

Guide to Inclusive Learning and Teaching




**Harper Adams
University**

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Introduction

Inclusive teaching is teaching that is beneficial to the widest possible range of students. Many of the methods employed in formal education are known to favour students with certain characteristics, but with increased diversity amongst the student population, teaching methods must be appropriate to enable **all** to succeed. There is a legal obligation and moral duty to support all students who enter higher education and this means ensuring methods of teaching and supporting learning are able to guide Harper Adams University students to success. According to Gwen et al. (2017, p.5) “[inclusive] pedagogies should meet the diversity of learners’ needs, and should not create barriers for particular students or student groups”.

This booklet is intended to help tutors to think about how teaching and supporting learning can best address the needs of a diverse student population. It seeks to provide guidance, but also to encourage reflection and discussion. The guidance is not intended to be entirely prescriptive; inevitably, for pedagogic reasons, alternative approaches to supporting students will sometimes be necessary. There are, however, a number of points that are a requirement of all staff at the university. These points must be incorporated in to everyone’s practice to ensure fair access to learning. The points are signposted through the guide by use of this symbol: 

The ideas and suggestions herein have been collated by considering internal and external practices as well as published research. The guide should be used in addition to working with the learning support needs of individuals and it is not a replacement for ‘reasonable adjustments’ (these are bespoke arrangements that are arranged for students who require additional support or adaption of teaching or learning resources to ensure that they can access higher education and succeed).

Recognise diversity

Inclusive practice requires the recognition of diversity. Students come in to higher education from a range of different backgrounds, some have undertaken A’Level qualifications, some will have BTEC qualifications, and others will have a combination.

Some have rural backgrounds and have a great deal of exposure to applied practice, whereas others will not have this experience. Students may also have different cultural experiences and some will have specific disabilities. It is hugely important that tutors anticipate and plan for this diversity, which may be unfamiliar from their own time as a student.

To embrace diversity, consider:

- **Talking to students** in the class about their prior study experiences and about what support and guidance they would find helpful; each group will be different.
- **Posting class materials early** so students can identify what they may need to do to address any prior understanding that may be needed.
- **Explicitly highlighting expectations** of what is needed for the next class to give an opportunity for students to manage their preparation.
- **Providing follow up activities** for students with less prior experience or knowledge of a topic, so that they might address any issues in a timely way.
- **Being clear what is required within assessment tasks** because the criteria and expectations may not always be in keeping with students' prior study experiences
- **Discussing differences** in experience to help identify what support is needed.
- Encouraging students to **exchange skills** and support each other.
- **Being careful not to make assumptions** about students according to their prior experience, qualifications or personal characteristics. This can damage motivation, erode confidence and belonging.

The rest of this guide moves to focus on more specific aspects of practice.

Produce accessible handouts

Handouts¹ can be enormously beneficial for learning. Before designing a handout it is useful to clarify its purpose. Is the handout to aid note taking? Is it being used as a summary document? Is it being used to stimulate discussion or prompt follow up reading? Clarifying the purpose can help to prompt reflection on the most appropriate

¹ Handouts here are used to refer to any supporting class materials; the printing of presentational slides e.g. PowerPoint is dealt with as a separate item later in the guidance.

layout and structure. Whatever its purpose though the following recommendations can help the resource remain accessible to all.

Designing and publishing handouts

- Have the font size set at a **minimum** of 12 points.
- Use accessible sans-serif fonts such as Arial, Calibri or Verdana, and avoid ‘fancy’ fonts like Chalkduster *or* Lucida. Also avoid serif fonts (i.e. those with small lines at the end of each character) such as Times New Roman or courier. These fonts can be visually distracting.
- Use dark font colours with a plain white background (for digital formats).
- Avoid garish or unnecessary colour.
- Avoid clip art to brighten up the handout.
- Think about different ways to show information on handouts; consider charts, diagrams and tables as well as text.
- Use short bulleted or numbered points, not blocks of text.
- Use wide margins, and left alignment; do not justify text as this can make reading more troublesome.
- Don’t use upper case letters for whole words.
- Use bold for highlighting rather than italics or underlining.
- Keep plenty of white space for note taking and annotation. Line spacing should be a minimum of 1.5 lines.
- To aid note taking consider providing students with a framework handout of key headings so that they can structure their notes.
- Wherever possible release handouts at the start of a module so that students can prepare for classes.



Publish all handouts online through The Learning Hub to allow students to access the material for revision and for use on personal devices.



Publish handouts online in the native format (e.g. Word) so that students can adjust the font size and background to suit their individual needs or screen reader.

Printing handouts

If printed handouts are needed ensure line spacing leaves room for annotation and use soft colour paper, ideally cream, rather than white. You can run documents through the 'Microsoft Word Accessibility Checker'. In a few steps you will be able to diagnose any issues with accessibility. To find out how to do this just complete a web search or speak to the eLearning team for assistance.

Develop effective presentations

Presentations, through such media as PowerPoint or Prezzi, remain a core element of teaching for many tutors, and as such it is important to students that the material shown on screen is accessible and engaging.

