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Teaching Is Accommodation: Universally Designing Composition Classrooms and Syllabi

This article theorizes teaching as accommodation and argues for a centering of disability in writing pedagogy. It examines how universal design can improve composition classrooms, applying inclusive principles to the syllabus in particular.

Accommodation is the most basic act and art of teaching. It is not the exception we sometimes make in spite of learning, but rather the adaptations we continually make to promote learning. Accommodation often has a more narrow definition in the academy, appearing notably in the syllabus. In required disability policies, universities often state that students can request “reasonable accommodation,” drawing from the legal language of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This article takes up these intersecting issues: academic accommodations, disability, and syllabi. The first section of the essay discusses contemporary theories of disability to retheorize *accommodation* as the process of teaching itself. Disability studies provides a key lens through which to view accessibility, which is the precondition to all learning. In the second section of the essay, I apply my reasoning to the syllabus as a specific example. By using disability as

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the starting point for course and document design, I pose strategies for universally designing writing classrooms.

Moving from Accommodation as the Exception to Accommodation as the Rule

Disability law first began affecting American universities in the late twentieth century with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and its expansion by the ADA in 1990. Before these statutes, a small number of the three thousand US colleges provided support for students with disabilities: a few were dedicated to disabled students such as Gallaudet, a few dozen developed services for students with disabilities due to the influx of disabled World War II veterans, and a handful like Berkeley created accommodations in response to student activists (Lissner). Under the new legislation, students with disabilities could not be barred or discriminated against based on disability, and today, 11 percent of students in the United States undergraduate population report having a disability (US Department of Education).

Legal backlash to the broadened access offered by the ADA has been so strong, though, that Congress passed the 2008 Amendments Act to stop courts from drastically limiting the scope of the ADA and the term *disability*, a trend described by legal scholar Elizabeth Emens (“Disabling”). In addition, the law’s protection from explicit discrimination does not mean people are fully accommodated. The ADA states that disabled people can request “reasonable accommodation,” if modifications do not “fundamentally alter the nature of” the program or impose “undue hardship” on the organization (ADA). The language focuses on the effects of accommodations for the institution, not the individual, and *hardship* and *fundamental alteration* underscore the threat they are seen to pose. Sushil Oswal notes that “reasonable” does not amount to “equal,” and Amy Vivaldi argues that the law is treated “at best as minimum requirements” (Kerschbaum et al.).

Students today must pass substantial hurdles to qualify for accommodations, initiating a medical and bureaucratic process, undertaking extra steps throughout their educations, and possibly outing themselves as having a disability. Once they receive accommodations, they face considerable social stigma. Ramona Paetzold et al. studied students’ perceptions of disabled people, specifically those taking longer test time, and found that “granting an accommodation was seen as less fair than not granting one” (27). Many

instructors view accommodations negatively as well. Disability scholar Linda Feldmeier White explains her initial attitude toward accommodation: “Before I had read much about learning disabilities . . . I couldn’t see what might constitute reasonable accommodation . . . since learning is the work that college students do”; she soon realized “this argument depends on a too-narrow definition of learning and intelligence” (Brueggemann et al. 372). Before I was exposed to disability theory, I saw myself as the pedagogical authority in the classroom, and making changes felt threatening to my too-narrow definition of best practice. Disability and rhetoric scholar Stephanie Kerschbaum critiques this common, problematic narrative in which disability is viewed as a threat to instructors (“Anecdotal”).

This threat often stems from ableist systems, in which “reasonable” accommodation is institutionally designed to change the least possible amount. Faculty working with disabled students receive little to no institutional support, sending the message that pedagogical changes

“Reasonable” accommodation is institutionally designed to change the least possible amount.

should affect only individual students instead of professors, institutions, and even other students. As a result, traditional accommodations often occur after the moment of communication has passed and do not challenge the culture of exclusion (Kerschbaum in Yergeau et al.). For example, a video transcript goes online long after the video is posted because professors do not have the technology and staff to transcribe quickly. Or a student testing with more time in a separate environment doesn’t receive the last minute advice of the professor. That extra time, though, might have improved the class overall. Studies show that additional time tends to benefit all students and especially disabled students (Sireci, Scarpati, and Li). If instructors decide to provide additional time, they face the limits of their schedules and the classrooms. By definition, “reasonable” accommodations are retrofits built on the condition that they cannot “fundamentally alter the nature of” an exclusionary system (ADA).

Resistance to accommodations across academia reflects and constructs several underlying assumptions, in particular that accommodations are the exception to the rule. Because accommodation is defined as an adaptation or adjustment, it presupposes an antecedent. In other words, with accommodation, there is an earlier version, a baseline that has changed. In teaching, we often see this traditional version as falsely rigid, assuming

it is an exemplary original, a “best practice.” Accommodation, in contrast, is seen as a deviation from that norm. Yet any baseline is already a change from some previous baseline; it is an accommodation from an earlier form, for which there is no true or single original. Learning strategies seemingly become not-an-accommodation once they are no longer novel, once they are so common as to be “normal,” erasing the originating history as accommodation. For example, handwriting notes is seen as a “normal” student activity instead of an accommodation that helps students process more information than most can remember, and it’s seen as one type of activity instead of a multitude of different practices. Typing notes, in contrast, is seen as deviation from that “norm” and is often forbidden in “no-tech” bans (Godden and Womack). Ultimately, though, there is no normal, primary way of learning, only normalized methods made primary through frequent use. Material always changes as it moves from expert to novice. Every act of teaching is an accommodation because it creates certain conditions for students to learn and display learning.

Even though learning requires that material be accessible to students, educators often assume that making material accessible to *disabled* students threatens academic rigor. Inclusive learning organizations address this common fear in their resources, suggesting that accommodating students requires instructors to “eliminate unnecessary barriers without eliminating the necessary challenges” (CAST) or assuring readers that “[i]ndividualized accommodations are not designed . . . to weaken academic rigor” (DO-IT). Inclusion and rigor are only incompatible opposites when rigor is defined as exclusion and inflexibility. When rigor is defined as difficulty, they are complementary values. The way to teach difficult material well is always to make it more accessible. Accommodations can increase rigor when students are better prepared to take on complex subject matter. This false dichotomy of inclusion and rigor has confronted many civil rights movements, yet educators often feel it is justified with disability because of idealized notions of ability and independence. Ability and independence, though, depend on accessible environments.

