual students, for example by having another lecturer or assistant answering questions during the lecture or working group.
- Offering students the course material in multiple ways improves their learning process. Consider whether integrating *discussion boards* or subgroups reporting back is helpful for your lectures. Interactive work methods contribute to students' motivation. Keep in mind that lecturers have no access to the Kaltura breakout rooms.

Resources

- Various tools encouraging the interaction with and amongst students are [Kahoot](#) and [Peer Wise](#).
- [Times Higher Education](#) and the [University of Arkansas](#) offer practical advice for effective and inclusive online education.
- In this [short animation](#) Dr. Russ Harris offers concrete tools to deal with concerns and anxiety with regards to the corona crisis. You can share this animation with your students and/or colleagues.

PowerPoint presentations

- Make sure that PowerPoint presentations are clear: start the presentation with an overview of the structure (and return to this slide regularly), don't put too much information on one slide, clarify important concepts both in speech and in writing, and summarize the most important information on the final slide(s).
- When using images, videos or other visual material, provide a clear description in both the text and the explanation. A so-called 'thick description' helps all students to better understand the explanation.
- For students with visual impairments it is important that PowerPoint presentations have a high contrast between the background colour and the text.
- Use the split/share screen functionality, so both the lecturer and the presentation are visible.

Resources

- [Microsoft](#) and [Trinity College Dublin](#) offer practical advice for creating accessible PowerPoint presentations.
- It is possible to [record a slide show with narration](#) in PowerPoint and subsequently [export it as a video](#). [Adobe Spark](#) allows you to add voice recordings to separate slides. This can be useful for pre-recorded lectures.

Accessible texts

- Guidelines for accessible texts: sans-serif typeface (such as Helvetica, Arial, Verdana, and Calibri), minimum font size 10, and minimum line spacing 1,5. It is important to create headlines and paragraphs with the Word function Styles in the Home tab (instead of enlarging texts manually), otherwise screen reading software is unable to detect the layout.
- When using images, videos or other visual material, provide a clear description in both the text and the explanation. A so-called 'thick description' helps all students to better understand the explanation and creates access for students using support software.
- Kaltura is fairly compatible with screen reading software for people with visual impairments. The layout becomes slightly distorted, but Kaltura's functionalities remain intact.
- Word can check texts for accessibility through an automated check. Go to File > Info > Check for Issues > Check Accessibility.
- If possible, use Word documents instead of PDF files since they are more accessible. Make sure that websites and PDF files are readable for *text-to-speech* software. Not only does this improve the accessibility for students with visual impairments, but also for dyslexic students.

Resources

- An extensive overview with tips & tricks for creating accessible texts can be found [here](#).
- [This article](#) offers practical advice for making a good image description.
- Also see the website of [Trinity College Dublin](#) for guidelines for creating accessible PDF files.

Examination and assessments

- Inform students well in advance about the planning of online classes and examination (at least 5 working days). This allows students with disabilities to adjust their planning, energy distribution and other obligations accordingly.
- Consider using types of assessment that are less time-bound, such as (short) essays and essay questions.
- Keep in touch with students and lower the threshold to contact the Board of Examiners as much as possible. This allows students to ask questions with regards to requesting accommodations.