Harper Adams Student Comments

- When slides are crowded I often struggle to pick out key information
- Using Power Point slides that are not overcrowded is really important especially being dyslexic I find the layout, amount and colours of slides really important
- Using slides that are not overcrowded means it's easier to retain the information and get the points from the slides
- If lots of information is on a slide we need more time to write it down and to take it on board
- I sat through a one hour lecture with 67 slides in it – it's just too much information to take in. I had no time to make notes or take anything in

There are many different ways to use presentation slides, for example:

- As a lecture structure to help the tutor manage the class;
- As a means to illustrate points being spoken about by tutors;

- As a tool to bind together different stimulus such as video clips and activity instructions.

The approach taken will depend on the type of class, the students' needs and the tutor's own preferences. Amongst these different approaches, student feedback, sector norms and research, have helped formulate some guidelines to ensure students can make the most of the material presented:

- Use an accessible font such as Arial or Verdana, or any Sans-Serif font, to ensure the text is easy to read.
- Use a font size of 24 or bigger.
- Use dark fonts on a light background. It may be helpful to use the university's own presentation templates.
- Beware of using reds and greens within presentations or on whiteboards; these colours are less accessible to students with visual impairments.
- Provide minimal text on each slide to avoid cognitive overload as students try to listen and read simultaneously. *Typically* this would be no more than seven lines of bullet points.
- Make sure diagrams and images are of a clear resolution to be shown on a large screen without distortion (this is usually a resolution of 72 pixels per inch (ppi) but most importantly consider a quick visual check from the back of the room).
- Use bullet points, simple diagrams and pictures, but avoid unnecessary content such as animated decorative images.
- Consider the use of video clips to engage learners. If the clip is not available then you can commission short videos from the e-learning team – for example, a short interview with an industry expert or highlights from a field walk.
- Where possible use the 'notes' field to add explanation to the slides: this will be useful for people viewing the presentation online and especially for revision purposes.
- While slides are an important tool for teaching, try to build activities in to each session or even just periods of rest for students to take in what they have heard at least every 15 minutes or so. While evidence does vary about how long people can concentrate for, we know that it is very challenging to fully concentrate for an hour long session.

Sharing class presentations ² on The Learning Hub

All students can potentially benefit from being able to access presentation slides before and after classes. Harper Adams students say:

- We value the lecture presentation slides in advance of the class session so that we can print and/or download to our own devices to assist with note taking.
- Having the slides in advance will not put us off attending classes if the session is engaging.
- We expect full electronic access to all presentations to support their learning and we are aware that students in other institutions have such access.
- We prefer PowerPoint files to PDF files, as they can be customised for viewing and printing.

Sharing lecture slides (almost universally PowerPoint slides) before a class is widely believed not to negatively impact attendance (see for example Billings-Gagliardi & Mazor, 2007; Frank, Shaw & Wilson, 2009; Worthington, & Levasseur, 2015). Sambrook & Rowley (2010) found that non-attendance was most likely to be linked to other factors such as illness or crisis, and slides were likely to be an assistive facility rather than a root cause of non-attendance.

Research shows that sharing electronic materials before a class is seen as helpful to students' preparation for learning, which in turn encourages attendance (BillingsGagliardi & Mazor, 2007; Sambrook & Rowley, 2010). Specifically, as a result of advanced publication of notes online, students reported:

- i) Better opportunity to retain content in the lecture when they had prepared;
- ii) Being more organised in note taking;

² Typically though not exclusively PowerPoint files

- iii) Being better able to pick out areas of the lecture where they will need further explanation – these points were especially important for international students and students with dyslexia (Sambrook & Rowley, 2010).

Additionally, student feedback at has shown that advanced release of lecture slides:

- Helps students to prepare for lectures e.g. by enabling unfamiliar words to be looked up or by highlighting areas where prior reading might be helpful;
- Enables students to use the slides in a way that helps their learning (e.g. to download and annotate on a tablet device)
- Provides a record of content, which is essential for revision.

Additionally “[b]y posting slides before lecture, students have the opportunity to prepare in advance for class and perhaps feel more comfortable in volunteering thoughts and opinions” (Babb & Ross, 2009, p.878). Where slides show particularly tricky content it may be helpful to add an audio explanation or to offer a screen recording. This is a very quick process and support is available online and through the e-learning team.



To ensure all students can get these benefits, **all lecture slides must be put on to the Learning Hub 24 hours before the session**. Where for pedagogic reasons this is inappropriate, or where presentations are used for visual/media material rather than as a session structure or précis of ideas for, it is advisable to offer a summary of the class, which will aid prior preparation and/or note taking. While 24 hours is the expected minimum, an earlier upload would be desirable. Leaving hidden slides in the uploaded presentation can be especially problematic for revision; wherever possible ensure all the slides are available to students.