As a result, the pedagogy I advocate centers the experiences of disabled students within a universal design framework to create more inclusive pedagogy. Universal design (UD) proposes that inclusive design is better design for all. The classic example of UD is the curb cut, which allows individuals using wheelchairs to access sidewalks as well as those using carts or stroll-

ers. For instructors, a meta-analysis of UD research found that the most recurrent recommendations included “multiple means of presentation,” “inclusive teaching strategies and learner supports,” “inclusive assessment,” and “instructor approachability and empathy” (Orr and Hammig 185). UD privileges flexibility and redundancy, building accommodations directly into the framework of a system. To create stronger pedagogy, then, White encourages compositionists to “examine whether teaching practices that require accommodations are really necessary” because traditional accommodations often develop from limitations in pedagogy (728). For example, my work with accommodations began when a student requested longer quiz time; I questioned whether there was a good rationale for stricter timing in my context and removed the requirement for all. Requests for accommodations, official or not, signal spaces for UD.

This line of argument coincides with several contemporary theories of disability. The social theory of disability, which became popular in the latter half of the twentieth century, has been useful in pointing out the ways that environments exclude. The social model rejects common medical approaches that pathologize and “correct” disability. Proponents differentiate between impairment, a physical or cognitive difference, and disability, a socially constructed difference that results from an exclusionary environment. In a powerful example, diversity speaker Susan O’Halloran tells workshop participants to record a paragraph with their left hand. When many writers don’t finish, she holds up the work of lefties and suggests, “You all had the same time, same tools, same assignment” (Perry “She”). The history of handedness—in which schoolchildren were forbidden from using their left hand because of a medical and moral norm—demonstrates in short how difference is made into disability. The stakes only get higher when we’re not talking about choices (left *or* right) but basic access, when students do not have multiple options. So, the social theory focuses on removing barriers to access. This model offers just one account of disability; it does not describe the various ways disability functions for people like me with chronic illness and other impairments. But it does offer the crucial insights that culture disables people by creating barriers to inclusion, and integrating people requires flexible accommodations.

Prominent disability scholar Lennard Davis continues the focus on accommodation and cooperation but critiques the social model for relying on an outdated view of identity as stable. He coins the term *dismodern* to

argue, “This dismodern era ushers in the concept that difference is what all of us have in common. That identity is not fixed but malleable. That technology is not separate but part of the body. That dependence, not individual independence, is the rule” (Davis, “End” 273). Instead of viewing *ability* and *disability* as a set of binary terms, he locates what people think of as abilities within the larger category of dependence. We all depend on the ways our bodies are culturally accommodated in order to function. Davis writes, “As the quadriplegic is incomplete without the motorized wheelchair . . . so the citizen is incomplete without information technology, protective legislation, and globalized forms of securing order and peace” (“End” 275). To illustrate, he argues that “normal parking becomes a subset of handicap parking,” not the other way around (275). In other words, parking accommodates all drivers, who as a result can park closer to a destination. While accommodations are usually seen as out-of-the-ordinary practices, as special conditions granted to individuals with disabilities, Davis reverses standard assumptions. Accommodation is the norm, not the special case.

Several critics have critiqued the globalizing force of such a position, shedding light on the limits of my current thesis as well. Robert McRuer writes, “When a field covers a larger terrain and purports to be about everything . . . , there is always the danger [of] trumping, transcending, and even colonizing” (*Crip* 201–2); “transcendence ultimately rel[ies] on a coherence and harmony that exclude difference” (“We” 151). If every pedagogy is an accommodation, as I have claimed, then all teaching—inclusive and exclusive alike—becomes synonymous with disability studies terminology. This alignment potentially undermines the field’s radical focus on including a marginalized minority population. So, in Davis’s argument, even though we’re all dependent, certain dependencies are still used to exclude and dehumanize people. In my argument, even if all teaching is accommodation, certain accommodations are still deemed “unreasonable” and exclude students. Therefore, not all accommodation is equal, and not all accommodations are treated equally.

A related limitation is that if we start to focus too much on accommodations for *all* students and less on individuals, then disabled students who have more limited options again fall to the wayside. Tom Shakespeare, in his evaluation of the social model, asserts that even though we can strive for barrier-free environments, “People who rely on wheelchairs, or personal assistance, or other provisions are more vulnerable and have fewer choices

than the majority of able-bodied people” (219–20). In teaching, we might consider first how to include individuals typically excluded, how to make the “normal” more inclusive, but then also leave room for changes to be negotiated later. To illustrate, when designing documents, I consider guidelines for dyslexic and blind readers, working under the assumption that if I create documents that more students *can* read, then more students *will* read. There is no perfect document, though, so students also need a format they can adjust based on their individual reading abilities (for instance, in text size and color). As educators, we must remain vigilant in imagining the ways that inclusivity can still exclude, in recognizing the pull toward colonization in inclusive projects.

This pull is clear in the *universal* design I advocate for, yet so is the scholarly insistence that the universal is indeed an unattainable fictionalized ideal. To return to the curb cut for example: cuts are sometimes relegated to out-of-the-way locations, and they “may present new challenges for people with vision impairments” who might prefer stairs (Emens “Accommodation” 20). Any design creates unforeseen consequences when it comes into contact with individual users, so UD fails insofar as it forecloses further accommodation. For instance, because I build extended paper deadlines into the syllabus, I might wrongly assume that I never have to offer additional time based on individual circumstances. Disability studies, though, examines UD as a continual process. Melanie Yergeau explains

Agency, for all students, comes from access. “Universal design is a process, a means rather than an end. There’s no such thing as a universally designed text.

There’s no such thing as a text that meets everyone’s needs.” Jay Dolmage says UD is “a push toward seeing space as in-process” (183). Richard Godden calls for a continual balancing of UD’s “utopian aims . . . with a more local, attentive approach to individual use” (Godden and Hys). UD does not cancel out the need for individual accommodations, particularly because difference is in flux, but it begins by incorporating difference and disability.

As I argue that teaching is accommodation and that UD begins closer to inclusivity than traditional design, I want to bring two issues into focus: creating access for students with disabilities and empowering all students. While these may seem like different, even conflicting audiences, I contend that they have only been seen as incompatible populations because of normalizing discourses and pedagogies. Agency, for all students, comes from

access. Academia accommodates one spectrum of students, overlooks that pedagogical history of accommodation, and ostracizes students who seek further inclusion. In illustration, the remainder of the article examines the ideologies that circulate through and around the syllabus.

