# Supporting students: making your remote teaching inclusive

Many students will be unfamiliar with remote learning, may be worried about how it will work, and may experience barriers to learning that are particular to this context. Here are some actions you can take to help. The advice below is designed to ensure that all students are:

* able to identify and communicate their learning needs and motivated to learn
* clear about what they are expected to do and achieve
* confident that they can participate and encouraged to do so
* able to fully access learning materials

## Consider what barriers to learning students may experience

You should consider if any of your students:

* are located in a different time zone
* have limited or no quiet space in their current home
* are isolated with little or no social contact
* have poor wifi signal or limited computer access
* have a disability or additional learning needs that affect how they will need to engage with remote learning
* lack confidence with online interactions and technology and are struggling emotionally with the transition to remote learning

Remember, all students may be placed in one of these situations at one time or another. For example, a usually good internet connection might fail immediately before a tutorial, or external noise might disrupt a usually quiet working environment. Therefore, it’s good practice to anticipate these needs irrespective of what you know about your students.

## Make space in your teaching to engage personally with your students and to discuss the new teaching and learning environment.

You may wish to:

* Acknowledge the challenges of working via the technology.
* Ask for patience in advance if the technology doesn't work as planned
* Acknowledge that everyone is adapting to a new setting and that it will take time.
* Tell your students if some or all of the technology is new to you, too.
* Make it clear to students that you want to hear about any specific learning needs they have, if they are prepared to share them.
* Be flexible in the way you allow students to engage and use the technology, whilst also establishing ground rules for discussions. For example, a student may prefer to type their responses, rather than use the microphone or video. Disabled students may need specific technology to be used so that they can access learning.
* Students have different expectations about how they should participate, complete work, the desirable qualities of the work produced, how they are required to use resources such as reading lists, and so on. These differences are likely to be particularly acute in this new learning environment. It is important to be clear and explicit about how you will provide teaching, what the objectives are, what you expect of students, and how feedback will be given.

"No two students are the same: they vary in academic backgrounds, learning styles, motivation levels, personalities, and cultures. When you get a new set of students, it’s key to find out if there’s any information about disabilities, mental health or special educational needs, because you might have to make adjustments. I try to be as welcoming and approachable as possible so they feel able to do this." Oxford Tutor

"I know that due to my disability I process information in a particular way that might be quite different from other students. So knowing what I'm going to be learning and having a plan to work to, knowing what I'm expected to know and do by the end, and having the tutor lay this out clearly at the start in a format I can use and say 'I want you to be able to solve this type of question'... just knowing what I'm aiming for. That's what helps me."

Maths student

## Remember that distance and/or isolation can make it harder for students to engage with their learning

Oxford students will be used to interacting in intense, social environments and the sudden change may upset study patterns and practices and their level of motivation. A personal word of encouragement and to acknowledge these feelings may make a big difference.

Talking to students at the beginning of term about what most interests them in the subject area, so you can build these preferences into teaching, is likely to foster further engagement and a sense of togetherness.

“In the first tutorials of term I find out from each student what they're particularly interested within the broader overview of the paper, then I try to include each of these topics throughout the term, either in classes or in essay options. It means that the course incorporates the diverse interests of the group, and that students see themselves as co-creators in designing the curriculum. I find that, because I draw on student interests, students are more motivated to learn."

## Ensure that ‘live’ online sessions are supported by learning materials provided in advance.

This may include handouts, PowerPoint slides and details of any exercises to be carried out. It is also good practice to provide a plan for the session in advance (e.g. a set of questions to be discussed, or a list of subject areas to be covered). This will enable students to prepare and be ready to contribute, and is helpful for those who have to miss/are less able to contribute to the session due to a poor internet connection, or time zone difference. By planning for some discussion to be undertaken via discussions boards, or by setting exercises that students carry out outside the tutorial or class, independently or collaboratively (e.g. students could collaborate on a Google document where they can view others’ responses over time), there is less reliance on the ‘live’ tutorial. This makes remote learning more resilient, and adds structure and variety to self-study.