Printing presentations

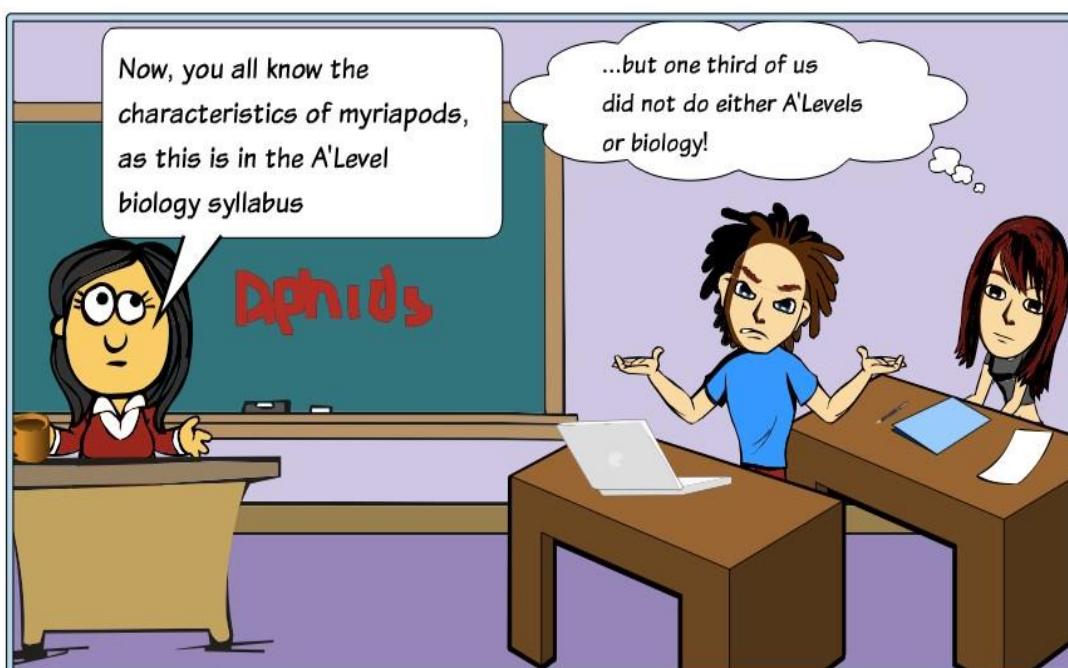
It may sometimes be necessary to provide printed slides, where this is required:

- Slides should be readable with no more than six per page.
- Remove any background colours, which make printed reading difficult.

Prior knowledge

Sometimes it's easy to forget that members of the class might have had very different experiences of education before encountering your class. Students might come from a science or arts background, a vocational or more theoretical pathway or they might have been educated in a different country using very different methods or home-schooled . We can't always realistically address every student's exact needs, especially in large groups, but we can give everyone the best chance of engaging fully with the class.

- Consider the existing knowledge needed for the class and explain this to students at the start, or better, in advance of the class. This will allow students with different prior experiences to prepare or retrospectively address gaps.
- Try to recognise when we, as tutors are making assumptions about prior knowledge e.g. when saying *"you'll all have done this in A'Level Chemistry"*, ask are these fair assumptions? Has everyone really had the same prior experience?
- Consider asking students themselves if there are parts of the class they found tricky (perhaps by using a post-it-note to feedback); this can help diagnose where many students are struggling.
- Again, sharing lecture slides or session outlines in advance can aid preparation.



Create engaging classes

Students value engagement and learn more effectively in interactive settings.

Harper Adams' students said:

- Engaging lectures help improve concentration
- If you make classes more interesting, students are more likely to participate and answer questions, especially if the lecturer conveys their passion
- Long lectures lose attention so the learning time is ineffective
- All lectures should be engaging – this should be standard

There are many ways to bring about engaging classes. Personal charisma and presentation style can help some tutors, along with a good student rapport, but there are also things we can do to more systematically develop student engagement. These include:

- Using lots of interesting examples within classes – this is particularly helpful for students who have less experience of the subject under consideration.
- Pacing classes so that students have time to write down important notes. Tutors may provide advice on essential points to note. Provide a few minutes without talking, to allow notes to be consolidated.
- Avoiding showing negativity towards difficult or 'dry' concepts. This will turn students off from engaging with the topic and will make it feel impossible to master.
- Adding follow up resources or activities to The Learning Hub on tricky concepts to encourage independent engagement and mastery (the eLearning team can help develop media rich materials including videos, interactive diagrams and quizzes).
- Breaking up lectures by introducing small activities, such as question and answer tasks, note consolidation, or partner discussions. A small activity every fifteen minutes can refresh concentration to aid engagement and learning.

Activities that you might try include:

- Ask students to summarise the three most important points from the lecture so far;

- Ask student to show their lecture notes to their neighbour and identify any key points that they have missed;
- Write out a theoretical idea shared in the class using their own words, then share with a neighbour;
- Allow a period for questions and answers so that students can seek clarity on complex ideas or learn more about how theories work in practice based on the experience of the lecturer;
- Conduct a quiz to check understanding; this can be done using Apps such as Kahoot or Socrative. Lecturers can then use this feedback to revisit any areas where understanding is less secure;
- Pose a question and encourage students to offer a time limited free writing response to consolidate their thoughts. These can be collected back in, with any misconceptions addressed in future sessions.
- Collate student opinions or experiences which relate to a specific topic under consideration; this can be done using technology such as PollEv, where students effectively submit text to a class page to share their views. This can be especially useful to engage those who may be less inclined to speak in a large group setting.
- Use a 'think, pair, share' activity whereby students are think about a problem initially on their own, then with and partner and finally share with the class.
- Ask students to critique ideas shared with the lecture; ask them '*what are the limitations of these ideas in practice?*' Again, technology can help collate the answers.
- Give a few minutes of non-directed activity for students simply to take a two minute break; - some may use to time to generate questions or write notes, others may just rejuvenate for a few moments;
- Ask students to produce a one minute paper. Students to write for one minute on the main 1-2 points of the class. This encourages more active listening in class and can allow misconceptions to be identified.