Moving from Syllabus as Contract to Syllabus as Accommodation

The syllabus is the official document that declares certain practices are “accommodations” whereas others are normalized. While accommodation is traditionally one aspect of the syllabus—contained in the official disability policy—I suggest that the syllabus is one aspect of accommodating students. This genre is particularly important because the syllabus was named “the component [that] most often contribut[es] to effective college teaching,” according to a survey of two hundred professors, administrators, and students (Matejka and Kurke 115). Even so, many syllabi present problematic assumptions as they rely on text-heavy visual design (Cunliff), negative punishment language (Wasley), defensive and even combative policies (Perry, “Faculty”; Baecker), and cold-toned disability statements. In 2001, a CCC article, “Becoming Visible: Lessons in Disability,” issued a still unanswered call for scholars to analyze the syllabus for limiting ideologies about writers’ abilities and learning styles (Brueggemann et al.). Problems in the genre continue because syllabi are often treated as informational, not rhetorical, documents; writing instructors are often powerless to change standardized syllabi; and document design is not always accessible to faculty with and without disabilities. The following suggestions, then, provide multiple possibilities, all working to establish a tone of negotiation and flexibility in the classroom. They include (1) creating accessible document design, (2) engaging students with cooperative language, and (3) empowering students through flexible course plans. If instructors see the syllabus through the lens of disability, then the question becomes not how policies protect a normative standard but how far they extend inclusion.

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Historically, syllabi began as lists of topics in the late nineteenth century, but beginning in the 1970s educators began to see syllabi as contracts (Brosman). While a contract in its best forms implies negotiation, with a

unilaterally authored syllabus, students have little input. Moreover, a “syllabus is unlikely to stand as an enforceable contract,” says Jonathan Alger, former counsel to the American Association of University Professors (qtd. in Wasley). In general, courts leave these matters to academic institutions because syllabi are educational documents, *not* contracts. Some scholars suggest that the lengthy legalese stems from a breakdown of trust between student and instructor (Singham, “Away”) or the customer service model in which boxes are checked off for A’s (Schuman). Many realize that treating the syllabus as a contract can promote an adversarial relationship, much like “the fine print of a life insurance policy” (Cunliff 5) or “a prenuptial agreement” (Wasley). Historian David Perry argues that students “treat the syllabus more as an End User License Agreement—something . . . which one glances at briefly, clicks ‘agree to terms,’ and moves on to the product without reading.” His critique reveals students’ institutional powerlessness in the face of the document. The nearly unreadable fine print of end-user agreements is inaccessible to nonspecialists and purposefully obfuscates to avoid liability. Moreover, users must agree or not proceed, a one-size-fits-all scenario that flies in the face of inclusive learning.

Much scholarly literature on syllabi, most of which is in education, promotes a contractual view, but a selection emphasizes rhetoric tied to student agency. Diann Baecker calls for an honest balance of student-teacher power in her discussion of pronouns in syllabi. She finds that *you* is the most prominent and suggests instructors tend to mask power in creating solidarity through *we*. A study of common syllabi language found that syllabi often employ the imperative mood of commands, language that was “frequently strengthened by negation” as in “Never leave homework in the mailbox of a TA” (Afros and Schryner 228). Terrence Collins teaches in an open admissions wing and argues that inclusive syllabi need to make academic norms explicit, especially for nontraditional students belonging to underrepresented groups (80). Mano Singham, in contrast, argues for abandoning a formal syllabus altogether. He brings to class a tentative list of readings and takes the semester to negotiate with students how to assign meaningful grades (“Death” 56). The discrepancy between Collins and Singham illustrates that even while striving for inclusivity, one size does not fit all. Competing values make UD an ideal to work toward instead of an easy fix, particularly because disability intersects with race, gender, class, preparedness, and other identities. My work developed at a selective pri-

vate university with first-year writing courses capped at sixteen. I privilege brevity in the syllabus for my young and highly prepared first-year students, many of whom have learning disabilities. Because student populations are unique, what works on one campus will not meet the needs of every institution. Overall, it is crucial to consider the student audience and the document's rhetoric.

Strategy 1: Creating Accessible Document Design

The design of syllabi powerfully affects whether students can digest the material and, in turn, how they respond. Syllabi are not value-neutral documents on any level. Ed Cunliff in "The Boring Syllabus" argues that "meta-communication suggests that the form of the communication, its nonverbal elements, begin to define teacher-student relationships" (5). Though composition syllabi don't often reflect it, there is a rich history of visual and digital rhetoric within the field that makes texts more accessible. Document design scholar Saul Carliner describes a framework for information design in which writers examine the *physical* design that helps users find information, the *cognitive* design that helps users understand information, and the *affective* design that motivates users to perform (46). These principles demonstrate the document designer's responsibility to enable users.

When I shared my own syllabus in a faculty seminar a few years back, the leader took one look at fifteen pages of small prose and said, "My son has ADD. He would never pick this thing up and read it." I had worked to make the course content diverse and accessible but had ignored the document that facilitates that content. While redundancy across modes (e.g., visual and verbal) leads to increased access, redundancy within a single mode (like text) can lead to decreased access. Redundancy of information has its corollary value of conciseness. Syllabi today, though, have become less concise, particularly because of required policies. As I developed this article, this boilerplate is what academics asked about most. Some felt it can be overwhelming and alienating, and Rebecca Schuman recently mocked it in *Salon*, suggesting, "Go ahead and include that admin boilerplate, but do it at the end, in six-point type, and label it 'Appendix A: Boilerplate.' . . . Make it very clear . . . what you think is important for students to read and what you don't." In contrast, many administrators I've spoken with say these policies protect teachers and ensure standardization, and Catherine

Savage Brosman examines the controversial history of standardized syllabi, ultimately arguing that they are beneficial in multisection courses “as a guide—but not as a yoke” (65).

There are several ways to approach policy language. First, some information can be cut (if possible). According to psychologists Angela Becker and Sharon Calhoun, who surveyed 863 students on how they use syllabi, students ignore certain kinds of information. They “pay little attention to information they can find elsewhere (e.g., textbook information that is available at the bookstore and basic course information and withdrawal dates published in the schedule of classes)” (9–10). With student codes of conduct, too, the syllabus shouldn’t have to reiterate inappropriate behaviors. Second, information can be relocated to documents that come later in the semester, such as prompts. Becker and Calhoun’s research suggests that it’s a good idea to introduce items as they become timely. They found a “general trend for students . . . to pay less attention to syllabus items as the semester wears on. . . . [D]ata indicate decreased attention to makeup and late assignment policies near the end of the term, just when students often have many assignments due” (10). Third, hyperlinks provide a happy medium in which the syllabus links but does not repeat information outside it. Finally, for the remaining necessary text, format it to be appealing, legible, and navigable as my following suggestions demonstrate.

Trade some text for accessible images.