## Provide accessible learning materials

All documents provided should be accessible i.e. the text is searchable, selectable, and can be read by a screen-reader. Word documents, accessible PDFs and HTML files all have this functionality. Visit the Centre for Teaching and Learning’s [Accessibility page](https://www.ctl.ox.ac.uk/accessibility-teaching) to learn how to get the most out of the accessibility in Word and to create accessible pdfs. To convert existing inaccessible resources, visit Oxford’s [SensusAccess page](https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/using/sensusaccess).

## Ask your students for feedback

At the end of a session make five minutes to ask students what aspects of the session worked well for them, and which worked less well. An open discussion can help you to engage your students and to encourage them to work with you to make the remote learning experience positive for everyone.

If students have positive things to say, consider asking other students in the group if they feel the same way or if they have alternative perspectives. Remember to thank students for speaking up. If students have criticisms to make, consider asking: 'how do you think we could do that differently?' or, 'can you tell me more about that?' You don't have to immediately promise to make any changes they suggest.

## Be clear about the ways in which students can contact you so that they can feel confident of approaching you appropriately

You may wish to suggest a particular medium (e.g. email, canvas discussion board) and also tell students how long they may need to wait before receiving a reply. You may also wish to suggest resources that they check before contacting you, e.g. Canvas/WebLearn sites, the course handbook etc.

## Provide constructive feedback to students and ensure that they can ask you questions about it.

In a context where students will be isolated, and may lack confidence in their ability to produce the work expected and to progress in the remote learning environment, it’s important that your feedback on their work helps them appreciate its strengths, as well the steps they can take next to improve. Highlighting strengths is motivational for students and is helpful for building a productive and supportive working relationship remotely.

Try to focus on a limited number of areas for improvement. When assessing work, many things may come to mind that can be fixed or improved. However, pointing out everything to students can be overwhelming and demoralising. For every critical comment, provide a next step or suggestion to address it. This could be referring them back to a resource, e.g. lecture notes, or suggesting an approach or framework that they could consider next time.

If providing written feedback, type them or add comments within a Word document directly onto the student’s work if possible. Scanned handwritten comments are harder to read, and inaccessible to some with dyslexia or a visual impairment. Consider also audio or video feedback, using the canvas ‘Speedgrader’ tool. Also, try to provide an opportunity for students to ask you questions about your feedback.

## Support your students to communicate with each other appropriately

If your students are communicating together using a technology which is not supported by the University, e.g. WhatsApp or other, you might wish to direct them to guidelines which will help them to use these fora responsibly. For example, the Open University has [guidelines on the use of social media](https://help.open.ac.uk/documents/policies/social-media/files/139/social-media-policy.pdf) and your students might appreciate looking at such guidelines and making use of them.

Facilitating discussions between students outside of virtual tutorials and classes via online discussions boards (Canvas) can help recreate some of the supportive contact students would normally have with each other. Setting ‘low stakes’ or optional group work (groups of 2-3) might also be a good way of fostering contact between students.

## Follow advice on how to make good quality audio and video recordings and the technical tips on running Teams’ meetings effectively

For guidance, see the links at the bottom of this section. Using a headset rather than a built-in microphone in a laptop, for example, is likely to increase the audio quality. A better quality recording or live stream will aid students’ concentration, and be of particular benefit to those who are studying in an environment that is distracting or disruptive. It will also be very important for hearing impaired and visually impaired students’ access to learning.

[Tips on audio and video recordings in Panopto](https://help.it.ox.ac.uk/sites/ithelp/files/resources/Tips%20for%20Audio%20and%20Video%20Recording%20-%20Long%20V2.pdf)

[Best practice guide for using Panopto manual recorder](https://help.it.ox.ac.uk/sites/ithelp/files/resources/Best%20practices%20for%20using%20Panopto%20Manual%20Recorder.pdf)

This IT Services page on organising [remote committee meetings](https://help.it.ox.ac.uk/nexus365/remote-meetings) has lots of useful advice on how to set up a Teams meeting so it runs smoothly.

There is also more detail on supporting access for students with [Visual Impairments](https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/files/remote-learning-accessibility-visual-impairmentsdocx) and [Hearing Impairments](https://academic.web.ox.ac.uk/files/remote-learning-accessibility-hearing-impairmentsdocx).