Don't fill the whole class with delivery. Leave some time to allow students to discuss or ask questions. Leave time to ask the students what they understood least so that you can

revisit it. Each scheduled class should contain a maximum of fifty minutes structured teaching and learning activity.

Recording in Lectures

Most students possess smart phones or tablets, which can help their engagement with material presented in lectures or classes. All students are allowed by the university to produce an audio recording of lectures to assist their learning, so long as the recording is for personal use, is not redistributed and is deleted at the end of the module, as specified in policies located on the University's Key Information Page at www.harper.ac.uk/keyinfo. Tutors might help students make the most of this opportunity by actively encouraging session recording early on in courses to assist students with note taking skills and during sessions containing critical information such as assignment launches.



Students are permitted to make audio recordings of lectures using any appropriate device, unless otherwise advised by the lecturer. Students are bound by university regulations to use, store and manage these recordings sensitively and within university guidelines which can be located at the University's Key Information Page at www.harper.ac.uk/keyinfo

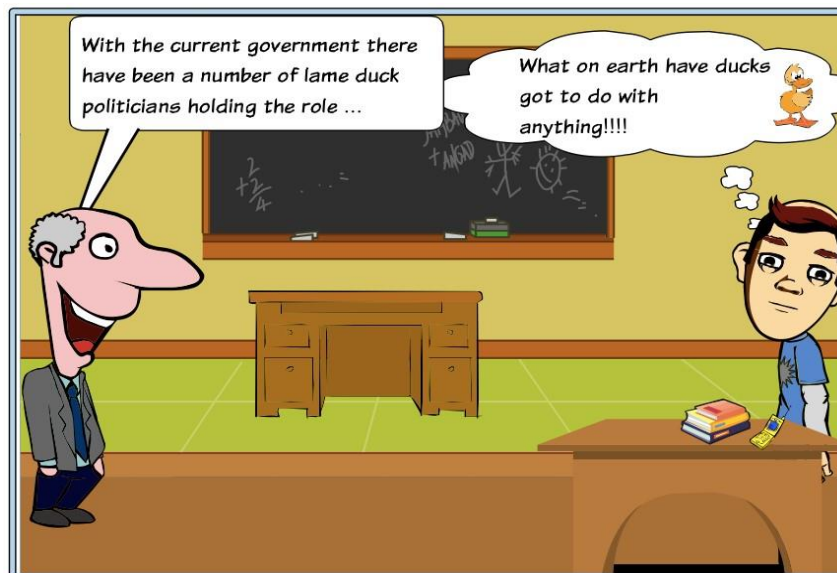
For more ideas on classroom engagement:

- Talk to each other – great ideas are sometimes kept quiet. Do share things that have worked well.
- Look at some of the reference books in the Bamford Library.
- You can ask the e-learning team to record your session to allow you to watch it back and review your own style, mannerisms and levels of student engagement. You can request a full class capture video or you can borrow a camera and tripod to film your own class.

Inclusive language

The way in which we use language can greatly affect how well students understand and how well they engage, consider:

- Speaking clearly, and not too quickly;
- Avoiding acronyms and abbreviations unless they are made clear on first use;
- Avoiding use of slang or colloquialisms, as these are difficult to understand;
- Offering a chance for students to ask clarifying questions at different points in class sessions. Be aware that students may not want to speak out and so it may be better to use other techniques to check their understanding, for example using post it notes or encouraging questions through a mobile phone tool such as 'Poll Everywhere'.



It may also be useful to provide a **glossary** for students at the start of a module or topic. This could be developed with specific groups in mind, although there will be benefits of this intervention for all students. For example in an applied module it may be very useful to create a glossary of terms that may be familiar to students from a farming background, but less well known to students from an urban background (e.g. heifer, beater, set-aside). Students themselves could create a glossary to reduce the burden on staff and to ensure the content is most useful. The Learning Hub has a glossary tool, so

this can be done online or in a paper based format. Students could actively be encouraged to search for unfamiliar terms during lectures as they are encountered.

Make the most of The Learning Hub

The virtual learning environment provides a significant opportunity to support students.

Key benefits of integrated use of The Learning Hub include:








- Materials for class can be shared so that students can access them in advance, for preparation, for example to look up key terms or to support note taking.
- Students can access class materials in a way which suits their study routines e.g. to print or to view on a laptop, and which suits their own viewing preferences e.g. by adjusting the font size or colour.
- Students can engage with additional activities to reinforce concepts introduced in class.
- Media rich content can bring concepts to life.
- Glossaries can make key terms accessible to all students.
- Scanned book chapters can ensure all students have access to key resources, even when off campus (library staff can assist with, and advice on, the appropriateness of scanning; all scanning for The Learning Hub must be commissioned through the library).
- A bank of frequently asked questions can be used to resolve common errors or to add clarity around assessment.
- Links and resources can provide engaging illustrations for students from different backgrounds which may be difficult to deliver in mixed classes.

As well as building the virtual learning environment in to your learning design it is important to attend to design aspects to ensure that the space is accessible, usable and even enjoyable. Ideas for good design are listed below.

- Try to ensure a tidy and consistent page layout (e.g. number of topics matches number of teaching weeks).
- Imagine your page from a student perspective and ask colleagues and students for reviews and feedback on how it may be made more usable.