When students skim a document, images can quickly convey information and increase understanding. However, images are not automatically accessible to screen readers on computers, and Oswal describes how digital environments exclude blind users, even though they are assumed to present greater accessibility (Yergeau et al.). Alternative text (alt text) adds the level of redundancy necessary for screen readers. For creating alt text, Bryan Gould of the National Center for Accessible Media poses three questions:

1. Why is the image there?
2. Who is the intended audience?
3. If there is no description what will the viewer miss?

This third question, he points out, does not imply that alt text should include every visual detail, but rather that it should include the most important concepts. The rhetorical situation dictates the description necessary. STEM

guidelines suggest alt text be brief and focused on data, not extraneous visual details. For an image that will be the subject of rhetorical analysis, more detail would be necessary. Regardless, moving from general description to specifics allows readers to choose whether to go further and deeper. Finally, Gould suggests asking someone who has not seen the image to review the description.

Images also often introduce color, a format not legible to all readers. Kei Ito and Masataka Okabe provide guidelines for universal color design, suggesting foremost that information should not be conveyed through color alone. For example, on a grade pie chart, sections should be labeled inside or directly near the slices instead of with a color-coded key to the side. Certain colors are particularly likely to exclude readers; for instance, layering black on dark red can appear as black on black. Like all disabilities, color-blindness affects individuals uniquely; therefore, instructors must continually negotiate for inclusion.

By applying these visual principles, I moved from the old first page of my syllabus (Figure 1) to the revised first page (Figure 2). The old page shows dense text and undersized margins. The page contains the course information, required texts, course description, and grade distribution. There are bulleted lists, but the text covers almost every inch of the page. In the newer version, the information is organized in discernible chunks. There is more white space on the page, so the eye can rest and discern sections clearly. At the top, a rectangular collage suggests the rhetoric we'll study. It pictures public figures, including Martin Luther King Jr. and Hillary Clinton; American slogans from "Power to the People" to "Just Do It;" and iconic images from Uncle Sam to the Microsoft logo. I've seen other instructors use a single provocative image, photographs of authors, or a word cloud visualizing key terms. Beneath the banner is the course title, "First-Year Writing: Rhetoric and Research in the Digital Era." Below on the left, a table of contents contains hyperlinks to syllabus components such as the course description, grade distribution, and official policies. On the right, bulleted student quotes about the course provide a quick idea of the class structure. Blocked together at the bottom, hyperlinked images show essential course resources: a teacher icon with my name and email address (Freepik), a Canvas learning management system icon, a Google Drive icon, a notebook icon that takes students to a prompt for creating our own textbook, and the Remind logo for a class text message system. The new version strives to provide redundancy across modes: images for visual

learners; alt text for auditory learners; and digestible sections for learners with reading disabilities. (By the way, this last paragraph is an example of an image description.)

First Year Writing Spring 2014 Professor Section 29 ☉MWF 9-9:50, Section 30 MWF ☉10-10:50, Section 31 ☉MWF 12-12:50 🏢 RM 202

REQUIRED TEXTS AND TECHNOLOGIES

- Blackboard, *check daily for schedule and assignments* <http://University.blackboard.com>
- If you have a smartphone, get the Blackboard App—it makes life so much easier.
- Class Notebook; *Bring to Class Daily*. We are writing our own textbook, you will not purchase one.
- Class Text System: Text @text2014 to (555) 555-5555; then text back your name when prompted
- Class Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/class> “Like” page
- Oxford English Dictionary, www.oed.com (Off campus? From library.edu, go to top right corner and click OFF CAMPUS LOGIN. After logging in, you will be brought back to the library homepage and you can use subscription databases.)

COURSE DESCRIPTION (FROM ENGLISH DEPARTMENT)

English 101 is designed to help you write clearly and organize complex arguments that engage in a scholarly way with expert knowledge. Toward that end, you will learn to conduct independent bibliographic research and to incorporate that material appropriately into the sort of clear, complex, coherent arguments that characterize academic discourse. Specifically, you’ll learn that:

- To **write clearly** means that you must take a piece of writing through multiple drafts in order to eliminate any grammatical errors or stylistic flaws that might undermine the author/audience relationship;
- To **write with meaningful complexity**, you must learn to practice a variety of invention strategies (e.g., the five classical appeals, freewriting, reading and analysis, and library research) and to revise continuously the materials generated by these methods;
- To **make coherent arguments** without sacrificing complexity, your practice of revision must be guided by certain principles of style and arrangement, and you must grow adept in the genre of argument itself through work with models and templates established by standard persuasive rhetorics;
- To **create effective arguments**, you must cultivate strategies for positioning texts against each other to familiarize yourself with the arguments of others before developing your own claims, and grow adept at using warrants, evidence, counter-claims, and other rhetorical tropes to craft your own arguments. You will learn strategies for active, critical reading, strategies for deciphering why a text might be arranged a certain way and what that arrangement might mean;
- To **conduct effective research** means utilizing the library, evaluating sources, and incorporating the work of others into your texts using the proper conventions of citation endorsed by the Modern Language Association (MLA). You will also learn strategies and conventions for summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting others’ work to support and develop original claims.

To develop the skills mentioned above, English 101 balances seminar-style discussions with heavy student participation; brief lectures; hands-on productive work in writing workshops and guided “lab” exercises; and regular one-on-one conferencing with your professor.

Grade Determination: I am required to enforce a grading policy uniform with the standards of the university and the English department because this is a multi-section class in which many students must be graded similarly. At the same time, I want to work with you to ensure you earn the highest grade of which you are capable. That’s why I have daily work so you build toward papers and earn completion points; that’s why I give reading quizzes and notes so you get credit for your work and stay on top of the reading; and that’s why I create revision assignments so you always have thorough comments before you turn in the most heavily weighted version of the paper. I’ve set up this class to make it possible for you to do well while still maintaining ethics in grading, similarity across sections, and integrity at the university.

Unit 1: Analysis Paper	15%	Unit 2: Analysis Paper – Extension & Revision	20%
Unit 3: Research Paper	15%	Unit 4: Hybrid Argument Paper	20%
Group Work	10%	Low-Stakes & In-Class Writing / Quizzes / Homework	15%
<i>(Approx. 20 activities, calculated at end of semester)</i>		Handwritten Notes <i>(Submitted periodically)</i>	5%

Figure 1. Old syllabus.



First-Year Writing: Rhetoric and Research in the Digital Era

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What Students Say

- "Dr. Womack is unlike other teachers ... Traditionally, teachers teach topics and send you home to practice. Dr. Womack does this in reverse, you take notes at home and then you practice in class."
- "Come to class everyday ... discussions are crucial for success. Review old notes while writing essays to add elements we learned in class. This will boost your grade significantly."
- "Don't write off Dr. Womack's teaching style right off the bat because you're not used to it. Her method seems strange at first, but in the long run it will make you a better writer...you learn to become your best critic and analyze writing."

