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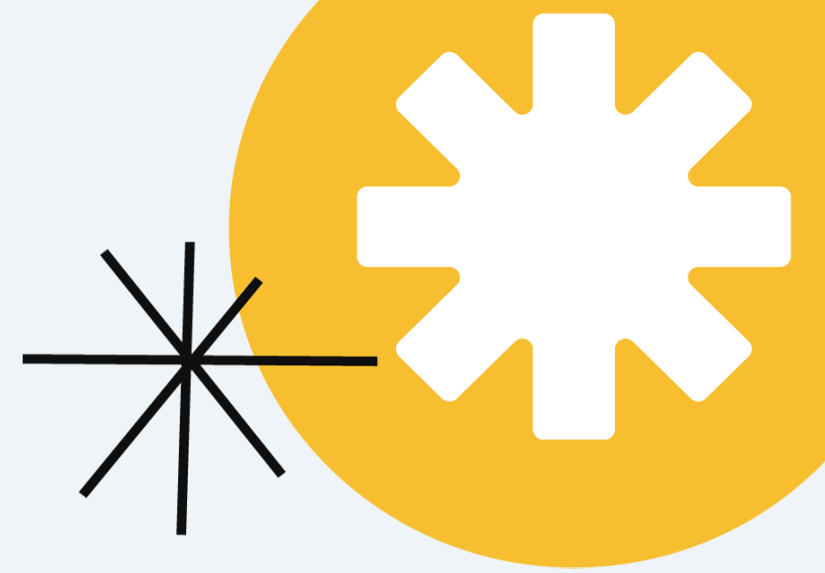
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Agenda

- Introductions and access information – **2 minutes**

- Key definitions – **5 minutes**

- Multi-modal learning and cognitive load – **10 minutes**

- Flexibility and accountability – **5 minutes**

- Wrap and call to action: access statements – **3 minutes**

Key definitions

Accessibility

The **intentional** and **proactive** work we do to identify, prevent, and remove barriers for disabled people. It's about designing spaces, programs, services, and communications so everyone can access and use them with dignity, independence, and ease.

Accessibility work involves:

➔ Identifying, removing, and preventing barriers

➔ Designing spaces, programs, services, and communications to be flexible and adaptable to different engagement styles

➔ Clearly communicating accessibility information

Source: How do we define accessibility?

Academic accommodation

→ **Academic accommodations** are adaptations that aim to reduce or eliminate barriers to participation which arises when a student with a disability interacts with the academic environment

- **Academic environment**: Anything in the academic institution and practices, including classroom environments, assessment practices, or learning strategies

Accommodations versus accessibility

Accommodations

→ **Reactive** and **individualized**

→ Requires **individuals** to identify barriers and initiate the process of removing them

→ Is usually a confidential process that **needs to be requested** by the person with a disability

→ Improves **access for one person**

Accessibility

→ **Proactive** and **systemic**

→ Requires **organizations** to identify, remove, and prevent barriers

→ Planning and design can be **public and include consultation**

→ Requires an **enterprise-wide** approach

→ Improves **access for everyone**

ADHD

→ ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition affecting **attention**, **impulse control**, and **executive functioning**.

→ Executive functioning includes:

- Planning and organization

- Working memory

- Task initiation and follow-through

- Interoception and emotional regulation

Key terms

→ **Neurodivergence** is the state of being neurodivergent

→ **Neurodivergent** means having a mind that functions in a significantly different way from what's considered or valued as "normal" in a given society or context

→ **Neurodiverse** describes the limitless diversity of human minds

→ **Neuroinclusive** refers to environments, practices, and attitudes that actively welcome and support neurodiversity.

Sources: Nick Walker (Neuroqueer); Ludmila Praslova (Forbes)

Multimodal learning and cognitive load

Cognitive load theory

➔ Before we can learn new information, we must **process it in our working memory**

➔ Working memory has **limited capacity**

➔ Disabilities can affect working memory

- Spoon theory

Strategies to reduce cognitive load

➔ Chunk content into **smaller, digestible units**

➔ Give **clear direction** with **strong action words** and use **plain language** where possible

➔ **Simplify LMS navigation** and **clearly label** materials

➔ Offer **examples** and **checklists** for complex tasks

➔ Offer **multimodal learning** with multiple means of engagement

Multimodal learning

➔ **Multimodal leaning** is an educational approach that aims to offer engagement with different senses to engage students and improve learning retention.

➔ Offering multiple forms of sensory engagement/input gives students different ways to retrieve and access working memory.

- **For example**: engagement/input that's visual, auditory, tactile

➔ This can reduce cognitive load, or, at minimum, give students a chance to choose how they spend their "spoons"

Multiple means of engagement, representation, action, and expression

➜ **Principles of Universal Design for Learning that emphasize offering:**

- Information and content in multiple format (verbal, textual, etc.)
- A variety of activities (both learning and assessment)
- Choice and autonomy
- Support!

➜ Ultimately, the goal is to offer **multimodal learning** while also supporting **student agency** and **dignity**.

Building in flexibility and accountability

What does this mean in practice?

➔ Cultivating an **accepting space** with no shame

➔ Opening **clear lines of communication** and **emphasizing trust and rapport**

- Being open about the fact that you are human too!

➔ Offering **flexibility** in the classroom, in communication, and in assessment

➔ Building in **accountability** throughout the semester

Flexibility

→ Flexible due dates
- Specific late policy practices
- Emphasize communication

→ Multiple means of demonstrating knowledge

→ Recorded lectures for self-paced review

→ Time-buffered assessments

→ Assessments with multiple segments to select from

Accountability

→ Clear rubrics and expectations

→ Weekly check-ins or mini-deadlines

→ Non-graded feedback and peer review opportunities

→ Progress tracking tools

- **For example**: LMS reminders, check-lists, worksheets

→ Scaffolded assignments

Myth busting

→ Flexibility doesn't mean a lack of standards

→ Accountability and scaffolding is not coddling

→ Accessibility is not more work – it can reduce workload if you're strategic

→ People can fidget and listen at the same time

→ Not all folks with ADHD are the same – there's as much in-group variation as out-group

- This is why flexibility is so important!

Call to action

Adding an accessibility statement to your syllabus

untapped
accessibility

Thank you!

Get in touch

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