- Try to organise your page so it has its own journey through the module.
- Organise content for example through appropriately labelled folders and the 'book tool'.
- Include a welcome message to the student group which gives key tutor information (name, contact details). Consider doing this through a friendly quick video to help students feel that they can approach you. This can be created on a smart device or using Kaltura (a recording facility in The Learning Hub).
- Include an 'assessment centre' block within your module to gather key information about assessment. This might include a launch video, the assessment instructions or brief, an assessment forum for questions, a frequently asked questions page and tips collated as the module progresses. Such a facility helps students to quickly locate information; it can also save tutor time as questions can be answered for the whole group. See below for an example.

Assessment centre

-  Assignment brief approved
-  A project example (assignment section 3) - use alongside critique formed in through the in class discussion
-  Summary of class discussion about action research example 20th May
-  Example for section two of the assignment - use in conjunction with class comments below
-  Lessons learned from reviewing the example assignment - inclass discussion summary
-  An example of a summary poster from an early student submission (showing an alternative way to present your assignment))
-  TSL7000 Submission Box 13/08/15

- Upload all learning resources – including teaching aids used in the classroom (digital copies of handouts and/or copies of PowerPoint presentations) to help students prepare for classes and print any material needed.
- Signpost learning resources clearly through headers, meaningful link names, details of resources via use of labels.

- Consider whether activities such as post-lecture quizzes can be integrated in to the virtual space as a way of further engaging students with key content and particularly as a means of getting feedback on their performance.
- Consider whether media such as video or animations can reinforce tricky class concepts or may provide contextualised case studies for students who may have less experience. Videos can be commissioned from the eLearning team or linked from popular sites such as YouTube or Vimeo.
- Use a wiki to allow students to share good resources or key ideas between themselves. This may be tied in to a tutorial session.
- In the same way that teaching routines help students to be organised, consider employing a consistent strategy on how and when learning content is released, so students know when material will come online.
- Help students to manage large volumes of content by employing a links menu bar at the top of the page.
- If you have done in-class work, such as brainstorming, perhaps take a picture of the whiteboard board and add it to The Learning Hub space as a revision aid?

While there are many ways of using The Learning Hub, there are a number of points of expectation for all module spaces. **All modules must include:**



An introduction from all tutors on the module containing their name, photo and contact details.



An accessible page design with clear fonts, simple colours and logical organisation. Tables must not be used on Learning Hub Pages (as these are inaccessible to reading software and mobile devices).




Current module descriptor and teaching scheme.





Assignment brief (and co-located assignment support material where available)





Past examination papers, where available, made visible to students at least four weeks before the examination.

 The rubric for forthcoming examinations (detailing the examination format), made available to students as soon as it is approved.

 An up-to-date reading list.

 Topic headers and file names with a meaningful descriptor and signposting for students to make the most of the page.

 All newly uploaded images should be 'tagged' with meaningful labels (using the ALT tag option when images are added to the virtual learning environment).

 All online module spaces should be peer-reviewed to inspire new ideas. Practically this should be completed alongside the annual peer observation of teaching.

If you are concerned about sharing materials due to Intellectual Property Right issues, the e-learning team are available to provide advice.

Inclusive assessment

Assessment can be a particularly challenging and stressful part of the student journey. It is therefore important that lecturers ensure assessment expectations are absolutely clear and that students are well supported.

Harper Adams' students say:

- We all come from different backgrounds and have different experiences at school or college. It's important that lecturers make clear what is expected as we have been used to different things.
- People learn in different ways. Different types of assessment help assess everyone's strengths
- Too many assessment hand-ins around the same time creates high levels of stress and means we have to choose to focus on one module over another. Sometimes I even have to choose between attending a class or completing an- assessment.
- Assessment bunching means that feedback from one module can't help improve in other modules.
- Different types of assessment mean that different students can excel in different areas.
- While exams are suitable for some students, sometimes, for others they cause anxiety and do not give us all an opportunity to shine.

Planning assessments

- Assessments should be planned with the student's journey in mind. When planning assessments, ask questions about the student's assessment diet across the whole course: How many assessments will the student be working on at any given point? How many different types of assessment has the student experienced? Is there an over reliance on one type of assessment? How can my assessment be timed and designed so that feedback can be useful in subsequent modules or tasks? This approach to assessment design does require discussion between course teams.

Course Managers may be able to provide student assessment schedules by request to support joined up assessment design.

- Learning outcomes don't need to be formally assessed more than once. Doing so can create assessment overload. Formative tasks, in or out of class, can support students to gain feedback in advance of a summative assessment.
- To make assessment accessible to all students, consider offering a choice on how they present their work, for example a report could be offered in a written form or as an audio file. Allowing students to use a preferred media affords them more space and time to work with the key concepts or skills that are the focus of the assessment. Choice can be built in to programmes as a norm, not an exception. The selection of different approaches can be accommodated in the design of the assessment criteria; for example if students are being asked to 'discuss' a particular theme they may be assessed accounting to the structure of their argument, the range of themes addressed and the strength of the evidence used to support the discussion. The criteria would then not need to be different for an oral (voice recorded) or written submission. Choice may not be appropriate when the assessment is concerned with a particular type of communication e.g. the written word, or a particular format e.g. lab report.
- A range of assessment types should be used within a course to allow students to develop a range of skills and attributes. Options include reports, presentations, computer aided tests, posters, proposals, essays, articles for the professional press, web sites, mini-projects, pitches, video resources or booklets and practical skills tests.
- Assessment should seek to test the student's ability to meet the learning outcomes and not some other unspecified thing.
- Sometimes it is just not possible to achieve the 'ideal' assessment scenario because of professional body requirements, for example. Students are much more likely to engage with an assignment when they understand the rationale for it. When assessment is introduced, and on module descriptors, be explicit about why a particular assessment type is selected.