Course Resources



Dr. Anne-Marie Womack
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canvas



Google Drive



No books to buy.
We write our own.



Text @class to
81010

Figure 2. Revised syllabus.

Make text reader-friendly.

To format text, a strategic place to start is with learning disabilities that affect reading, such as dyslexia. The images in Figures 3 and 4 show before and after versions of a course description—one in typical paragraph format on the left and one formatted in ways that increase legibility for dyslexic readers on the right. The old text shows one dense paragraph in Times New Roman font and single spacing that takes up two-thirds of the page. The revised text breaks up the print into a list of bulleted points and follows recommendations from the British Dyslexia Association:

- Use a 12–14 point sans serif font (e.g. Helvetica, Arial, Verdana, Tahoma). Serif fonts, which have tails on the characters, can blend text together.
- Divide the page into two columns so that each line contains between 6–9 words.
- Use 1.5 line spacing.
- Break up text into smaller paragraphs of between 2–4 sentences.
- Avoid black text on a white background, which can produce glare. Instead use another dark font color on a light colored background, such as navy on light gray.
- Opt for bold over italics to emphasize text—the jagged lines can wash out text.
- Align text to the left. Centering makes it difficult to find the next line, and justified text looks like one overwhelming block. (“Text”)

These guidelines improve readability, but they do not undercut the need for rhetorical deliberation. My revised version, for example, uses 1.25 spacing instead of 1.5 to keep the document to one page, another factor affecting readability.

Other new font systems have been reported to increase text legibility for people with disabilities. *Dyslexie* font manipulates letter openings, slants, and tails so that each character has a unique form, the goal being greater letter recognition. The single study conducted on the font, a master’s thesis by Renske de Leeuw, found that several reading errors decreased with the font and that it created a *pleasant* or *very pleasant* reading experience for

English 1010 Course Description:

The purpose of English 1010 is to teach students to write clearly and to organize complex arguments that engage in a scholarly way with expert knowledge. Toward that end, students will learn to conduct independent bibliographic research and to incorporate that material appropriately into the sort of clear, complex, coherent arguments that characterize academic discourse. More specifically, in English 1010, students will learn that to write clearly means that they must take a piece of writing through multiple drafts in order to eliminate any grammatical errors or stylistic flaws that might undermine the author-audience relationship. They will also learn that, to write with meaningful complexity, they must learn to practice a variety of invention strategies, from the five classical appeals to freewriting to commonplaces to analytic reading strategies to library research – and to revise continuously the material generated by these methods. Students will also learn that, in order to make coherent arguments out of the material generated through these invention strategies without sacrificing complexity, their practice of revision must be guided by certain principles of style and arrangement -- for example, principles of emphasis, cohesion, parallelism, figuration, and syntactic variation, to name a few. Also, students must grow adept in the genre of argument itself through work with models and templates of the sort outlined in the standard rhetorics of argument. Students must learn, moreover, that in order to create effective arguments they must cultivate strategies for analyzing the texts of other – that is, they must grow adept at situating the texts of others in a context, looking at them through the lens of some other body of thought, to see how such a move heightens the significance of certain elements of the text under analysis. And they must learn strategies for active, critical reading, strategies for deciphering why a text might be arranged a certain way and what that arrangement might mean, as well as strategies for summarizing and paraphrasing and quoting. Also, they must learn to conduct research in the library, evaluating sources, incorporating the work of others into their texts and doing so while following the proper conventions of citation endorsed by the Modern Language Association. Finally, in order to maximize the students' potential for developing these abilities, the method of instruction in English 101, week by week, will be organized as a hybrid that combines four different instructional modes: 1) discussions as appropriate to a seminar; 2) hands-on, productive work as appropriate to a studio or lab; 3) brief lectures; 4) regular one-on-one conferencing with the teacher. Through all of these means, students in English 1010 will learn to produce clear, complex, coherent writing with meaningful academic content.

Figure 3. Old course description.

more than half of the dyslexic readers questioned. About 40 percent rated it a *neutral* experience, so few saw it as negative. The study, conducted on forty-two participants, half of whom were individuals with dyslexia and half without, also found an increase in some other errors, though, and it did not find an increase in reading speed. The font is free for personal use, and a similar open access font is available called Opendyslexic. Another experimental program claims to enable readers with dyslexia and ADD to read more quickly. The BeeLine Reader, a web browser add-on and PDF

English 1010 is designed to help you write clearly and organize complex arguments that engage in a scholarly way with expert knowledge. Toward that end, you will learn to conduct independent bibliographic research and to incorporate that material appropriately into the sort of clear, complex, coherent arguments that characterize academic discourse. Specifically, you'll learn that:

- To **write clearly** means that you must take a piece of writing through multiple drafts in order to eliminate any grammatical errors or stylistic flaws that might undermine the author/audience relationship;
- To **write with meaningful complexity**, you must learn to practice a variety of invention strategies (e.g., classical appeals, freewriting, reading and analysis, and library research) and to revise continuously the materials generated by these methods.
- To **make coherent arguments** without sacrificing complexity, your practice of revision must be guided by principles of style and arrangement, and you must grow adept in the genre of argument itself through work with models and templates established by standard persuasive rhetorics;
- To **create effective arguments**, you must cultivate strategies for positioning texts against each other to familiarize

yourself with the arguments of others before developing your own claims, and grow adept at using warrants, evidence, counter-claims, and other rhetorical tropes to craft your own arguments. You will learn strategies for active, critical reading, strategies for deciphering why a text might be arranged a certain way and what that arrangement might mean;

- To **conduct effective research** means utilizing the library, evaluating sources, and incorporating the work of others into your texts using the proper conventions of citation endorsed by the Modern Language Association (MLA). You will also learn strategies and conventions for summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting others' work to support and develop original claims.

To develop the skills mentioned above, English 1010 balances seminar-style discussions with heavy student participation; brief lectures; hands-on productive work in writing workshops and guided "lab" exercises; and regular one-on-one conferencing with your professor.

By the end of the semester, you will have completed a **minimum of 30 pages of graded prose** as well as a minimum of 5 short low-stakes writing assignments. This page count is standardized across 1010 courses, but not to worry, I will guide you through each stage to make sure you're ready.

Figure 4. Revised course description.

viewer, uses color to match the end of one line to the beginning of the next, making it easier for the eye to find its place. Both developments have wide testimonial support, so students might find them useful.

