

Resource Guide

Considerations When Teaching Online: Part 2

Online courses have increased educational opportunities for countless learners, yet accessibility remains an afterthought for most faculty teaching in this format. Making an online course accessible means that every student can benefit from the learning activities you use, and not be confronted with barriers that prevent them from interacting with required course components. Although specific frameworks, such as the internationally recognized Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), are helpful for promoting digital accessibility, the following myths continue to hinder efforts at creating inclusive online environments:

- **Myth #1: Creating accessible content takes too much time.** Highly visible examples, such as an instructor spending hours re-creating a PDF document to have real text or captioning a 15-minute video, give the false impression that creating accessible content is too time-consuming. If you notice that your webcam lectures lack closed-captions, upload them to YouTube or Panopto for automatic captioning. The next time around, create an outline beforehand that you can turn into a transcript for students to view as a tactile alternative. These small modifications, coined the “Plus-1” approach by Tobin and Behling (2018), immediately improve the accessibility of your content.
- **Myth #2: Accessibility only benefits a small number of students.** Having an accessible online course improves the learning experience for all of your students, regardless of whether they have a disability or not. Closed captions are an essential instructional aid for students with hearing impairments as well as students who speak English as a second language or those working on your course late at night in their dorm room. Realizing that these improvements have a positive impact on all learners will allow you to see the value and benefit behind your individual efforts.
- **Myth #3: It’s better for me to address student accommodations once I start teaching.** Faculty tend to default to the standard “one student, one change, one time” approach, meaning that they react to accommodation requests as they arise in their teaching. Be proactive by structuring your course in an intuitive manner, varying the representation of your course content, and incorporating learning activities that allow students to express what they are learning in different ways. These strategies, which are central to the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, might even result in you not knowing that individual students need special accommodations to begin with (Coombs, 2004).

Resources

Coombs, N. (2004). *Making online teaching accessible: Inclusive course design for students with disabilities*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Tobin, T., and Behling, K. (2018). *Reach everyone, teach everyone: Universal design for learning in higher education*. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center by [email](#).