Launching and supporting assessment

Assessment briefs should be clear and simple; class time should be devoted to launching the assignment and making the expectations of the task explicit. Because assignments are often launched a long time in advance of submission, it may be useful to create a short video, which explains the requirements of assessment. This can be done through screencast technology, via audio embedded into a presentation, by a talking head video or through an audio file recorded on a smart phone. The assignment launch resource can save time as students refer to it instead of making one to one contact for clarification. The eLearning team will be able to offer further advice.

Using the VLE for assessment support: A student suggestion One Harper Adams' student suggested: "Every question asked by students about an assignment brief could be published to the rest of the students doing the assignment so everyone gets the same advice". In turn this can provide a resource for future students and can save time, as students can use this as a resource instead of asking the same questions individually to the tutor.

Focus on exams

Where exams are needed:

- Practice papers are valued by students to help them prepare for exams.
- Past exam papers must be made available on The Learning Hub.
- Ensure that the requirements for the exam are clearly specified (in advance) to aid revision/preparation.
- A range of question types should be employed.
- The marking criteria should be explicit and should be introduced in class to reduce anxiety.
- Formative quizzes on The Learning Hub can help students to reduce exam stress as they feel more prepared. As one student said, after undertaking practice exam questions on The Learning Hub: "when it comes to our exam, you would have

already prepared to have negative marking for that... It's like a mini version of the exam that we're going to get at the end of the year. The idea of it is good".

Focus on criteria

Students repeatedly emphasise the valuable role that clear, explicitly weighted criteria play in their production of assessment and in their ability to understand feedback. Criteria need to be shared with students and working with criteria in class can support learning and self-assessment (and associated improvements in performance). Ways in which students can be encouraged to work actively with assessment criteria to help them get to understand assessment requirements include:

- Marking past examples of student work (exemplars) with tutor guidance using the assessment criteria;
- Rewriting assessment criteria in their own words so that any misunderstandings are addressed;
- Explicit question and answer sessions in relation to the criteria and assessment task;
- The creation of an 'assessment commentary video'. Tutors can record their thoughts about the strengths and limitations of a piece of work and then students can watch this back to learn more about how their work will be marked;
- Peer marking exercises of draft work.



The weighting of assessment criteria should **always** be explicit on assignment briefs. Assessment criteria should make clear how marks are attributed.

The rationale for providing weightings is highlighted by one specific student comment: "If referencing and report writing skills are in the criteria, we know these things are important. But different tutors give this different weighting, some mark you down a lot for this and other just mention it in passing. It's not clear how important this is compared to the 'content' we produce. We need to know how our work will be marked, otherwise we don't know how to succeed"

Assessment criteria should tell students what their performance in any specific assessment should include. The university's Generic Assessment Criteria can provide inspiration as to the types of areas that might be included within assessment criteria, and they can help set the correct level, but the actual criteria within an assignment brief should relate to that specific task.

Marks and feedback should, in turn, always relate to the criteria on the assignment brief. The feedback given to students should not disproportionately focus on one criteria such as referencing or report writing details but should comment on the range of skills and abilities prioritised by the criteria.

What if I just can't design an assessment that meets everyone's needs? ³

It is just not possible to always meet everyone's exact preferences, but the university **must** support students who have specific disabilities. If the approach selected by the tutor is known to disadvantage specific students then adjustments can be made which typically include revising the assessment arrangements and, in those circumstances where this is not appropriate, offering an alternative mode of assessment. In the case of the latter, the student is expected to meet the same academic standards as other students and all module learning outcomes must be assessed. Examples of reasonable adjustments include providing assistive technology such as a PC, voice activated PC or Dictaphone in advance of examinations or allowing the assignment to be submitted in an alternative media, such as an audio file, or by question and answer, viva voce style.

Develop academic writing

Students' ideas about academic practice are influenced by their cultural background and prior study experiences. Misunderstandings about how to write essays or reports and

³ It may be helpful to also familiarise with the university's assessment arrangements at Annex 5.29 in the Academic Quality Assurance Manual, available at: <http://portal.harperadams.ac.uk/resources/AQAM/Shared%20Documents/Annex%205.29.pdf> This document sets out procedural information around assessment but also signposts further good practice.

how to use literature and references are often the result of students having received different advice in previous courses of study. Confusion can be exacerbated as different tutors have different requirements at different times according to the level of study, the discipline context and the professional requirements. It is essential to support the development of academic writing competences alongside the development of subject knowledge.

- Recognise and talk about differences in academic practice that are encountered and explicitly address differences in how students might have worked in other courses or modules.
- Direct students towards study skills resources within their feedback.
- Be clear about specific requirements of any task, particularly when a format is new to a student or where the format of the task varies from the institutional report-writing guide.