These add-ons happen at the student level and demonstrate a key principle of accessible text: allow users to alter it. In “Multimodality in Motion: Disability and Kairotic Spaces,” six scholars theorize multimodal texts through a disability lens. Kerschbaum describes *multimodal inhospitality*, in which texts are “not flexible enough for users to modify them” and so exclude users from the moment of communication (Yergeau et al). Because instructors cannot anticipate all individual users—an ever-present limit of UD—documents should allow users to make changes.

Make text user-friendly.

Syllabi are documents we want students to navigate, to consult, to *use*. Many document design scholars, in fact, prefer the term *users* to *readers* to highlight the way audiences interact with text. *Document Design* lists four general characteristics of users that shed light on the rhetorical situation surrounding syllabi:

- Users are real people with real problems to solve.
- Users do not want to read documents; they want to do things.
- Users often approach documents already feeling frustrated.
- When users do read documents, they rarely read all the way through. (Kimball and Hawkins 12)

The final characteristic may seem disheartening. In composition courses, we want students to digest difficult and lengthy arguments. Learning documents in that complex style, though, show a lack of audience awareness, or perhaps demonstrate they were not crafted for a student audience.

Because users don’t read every word, they need a document organized for quickly locating information. Word processor features can dynamically improve document use:

- Table of contents summarizes items for quick navigation.
- Internal hyperlinks connect to locations later in the document.
- Headings differentiate sections and create hierarchy.

- Bulleted and numbered lists organize points into lists.
- Tables compactly show multiple dimensions of data.
- Text boxes block together related information.
- Bolded or underlined text emphasizes key points.

Rhetorical context with any strategy is key. Overusing special type looks like “the teacher yelling at the student,” as Singham laments in “Death to the Syllabus” (52). One disability statement, for instance, announces, “Students must notify the instructor of accommodations within 2 weeks of class.” In contrast, another states, “If you need accommodations, you have a right to have these met, so it’s best to notify instructors as soon as possible.” The first highlights accommodation as an inconvenient burden, the second as a right. The tone comes from the rhetorical interaction of design and content.

Strategy 2: Engaging Students with Cooperative Language

Changing the tone of the syllabus is integral to making the document accessible to learners. Conveying “instructor approachability and empathy” is a key factor in universal instructional design (Orr and Hammig). Students with disabilities must feel comfortable approaching a professor to request accommodations, so approachability constitutes more than a worry about popularity. Yet, instructors often write syllabi in response to “problem” students, promoting an antagonistic tone.

Overly punitive rules never guarantee that unwanted behavior disappears and even create resistance in students.

Syllabi have also recently come under fire for being too authoritarian and too reliant on corporate discourse (Singham, “Away”; Perry, “Faculty”), distancing students through a focus on negative consequences and bad behavior. Overly punitive rules never guarantee that unwanted behavior disappears and even create resistance in students.

We always depend on student cooperation to achieve class goals, and focusing only on top-down authority misrepresents the choices students continually make. Just as disability studies demands that we see students as interdependent, so too must we see the role of the instructor. Syllabus researcher Baecker argues, “A balanced syllabus is not one in which power is shared, but rather one in which power is made explicit,” and she critiques

policy language that gives a false sense of control to students (60). I suggest that an equally unaddressed problem is language that gives a false sense of control to instructors. Teachers cannot force students to do anything regardless of the imperative tone of the syllabus. In addition, students with disabilities may resist rigid authoritarian structures because they have experienced exclusionary environments and condescending treatment. Yergeau, in her contribution to “Multimodality in Motion,” describes how alienating these exclusionary spaces can be. Because of this rhetorical context, instructors might highlight inclusive practices in the syllabus to convince students that the document is worth using and to motivate them to follow its guidelines. By building in the following accommodations, students can begin to find agency through greater access.

Begin with an inclusive learning statement.

When all course policies have been theoretically subordinated to accommodation, it makes sense to begin the list with an inclusive learning statement. Official disability statements usefully direct students to campus resource centers, but disability services oversee a small range of accommodations—those legally required that students must largely institute themselves. Instructors can do more to create an inclusive environment by extending definitions of accommodation and convincing their institutions to do the same. *Kairos PraxisWiki* provides excellent resources at “Suggested Practices for Syllabus Accessibility Statements” (Wood and Madden). Mine (see Figure 5) borrows from their suggestions.

Your success in this class is important to me. We will all need accommodations because we all learn differently. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or that form barriers to your inclusion, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we'll develop strategies that can enable you to succeed in the course.

I encourage you to visit the Office of Disability Services to determine how you could improve your learning as well. **If you need official accommodations, you have a right to have these met.** There is also a range of resources on campus, including the Writing Center, Tutoring Center, and Academic Advising Center.

Figure 5. Sample inclusive learning statement.

Choose positive over punishing language.

An inclusive tone can spread throughout the language of a syllabus. Richard Harnish and Robert Bridges conducted an experiment in which 172 students read syllabi containing either warm or cold language and rated professors. Unsurprisingly, students rated the cold syllabus professor as more unfriendly, less approachable, and the course as more difficult, even though the requirements were the same. Examples of the differing language used in the study appear in Figure 6.

Create invitations over commands.

Instructors can shift the rhetoric of the syllabus by explaining what students *can* do as opposed to what they *should not* do, and by phrasing policies as logical consequences of student actions instead of retributive punishments. Figure 7 describes language swaps that highlight agency.

Sample Phrases from Cold Syllabus	Sample Phrases from Warm Syllabus
“Come prepared to actively participate in this course. This is the best way to engage you in learning.”	“I hope you actively participate in this course . . . because I have found it is the best way to engage you in learning.”
“traumatic events . . . are no excuse for not contacting me within 24 h”	“traumatic events . . . are unwelcome and because I understand how difficult these times are, if you contact me within 24 h of the event and provide documentation, I will be happy to give you a make-up exam.”

Figure 6. Comparison of phrases from the cold syllabus and the warm syllabus.

Commands	Invitations
“You must complete makeup work to receive credit.”	“Feel free to complete makeup work to earn credit.”
“You are allowed to . . .	“You are welcome to . . .
“I only accept . . .	“I encourage you to . . .
“Late work receives a 40% reduction.”	“Late work is eligible for 60% of points.”

Figure 7. Language swaps that highlight agency.

With a kinder inclusive tone, students may even remember information better. Syllabus researchers Jeanne Slattery and Janet Carlson describe an interesting unpublished lecture given by V. M. Littlefield. She reported that participants in her study “remembered the information on warm syllabi better than that on less student-friendly syllabi” (159).

Choose cooperative over paternalistic language.

