

Creating Inclusive and Accessible Syllabi and Moodle Pages for Your Remote Learning Classes

Guidance from Marni Jones, Dean and Director of Access and Disability Services and SOAR: Strategies, Organization, and Achievement Resources

It is important to ensure that your syllabi and Moodle pages are easily navigable, ADA compliant, and appropriately accessible to all types of learners, including students with disabilities. Adopt the following guidance to maximize access, clarity, and inclusion for your diverse population of students. Use the checklist on the last page to verify that you've covered all your bases!

PRESENTATION OF INFORMATION

- **ORGANIZATION:** Use clear, consistent, uncluttered layouts. (The [“Ready for Fall” Moodle page](#) was designed to serve as an example.) White spaces can help with information processing.
- **EXPECTATIONS:** Convey course expectations succinctly and create separate sections or documents to provide additional details.

USE OF COLOR: Limit your text color to black, blue, or gray and the emphasis color to red. If presenting information using colored charts and graphs, it's best to use primary colors (red, yellow, and blue) as these colors are discernable even by those who are colorblind.

- **DELINEATIONS:** Employ headings and bulleted lists to break up text and enhance focus.

USE TEXT BOXES AND TABLES to present key dates and information. (In Moodle, choose “insert chart”)

GRADING RUBRIC	
Exam 1	25%
Exam 2	25%
Final Paper	25%
Homework	12.5%
Participation	12.5%

EXAM AND DUE DATES

Every Wednesday — Upload Homework to Moodle*

September 29 — Exam 1

November 1 — Submit topic for Final Paper*

November 22 — Exam 2

November 25 — Bibliography for Final Paper due*

December 14 — Final Paper due*

**All assigned work is due by 11:59 pm*

- **FONTS AND EMPHASIS:** How you present information can impact students' abilities to easily read and process it, as demonstrated in this preferable first example:

I will be asking questions about the readings at the start of each class.

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- For emphasis, use bold font, rather than italics.
- Choose a font with no serifs (embellishments on the letters) which can be difficult for students with dyslexia and others to read.
- Good font choices include Calibri, Arial, Verdana, Tahoma, and Helvetica.

HYPERLINKS

Use descriptive wording for hyperlinked* text, rather than linking the word “here.”

Here is a link to my [Course Participation Grading Rubric](#).

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* A hyperlink is a link to webpage or a web-based document. To insert a hyperlink: Copy the web address from the bar at the top of the page (using *Ctrl/Cmnd + C*), then highlight the phrase to be hyperlinked. Right click the phrase and select “Link.” Then paste the web address into the address field (using *Ctrl/Cmnd + V*).

PRESENTATION OF RECORDED CLASSES

Caption or transcribe video and audio recordings whenever possible (and when required as an accommodation). Here is the [ADS guidance regarding recording, captioning, and transcribing lessons](#).

When posting links to pre-recorded classes, make sure to include the following:

- Title that represents the topic(s) covered
- Clear depiction of action steps necessary (e.g., WATCH, DOWNLOAD, SUBMIT)
- Dates by when actions must be taken
- Indications of anything “Supplemental / Optional”

HEY MR. BLUE SKY: THE COLORS OF THE ATMOSPHERE – 9/27

- **WATCH:** *Why the Sky is Blue* (before class on 10/1)
- **SUBMIT:** Reactions to *Why the Sky is Blue* (by 8 AM on 10/8)
- **CONSIDER:** Optional movie: *The Rainbow Connection*

If you wish to emphasize that any recordings you provide are for your students’ viewing only, you may wish to post the following statement to your Moodle page:

Students may not share, send, post, publish, make public, or duplicate any recordings without the written authorization of the recorded person(s). Failure to abide by these rules is a breach of privacy and violation of copyright laws. It is furthermore considered a serious violation of Dickinson College Community Standards and subject to disciplinary action. Unless informed otherwise, students are to destroy any recordings shared by their professors at the end of the semester. Thank you for your compliance.

WHY RECORD SYNCHRONOUS CLASSES?

Many students have encountered difficulty with accessing remote classes in real time, whether due to illness, home/work circumstances, or connectivity challenges. Whether or not you provide students who missed a class for legitimate reasons with the recording of the class, you’ll be able to provide them with a transcript of it.