“I didn’t understand which was the right way, some tutors want different things and these are different to what I was told at college. If I knew why each requirement was important I could understand; if this is not talked about I just have different tutors saying they want different things and it’s hard to just remember who wants what when you have eight assignments”. *Harper Adams University Student*

While the university has guides for specific types of reports and essays, these documents are not intended to limit the styles of writing that are used on the student journey. Staff are encouraged to go beyond these standardised formats and consider other genres of writing which may be appropriate to their discipline or professional area, including web based publications, professional documentation such as a report in the style of a client commissioned consultancy, articles for the professional press, journal articles, a resource for teaching the topic under consideration, a resource for the general public or technical notes. Students must be clear of any specific requirements for layout and format, and writing or presentation conventions associated with their assessment task. Staff are therefore required to make this information explicit on an assignment brief. If the format is to play a role in determining marks then this must also be signalled in the assessment criteria. As well

as signposting this information, it is also helpful to provide class time and resources online to add clarity.



The format and/or writing genre requirements for each assessment task must be made clear on the assignment brief.

Good academic writing

To help students better understand the conventions of good academic writing, which may be unfamiliar to many, and to reduce the stress associated with assessment submission, tutors can proactively use Turnitin. This is the tool that allows all assignments to be text matched against potential source material. It is not just there to use as a diagnostic for plagiarism, it is also a powerful tool to help students to think about how they can develop their academic practice.

- Where appropriate, encourage students to make a draft submission through Turnitin so that they can review their academic practice, and see where they may not be summarising or paraphrasing ideas from literature with sufficient originality⁴. This is possible through the Good Academic Writing space on The Learning Hub (signposted from the landing page), which contains a practice submission box (called the 'Try it out' area).
- Encourage students to use the resources in the 'Try it out' area to address issues and seek tutor or academic guidance support where issues are recognised. Consider this as an in-class activity in early submissions so that students can ask questions.
- When designing curricula ensure that there is sufficient time to allow students to practise writing of different types. Coordinate the support for a student's development of writing across a course and not only within a module.
- Support students to work with different types of academic writing; discuss the differences between different formats and the requirements of different

⁴ This facility is open to students during all levels of study.


audiences. Recognise and discuss how the expectations may vary from one module to another.


Provide useful feedback

Despite lecturers being frustrated by students' apparent lack of use of feedback, twenty years of research has shown that feedback is the most effective intervention a tutor can make to influence learning. Moreover our own students tell us repeatedly that they value feedback when it is legible, timely, constructive and clear.

Students at Harper Adams tell us:

- They appreciate when staff can provide face-to-face feedback.
- It is useful to know in advance when feedback is going to be returned.
- Sharing past assignments and feedback is very useful to learning.
- Abbreviations and underlining are in themselves not helpful forms of feedback.
- They like different types of media in their feedback - such as video or audio.
- They value whole class feedback as an assignment is being marked; this can help them incorporate advice in to other assignments.
- We won't always say when feedback is poor as we don't want to challenge lecturers – all students know it is a problem though.

 If you must handwrite feedback, make sure it is legible. Colleagues may be used to each other's handwriting so ask the students themselves if they can read your comments. The best way to guarantee legibility is to type your feedback in a word processor or in GradeMark. If students can't read their feedback they will be encouraged to return their assignment to the assignment office and in turn to their tutor, for clarity.

 Be clear either to feedback what could have been done better, and/or what could be done better in future.

There are many features of good feedback, but Winstone et al. (2016) suggests that when time is limited to give feedback the following aspects are most valued by students:

- Highlights the skills needed to improve for future assignments
- Explanation of why the mark was appropriate with reference to the grade descriptors
- Comments on writing and how to improve
- Identifies things done well.

Additionally:

- Students should be supported to use feedback and to make the most of it. Guidance for this is available in a resource available at through the Educational Development publications section of the university's webpage.
- Take care to use words that are likely to be understandable by students; try to avoid 'eduspeak' like 'criticality aware' without being really clear what this means.
- If you are annotating scripts, be explicit with your comments: Underlining, question marks and exclamation marks may show something is wrong but do not explicitly identify what the issue is. Annotations can appear to be cryptic to students.
- Even if students have got relatively high marks, it is still important to identify how they can improve and where marks were lost.
- Identify what students did well; identify the strengths of the work so that students can become more aware of what good performance looks like.
- Use your feedback to signpost help. If for example academic writing is an area where attention is needed then writing workshops or support resources can be flagged.

'Address your use of literature!'

'Summarise literature – too many direct quotes'

'You should use less direct quotes, to show that you understand the key points from the literature you are using. If you are struggling to put literature in your own words then look at this resource on summarising or paraphrasing techniques:

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/619/1/> '

These three comments from tutors all address the same issue but with different levels of signposting and advice:

- Consider whether your feedback is 'in time' to be useful before the student's next deadline date. This is something that can be coordinated with other module tutors.
- Consider whether there opportunities for interim whole group feedback, which summarises the main issues from the work marked to date (perhaps after 20% of work has been marked).
- Consider posting common errors or points for consideration on The Learning Hub so that these can be incorporated in to other ongoing work if appropriate.
- Consider how marking grids, rubrics and checklists can help deliver feedback. For example you might return a rubric to students with highlighter on the points that apply to the work considered. You might encourage students to peer-assess or self-assess using a rubric format.
- Ask students how effective your feedback is; how it can be made more useful to them?
- Consider asking students how they prefer their feedback – via screencast or in written form, for example. Knauf (2016) reminds us that students soften respond well to audio feedback types since hearing rather than only reading comments can assist some students with assimilation.
- Consider using some different technologies to better engage students with feedback, to assist with consistency and legibility, to make efficiencies in feedback or to increase the personalisation of feedback⁵.

