# Key principles of inclusive teaching

Inclusive teaching contributes to students being:

* able to identify and communicate their learning needs
* motivated to learn
* confident that they can participate and encouraged to do so
* clear about what they are expected to do and achieve

Establishing an inclusive learning environment is a collaborative endeavour, involving teaching staff, University support services and students.

This resource outlines key principles of inclusive teaching that apply across different settings and contexts. Following these principles can help to create an inclusive learning environment where students feel valued and that they belong.

## Finding out about our students

Before we start teaching, we can start to address inclusivity by thinking about who our students are and what they need to achieve in their learning. This can help us to design teaching that is appropriate and meaningful for our students.

The level and type of information we know and can find out about our students will likely vary according to the type of teaching we're doing as well as our role and responsibility. In a large lecture, it is uncommon to have very detailed information about each student, and this would not be practical for a large group. However, we can still consider relevant factors such as:

* the skills and knowledge that students need to build and develop during their course
* what students may have already studied during their degree
* how students will be assessed
* what we want students to gain from our teaching
* the year-group of the students attending
* differences between students' prior knowledge
* whether students will have different disciplinary or educational backgrounds
* whether individual students have shared [Student Support Plans](https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/the-student-support-plan-what-is-the-student-support-plan-and-how-is-it-prepared#collapse1661101) outlining required adjustments to teaching
* common requirements for disabled students

Information about students and their programme of study comes from various sources including [OxCORT](https://www.oxcort.ox.ac.uk/), course handbooks, colleges and departments. We can also find out information directly from students, for example, by encouraging them to share their academic interests or designing activities that will help us to gauge their prior knowledge and learning.

## Communicating with students

What we communicate to students and how we do this impacts on students’ learning. This can range from practical details – such as giving students information about how and when they can contact us or setting out how frequently we will be meeting with them – to broader issues such as the language and examples we choose to use when explaining concepts.

Key to communicating with students is **clarity of expectations.** Students will have different expectations about how they should participate and complete work, the desirable qualities of the work produced, how they should use reading lists and other resources, and so on. By making our expectations explicit all students will be better placed to achieve and work towards specified goals.

As well as clarifying expectations, inclusive communication means:

* connecting students learning, making it clear why students are learning something and what else it links to in their degree
* establishing an environment in which students are encouraged to ask questions and try out ideas
* promoting respectful discussion, which may require clarifying appropriate language and communication, particularly when discussing sensitive topics
* using language that is respectful of different student identities

## Making teaching accessible

The term accessibility relates to whether all people can use, participate in or benefit from a particular resource, service or environment regardless of any disabilities or other needs. In an educational context, it refers to the removal of barriers disabled students might face in acquiring and reading teaching materials and participating in activities, for example, [The Guide to supporting disabled students](https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/supporting-disabled-students) is a key resource for those who teach at Oxford and contains guidance on [implementing common reasonable adjustments](https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/teaching-and-learning-reasonable-adjustments).

However, accessibility is important for all students, some of whom will have mild and undiagnosed [Specific Learning Difficulties](https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/files/specificlearningdifficultiesspldpdf).

Sometimes students will require accessibility adjustments that we cannot anticipate. However, by following [accessibility guidelines](https://www.ctl.ox.ac.uk/accessibility-teaching) we can remove most common accessibility issues from the outset. It is good practice to follow these guidelines for all students, regardless of whether they have disclosed a disability. Doing so will:

* benefit all students by increasing readability of material, giving students time to prepare and so better participate, and giving students greater autonomy in their learning
* reduce the need for students to disclose a disability
* reduce the need for tutors to retrospectively spend time adapting teaching to meet the needs of disabled students

A key aspect of anticipatory practice is the provision of materials in advance and online. This is invaluable for students with accessibility requirements. However, clear guidance should be provided to students about how you expect them to use these additional materials to avoid students simply adding to their workload.

## Diversifying our teaching

Even if we're not actively reflecting on this issue, many of us diversify what we teach and how we teach it in order to increase student engagement and participation. When we do this, we are recognising and valuing the diversity of our students.

Some of us do this by diversifying the materials we teach with, for example, using texts, images, objects or videos. When we do this in a way which is inclusive, we don't ask students to do more work, but instead give different ways of engaging with learning. This sometimes means swapping or replacing existing materials to create greater variety rather than greater quantity.

Many of us diversify our teaching by using different ways to give feedback, for example, recording video feedback, using peer assessment activities, and typing written comments. Sometimes we take this one step further by giving students some choice about how they receive feedback, acknowledging that this can be particularly important for some students, such as those with specific learning requirements.

Most of us give students a range of ways of demonstrating and reflecting on their learning, for example, asking them to do writing tasks, to give presentations, to work on group projects, to engage in debates, or to contribute anonymously. This involves identifying tasks that will support students to develop the skills and knowledge that will be assessed during their degree. Giving students some choice can also support and motivate students. This might mean giving students a range of questions, topics or formats to choose from. However, giving students too many choices can be overwhelming, particularly if these are unfamiliar. So when we do give choice, it is best to limit this and provide guidance to help students to make an informed decision.

Currently, many of us are thinking about ways we can recognise and promote a variety of perspectives in our teaching. For example, by showing different approaches to a question or alternative arguments so one single perspective does not dominate. This includes representing a range of contributors to the field and in doing so showing that voices from different cultures, genders, races, and backgrounds are present and valued. This can shape our students' experience of learning by increasing their engagement, sense of inclusion and even attainment.