Proponents of the social model of disability support a shift from legal and medical language to social language. For example, *helping* students becomes *cooperating* with students. In addition, many syllabus researchers promote a collaborative tone over authoritative business-speak. As a result, I have moved from listing “course policies” to describing “course values” and “course plans,” and Adam Heidebrink-Bruno in “Syllabus as Manifesto” focuses on “student rights.” Our diction emphasizes common ideals to build community with students. The Disability Resource Center of the University of Arkansas recommends more language for “Reframing Disability” in Figure 8.

If writing instructors applied to course documents the same kind of audience analysis we apply in scholarly research, we might make different choices about how to convey knowledge to a diverse novice population.

Strategy 3: Empowering Students through Flexible Course Plans

Composition studies examines the conditions under which students create texts, yet classroom practices such as deadlines and grade distributions have been undertheorized. Often considered classroom management issues rather than course content issues, these circumstances still influence

Paternalistic language	Cooperative Language
assist	cooperate
allowable	usable, equitable, sustainable
receive	create an inclusive learning environment

Figure 8. Samples of paternalistic language and cooperative language.

the production of texts. Disability studies provides a much-needed lens for understanding how all conditions of learning can affect and exclude students. Moreover, traditional accommodations, such as longer time and adaptable assessment, provide a starting point to improve course practices.

Instructors can apply the UD principle of *redundancy* to build options into assignments. This kind of flexibility is central not only to UD but also

Disability studies provides a much-needed lens for understanding how all conditions of learning can affect and exclude students.

to learning motivation. Nira Hativa explains in *Teaching for Effective Learning in Higher Education*, “The more students believe they operate under their own control, the greater is

their learning motivation” (237). Ken Bain’s *What the Best College Teachers Do* and Robert Boice’s *Advice for New Faculty Members*, two extensively researched books, both suggest that too much teacher control leads to problems in the classroom. Bain demonstrates that intrinsic interest “can diminish in the face of extrinsic rewards and punishments that appear to manipulate” students (47). Boice shows that when teachers use “antisocial motivators, such as threats and guilt,” classroom incivilities rise (84). Countless researchers in self-determination theory, developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, agree that providing choice is essential to creating autonomy in learners. Singham lists more research pointing toward the same conclusion and notes that “learning is an inherently voluntary act that you can no more force than you can force someone to love you” (“Death” 55). At the same time, colleges are not self-teaching institutions, and instructors guide students in useful ways. Learning requires balancing both interdependence and independence and cooperating with students to achieve that balance. Moreover, these are complementary, not binary, values: students depend on faculty to provide inclusive pedagogies, and inclusive pedagogy creates greater independence in students.

Expand deadlines on the syllabus.

Grades can incentivize behavior, but they can also create counterproductive secondary effects like resistant students. Bain, in his fifteen-year study of nearly a hundred college teachers, critiques traditional reductions in grading, saying, “The numbers themselves often suggest that the ability to be timely counts as much as—or sometimes more than—the capacity to do the discipline. . . . [I]nstructions usually emphasize the penalty rather

than, say, the obligations to classmates who are waiting to read the paper” (153). He offers as a point of comparison the practices of teachers rated as more effective in his study: “They do hope that their students will learn to do work in a timely manner, but they do not assume that their power over grades can facilitate that learning, or even that a late paper indicates that the student has procrastinated” (154). Extended time is a common disability accommodation because learners perform at different speeds, and college students juggle multiple commitments. Allowing extensions for individual students can give some individuals more time but does not help those who don’t feel comfortable enough to ask for them.

Several studies across disciplines suggest positive outcomes when students have some control over deadlines. In computer science, John Aycock and Jim Uhl describe time banks. Each student has a two-day grace period for one assignment or two one-day extensions applied to different assignments. They report that students are “overwhelmingly in favor of the time bank” and that it created little work to track (87). Psychologists Susan Roberts, Myke Fulton, and George Semb compared the pacing of students who worked with instructor-set deadlines against self-set deadlines. They found that “[s]tudents in the self-scheduling condition attempted [the last exam] significantly earlier, distributed pacing more evenly, and complied with their schedules to a significantly greater degree than did students in comparison conditions. Accelerated pacing rates were obtained without detriment to academic performance” (91). In a follow-up study, students were given the choice as to whether their deadlines would be set by the instructor or the students, and in this case, “Students who chose to set their own deadlines missed fewer deadlines, showed accelerated pacing, and rated the opportunity to choose more favorably than did those in the instructor-set deadlines” (Roberts and Semb, “Student” 128). Interestingly, more students first chose instructor-set deadlines. That students might first resist greater freedom signals to me the influence of past educational training, in which rules and compliance have been stressed, as well as a tendency to default to authority instead of taking personal, and possibly risky, responsibility. Indeed, there is some risk, though minimal, involved in students setting their own deadlines. A third study by Roberts and Semb did not find accelerated pacing and observed decreased compliance to deadlines when students set them, but still academic performance and course completion did not suffer (“Analysis”).

My approach combines student-set deadlines and instructor-set ranges. The extended time frame allows for redundancy—multiple days from which students choose—while preventing students from falling too far behind. Students have usually a week within which to submit major papers online. Here’s what a schedule looks like:

- Wednesday: in-class peer review; deadline opens
- Friday: suggested deadline; no other homework
- until Tuesday: class moves on; paper accepted for full credit

I encourage earlier submissions by grading in the order essays are submitted online, which was recommended by my colleague Lauren Cardon. About 10 percent of students turn in papers on the first day, even before the “suggested deadline,” and about half do not wait until the last day. I’ve experimented with paper deadlines, making them as long as eight days to two weeks. The idea backfired. Too many students were focused on the previous paper and couldn’t keep up with new homework. After a certain point, students were less likely to submit early. The sweet spot seems to be before the day of the week passes again.

Low-stakes writing poses different circumstances because instructors sometimes want to incentivize timeliness to facilitate class discussion or to

The needs of students must be balanced against instructors’ abilities and disabilities.

create incremental assignments that leave time for revision. Peter Elbow recommends minimal grading for this kind of work, such as pass/fail. In my class, students earn full credit for completion by the due date, and late work submitted before the major paper earns 70 percent credit. Unfinished assignments become a zero after that because they are no longer useful for building the paper. The logic of the timing supersedes an authoritarian decision. I also incorporate students into these decisions. Late daily work was previously eligible for 80 percent credit, but students complained that it didn’t provide enough disincentive for them to stay on top of assignments. Policies change in response to student feedback.