⁵ It is clear from research and experience at Harper Adams that technology can help achieve any of these benefits but it is unlikely that all can be achieved at once! There will always be tensions within technology use for example between personalisation and efficiencies, between consistency and personalisation. All of the variables should be weighed up in considering the best choice of technology.

Three key feedback technologies are listed with advantages and challenges highlighted⁶:

Grademark	Screencast e.g. Jing	Typed comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can create efficiencies through the use of reusable comments • Can enable free typing for more personalised comments • System is supported by the university and is hosted on approved systems • Students can download their feedback for future use • Works with rubrics and audio feedback • Fits with existing practices of annotation and summative comments • Can monitor student use of feedback • Can feel daunting upon first use • Support is available • Grademark can be used on mobile devices and offline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students like to see and hear feedback together • Can be efficient if audio aspects are presented without editing • Students report this is highly personalised • May be difficult to sustain for very large groups • Simple to use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legibility improvement • Use a familiar interface (e.g. Word) • Can work efficiently e.g. using a spreadsheet to generate comments • Can be time consuming to email or print individual feedback • Can be used in conjunction with dictation software for speed • Can be used for annotation using the comments feature of Word

Make space in a crowded curriculum

Within the design of classes, schemes of work and courses, tutors may instinctively want to fill every session to ensure the planned activity is clear. While planning is important it is also important that time is left to respond and adapt teaching to the needs of a particular group, to address points of confusion or to revisit tricky concepts, or to focus on academic skills.

- Ensure that space within the curriculum is left to help students make sense of key ideas and to revisit tricky content in different ways. For example, consider planning a class session which is led by student questions posted in advance on a

⁶ Further advice can be gained from the e-learning teams or those colleagues already using technology in feedback. An evidence based summary of different tools is available at <http://bit.ly/1CadETV>

forum, or ask students themselves to set the topics that they wish you to return to.

- Making space can also provide points of interest for students as it allows time to address issues arising in the media, or professional press, and topics that are of interest to them.
- Step back from focusing entirely on subject knowledge or content, and use class time to build fundamental academic skills, for example consider a session for first-years discussing the assessment criteria, perhaps using past examples of assessment or an early tutorial around note taking techniques. This is not wasted time; it is equipping students to become independent later in their journey.
- Consider and discuss with colleagues how to make space to operate flexibly, responding to the needs of particular groups of students.

Summary check list

A summary of the minimum expectations to support inclusive practice is listed here.



Publish all handouts online through The Learning Hub to allow students to access the material for revision and for use on personal devices.




Publish handouts online in the native format (e.g. Word) so that students can adjust the font size and background colour to suit their individual needs or for screen reading.





Students are permitted to make audio recordings of lectures using any appropriate device, unless otherwise advised by the lecturer. Students are bound by university regulations to use, store and manage these recordings sensitively and within university guidelines which can be located in the University's Key Information Page at www.harper.ac.uk/keyinfo





Assessment briefs should be clear and simple; class time should be devoted to launching the assignment and making the expectations of the task, including the assessment criteria, explicit.

 If you must handwrite feedback, make sure it is legible. If students can't read their feedback they will be encouraged to return their assignment to the assignment office and in turn to their tutor, for clarity.


 The format and/or writing genre requirements for each assessment task must be made clear on the assignment brief.


 The weighting of assessment criteria should **always** be explicit on assignment briefs. Assessment criteria should make clear how marks are attributed.

 Be clear either to feedback what could have been done better, and/or what could be done better in future.


 All online module spaces on the Learning Hub should be peer-reviewed to inspire enhancement.


Online spaces must contain:

 An introduction from all tutors on the module containing their name, photo and contact details.

 An accessible page design with clear fonts, simple colours and logical organisation. Tables **must not be used** on Learning Hub Pages (as these are inaccessible to reading software and mobile devices).

 Current module descriptor and teaching scheme

 Assignment brief (and co-located assignment support material where available)

 Where they are used in class, all presentations and handouts published 24 hours before a class in their native format (e.g. Word, PowerPoint). Where slides are omitted for pedagogic reasons e.g. quizzes, a full version should be uploaded after the class to enable full access. If you are concerned about sharing materials due to Intellectual Property Right issues, the e-learning team are available to provide advice. Where, as a presenter, you do not use presentational software for summarising your lecture's key

ideas, then you should upload an alternative to enable students to prepare for class, this would typically be a class outline.



Past examination papers, where available, made visible to students at least four weeks before the examination.



The rubric for forthcoming examinations (detailing the examination format), made available to students as soon as it is approved.



An up-to-date reading list.



Topic headers and file names with a meaningful descriptor and signposting for students to make the most of the page.



Additionally, all newly uploaded images should be 'tagged' with meaningful labels (using the ALT tag option when images are added to the virtual learning environment).

Further useful links

You can self-enrol in i) 'Learning and Teaching Development' module on the Learning Hub which contains all previous Learning and Teaching Forum resources and ii) The Teaching Practitioner Module which has a distinct section of resources on providing good feedback.

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