As an added benefit, in the words of Professor Jim Hoefler, “It’s nice to have a record of what went on during a synchronous session so that you can refer back to it if need be.” (*How well did I cover that? What exactly did I say when I explained that? Which students participated?*)

STATEMENTS OF ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

Dickinson faculty are required to include in each syllabus a statement expressing a commitment to honoring reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities, but faculty may also wish to make an additional statement, given that many students (in addition to those with disabilities) may experience barriers in remote learning environments.

Here are two ways to communicate your inclusive policies and practices:

INCLUDE AN ACCOMMODATION SYLLABUS STATEMENT

Dickinson faculty must include in each syllabus the following statement, and it is further recommended that professors read it aloud. This encouraging approach best promotes the timely use of any needed accommodations. The current statement can always be found at [ADS' Faculty Resources page](#).

Accommodating Students with Disabilities

Dickinson values diverse types of learners and is committed to ensuring that each student is afforded equitable access to participate in all learning experiences. If you have (or think you may have) a learning difference or a disability – including a mental health, medical, or physical impairment – that would hinder your access to learning or demonstrating knowledge in this class, please contact Access and Disability Services (ADS). They will confidentially explain the accommodation request process and the type of documentation that Dean and Director Marni Jones will need to determine your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. To learn more about available supports, go to www.dickinson.edu/ADS or email access@dickinson.edu.

If you've already been granted accommodations at Dickinson, please follow the guidance at www.dickinson.edu/AccessPlan for disclosing the accommodations for which you are eligible and scheduling a meeting with me as soon as possible so that we can discuss your accommodations and finalize your Access Plan.

COMMUNICATE YOUR COMMITMENT TO ACCESS AND INCLUSION

The following statement was adopted from a statement created by [Explore Access](#) (which is an excellent resource for accessible online course design). **The link in the statement to “assistive technology”** takes students to a page created by the ADS/SOAR staff that provides a treasure trove of free and access-boosting resources (such as text to speech and dictation) – **valuable tools for all Dickinsonians!**

You are welcome to incorporate this statement into your syllabus as-is or revise it as you see fit.

Usability, Access, and Design

I am committed to creating a course that is inclusive in its design. If you encounter barriers that cannot be addressed through [assistive technology](#), please let me know immediately so that we can determine if there is a design adjustment that can be made or a strategy that can be employed to overcome the limitations of the design.

I am always happy to consider creative solutions for ways to improve the usability for all students, as long as they do not compromise the intent of the assessment or learning activity.

PDF ATTACHMENTS

You may wish to upload PDF documents to your Moodle site, including text excerpts or assigned articles. When possible, upload original PDFs (rather than scanned copies.) It's important that students are able to copy and paste important information and use a screen reader to hear the text read aloud.

You can check to see if your PDF is in an accessible format by attempting to copy or highlight a section of text. If you cannot, you can make the PDF accessible by either following this [Guidance for Making PDFs Accessible Using Adobe](#) or you can [convert PDFs using SensusAccess](#).

ACCESSIBILITY CHECKLIST

(Recapping all information presented here)

- Layout is clear, consistent, and uncluttered
- Course expectations are presented succinctly
(Details about assignments, presentations, etc. are in separate sections or documents)
- Font colors are limited black, blue, or gray with red only used for headings or to add emphasis
- Other means of emphasis are bold print or underline (not italics)
- If charts or graphs are used, the contrasting colors are primary colors (red, yellow, or blue)
- Sections are separated by meaningful headings
- "List tools" employed to break up text (bullet points, numbered lists, checkboxes, etc.)
- Font is either Calibri, Arial, Verdana, Tahoma, or Helvetica
- Hyperlinks are descriptive
- Lesson titles represent the topic(s) covered
- Action steps with due dates are clear
- Optional/supplemental materials are identified
- Included (and will read aloud) the *Accommodating Students with Disabilities* statement
- Conveyed commitment to access and inclusion
- Ensured that all uploaded PDFs are accessible (i.e. could be read aloud by a screen reader)

Sources: Burgstahler, Sheryl. "ADA Compliance for Online Course Design." *EDUCAUSE Review*, EDUCAUSE, 2020, er.educause.edu/articles/2017/1/ada-compliance-for-online-course-design.

"Designing an Accessible Online Course." *Explore Access*, University of Arkansas Partners for Inclusive Communities, 15 Mar. 2020, exploreaccess.org/accessible-online-course/.

QUESTIONS? Please don't hesitate to contact Marni Jones at jonesmar@dickinson.edu