The needs of students must be balanced against instructors’ abilities and disabilities, too, particularly when teaching many students. Redundancy and flexibility does not always create more work. For daily work, I only comment on on-time submissions and look over late submissions quickly

on the final deadline. Major papers are still graded over two weeks but are returned to individual students in less than a week. Spaced-out submissions prevent the anxiety of a stack of looming papers, and students report the deadlines lessen their stress as well. Even if these are psychological tricks—I grade the same number of essays, and students submit by some deadline—it gives us greater flexibility to complete them.

Build flexibility into grading distributions on the syllabus.

Numbers are rhetorical choices (a principle examined by Joanna Wolfe in “Rhetorical Numbers”); yet instructors often employ “[e]laborate grading schemes [that] merely create an illusion of objectivity” (Singham, “Away” 57). These equations contradict pedagogies based on more subjective ways of knowing, such as rhetoric, because they “hide the role that judgment makes in our own decisions, . . . inadvertently reinforcing [students’] low-level view of knowledge as black and white, right and wrong” (57). In contrast, flexible grading structures draw attention to the rhetoricity of numbers and the choices that go into them.

Innovative grading approaches include those of critical pedagogy, such as Ira Shor’s contract grading. Critical pedagogy and disability studies share common goals of examining social contexts, empowering disenfranchised groups, and raising political consciousness. Shor negotiates grading criteria with his students to form a contract. Unlike unilaterally authored contracts, Shor encourages a strong view of a contract as a “meeting of the minds,” which “requires mutual negotiation and public deliberation to position students as rhetorical agents” (14). He rejects the weak version, linked to neoliberal politics and traditional syllabi, which enacts “obligation without negotiation” (13). Jane Danielewicz and Peter Elbow detail their version of contract grading in “A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching”—everyone gets a B for completing a set of requirements without taking into account writing quality. Students who want to score higher than a B must demonstrate higher-quality prose. Aycock and Uhl develop still another approach building on the contract system that they call “contract weighting.” They allow students to allocate weighted percentages to assignments within an instructor-mandated range. For example, a student could assign 10–15 percent to paper 1 and 15–25 percent to paper 2. Not all instructors have the authority to adjust their grade distribution, though, and writing programs need to question whether these kinds of

institutional requirements reinforce normative assessment while thwarting the flexibility crucial to inclusive pedagogies.

I've tried several approaches inspired by flexible grading models. When students score higher on revision essays, I have averaged the first and second grades to replace the first. In a technical writing course with a variety of majors, I don't assume all students need to hone the memo genre or the scientific abstract. Through contract weighting, students weigh heaviest the assignments most useful to them. In a course with nontraditional working students, I created two possible grading distributions: in the first, the grade was made up of low-stakes work and major essays. In the second, only major paper grades were averaged. I'm not suggesting that we stop teaching writing as a process but that we reconsider how we use grades and assessment in that process.

For accessibility, writing classrooms have a leg up, particularly over disciplines that use testing, because our method of assessment (grading writing) matches our content (teaching writing). James Wilson and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson note that "many of the routine practices of writing pedagogy (student-teacher conferencing, small-group workshops, etc.) are effective or adaptable in accommodating the individual needs of disabled students" (153). At the same time, writing curriculum often overprivileges the physical act of writing, as Patricia Dunn and Kathleen Dunn De Mers argue. They envision multimodal response logs that include "speech, drama, movement, listening and social skills." Cynthia Selfe and Franny Howes suggest in their contribution to "Multimodality in Motion" that teachers "too often design writing instruction for individuals who type on a keyboard and too easily forget those who use blow tubes, that we have a habit of creating assignments for those who read text with their eyes and a related habit of forgetting those who read through their fingertips, that we too often privilege students who speak up in class and too often forget those who participate most thoughtfully via email." Instructors can interrogate which parts of an assignment are necessary competencies and which represent normalized views for how students *should* display those competencies.

Moving toward More Accessible Pedagogy

My list of strategies synthesizes research on the syllabus with the goal of making accessibility more accessible to instructors. Yet in creating such a list, particularly about disability, my suggestions suffer from limitations.

This work might “imply that particular accommodations are more important than others or that there is an easy checklist to follow to ensure accessibility. The fact is that access will always require the hard work of negotiating among all members of a classroom community” (Kerschbaum, “Anecdotal”). The strategies offered here do not eclipse the need for individual accommodation. The revolutionary shift of disability studies requires that instructors plan for diversity in the classroom—Jay Dolmage’s oft-quoted goal—but also adapt to the unique immediate needs of students. You cannot have one without the other. Planning *alone*, as with universal design, generalizes about people and can’t contain all individual users. Reacting *alone*, as with individual accommodations, assumes a fictional norm and doesn’t integrate difference into pedagogy. Overrelying on either produces the same result: students are excluded.

The process, moreover, is reciprocal as individual needs are integrated into planned course design. In this way, accommodation explicitly becomes the default, not the exception. In my classroom, when a student with dyslexia said he studied better with YouTube videos, I created multi-modal online lectures. When an anxious student asked for extended paper deadlines, I considered how to make that a standard in my class. When an autistic student requested accommodation software for taking notes, I reenvisioned the assignment with multiple possibilities for students to process class content textually, visually, and orally. When I revisualized my syllabus for readers with attention disorders, I made a syllabus more accessible to readers accustomed to the tweet, the snippet, the photo. Time spent on inclusion is worth it educationally and ethically because learning depends on access.

Still, instructors may feel they lack the time, expertise, or institutional support to create more accessible classes. After all, it’s common for composition instructors to teach upward of a hundred students and to hold contingent and non-tenure-track positions. Many instructors, like myself, have disabilities that affect work flow. Accessible pedagogy becomes inaccessible to instructors when institutions do not support the mission, when programmatic structures are inflexible, when standardized policies are driven by norms, when legalistic language makes instructors fear “threatening” students. Standardization can be more productive if it, too, builds in flexibility and redundancy, and if it is seen, like UD, as an evolving process, not an endpoint.

Such a model of continual accommodation might seem like a slippery slope, especially when it is still a widely held misconception that traditional accommodations give disabled students an unfair advantage. In the hypothetical extreme, instructors cannot grant *any and all* accommodations; however, fictional stories about students requesting to miss all classes or opting out of major assignments create a straw man of accommodations and reveal more about instructors' resistance than students' expectations. If it ever seems that students with disabilities have ended up with an "unfair advantage" because of accommodations, I now believe it is more likely all students have been given an *unfair disadvantage* through inaccessible pedagogy.

The types of institutional and pedagogical change I have discussed throughout this article echo recurrent themes of composition studies: audience, revision, and writing as a process. The best versions of accommodation, universal design, syllabi, writing pedagogy, and institutional policy anticipate a diverse audience and adapt in response to individual needs.

This project will continue at AccessibleSyllabus.com.

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