



Academic Communication Equity BC (ACE-BC)

Effective Practices for Faculty: Inclusive Teaching with Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind Students

Introduction

Faculty members play a vital role in fostering equitable access and inclusive learning environments for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind students in post-secondary education. Creating access is not only about meeting accommodations, but also about building classrooms where every student can participate fully and confidently.

Inclusive practices like captions, repeating questions, shared materials, and clear sightlines, not only support Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind students but enhance learning for all. This guide offers practical strategies rooted in research, guidelines and practices, and aligned with accessibility legislation, reinforcing our shared goal: classrooms where every student can thrive.

Core Principles of Inclusive Teaching

- **Equity, Not Equality:** Ensure each student receives accommodations tailored to their specific needs.
- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** Design curriculum and teaching methods to be accessible from the outset.
- **Collaboration:** Work with accessibility services, students, and professional staff to identify best practices for inclusive teaching.

Pre-Course Preparation

- Provide syllabi and course materials early in accessible formats (digital text, captioned media, large print, braille).
- Choose videos/audio materials with accurate captions or transcripts, otherwise, allow extra time for conversion or captioning.
- Connect with students before the term starts to discuss accommodations and preferences.



Inclusive Teaching Practices (Classroom & Online)

General Inclusive Strategies

- Preferential seating can assist with clear sight lines, allowing a student to see the instructor, interpreter and materials without obstruction.
- Face students when speaking; avoid turning away while talking.
- Minimize background noise when possible.
- Use visual aids and accessible media (captioned, described) to supplement lectures.
- Share lecture materials and key vocabulary in advance.
- Repeat student questions before answering, for clarity for all students and the interpreter or transcriber/captionist.
- Plan regular breaks to reduce cognitive and listening/visual fatigue. [Learn More](#)
- Allow multiple formats for assignments and participation (written, signed, multimedia).

Supporting Students Using Assistive Devices

- Test assistive devices, e.g., FM systems before class; use microphones consistently.
- Battery and charging awareness: Some devices may require recharging ie: FM system transmitters. Have a backup plan and/ or contact accessibility services for support.

Supporting Students Using ASL & Interpreters (Registered Sign Language Interpreters RSLIs)

- Address Deaf students directly, not the interpreter, using first-person language.
- Pause for processing. Interpreters work a sentence or two behind, and students need time to respond.
- Share materials with interpreters in advance; anticipating context, technical language or subject-specific terms will support their interpretation.
- Be mindful of speaking rate, especially when reading aloud.
- Structure discussions thoughtfully to support full participation; encourage one speaker at a time.
- Arrange note-taking if possible; watching the interpreter, demo or presentation while taking notes simultaneously is challenging.

Classroom & Online Delivery

- Always use microphones and avoid speaking while writing on the board.
- Ensure online platforms support captions and interpreter visibility (e.g., pin/spotlight interpreters, enable transcriber/ captionist).
- Share slides in advance and describe visuals aloud.
- Meet with interpreters or real-time captioning/ transcribing providers as needed.
- For online discussions, speakers should identify themselves when speaking to support accurate captioning and student comprehension.



Assessment & Feedback

- Offer flexible assessment methods (extra time, alternate formats).
- Allow assignments and participation in various formats (written, signed video, or multimedia).
- Provide feedback in accessible formats (digital, written, audio).



Beyond the Classroom & Social Inclusion

- Ensure meetings, labs, projects, and fieldwork are equally accessible.
- Extend accessibility to extracurricular and campus-wide activities.
- Respect student communication preferences (ASL, captions, notes).
- Encourage group work and mentoring opportunities.
- Normalize accommodations as part of learning for all students.



DeafBlind Considerations

- Consult students directly on communication modes (tactile interpreters, braille, screen readers).
- Work with services to ensure safe wayfinding and accessible classroom layouts.
- Stay updated on assistive technology (braille displays, magnifiers, text-to-speech).

Pro Tip: When these practices are built into the course design, all students benefit, and those who need accommodations can participate without standing out.



Creating Accessible Learning Materials

Captioning plays a vital role in creating inclusive learning environments by ensuring equitable access to spoken and multimedia content for Deaf and hard of hearing students. Captions improve comprehension, retention, and active engagement while also supporting literacy, vocabulary, and note-taking skills. Captions also benefit many other learners, such as English-language learners, those facing technical vocabulary, and students in noisy or distracting environments.

Research shows that caption quality matters as much as availability: accuracy, completeness, and synchronization are essential for true equity. In synchronous learning, live captioning should be prioritized so all learners can participate fully. Blending human and AI captioning may offer a balance of quality, speed, and scalability, and integrating captioning as part of instructional design—not just an accommodation—normalizes inclusion. Captioning supports learners with language, attention, and processing challenges while aligning with Universal Design for Learning principles to enhance engagement and outcomes for all students.

Effective Practices for Captioning Instructional Resources

- Use professional captioned videos or films whenever possible
- If creating in-house content, add captions using reliable tools, then review and correct auto-captions.
- Provide accurate transcripts alongside captions for audio and video materials.

While captioning instructional resources ensures equitable access to pre-produced content, captioning in classroom and remote learning environments ensures students have equal access to real-time teaching and interaction.

Captioning in Classroom & Remote/ Hybrid Learning

- Captions are essential in both synchronous and asynchronous sessions.
 - **Closed captions** (toggle on/off) are generally preferred but **Open captions** (always visible) can be useful in group settings.
- For real-time lectures or discussions (in-person or remote), arrange professional captioning whenever possible.
- Ensure that all recordings of lectures, demos, and multimedia are captioned before sharing.

Captioning Tools

Because captioning technologies are continuously evolving, staying informed about current tools and their limitations is important. Contact your Accessibility Services, Teaching and Learning Center or IT teams for up-to-date guidance on which tools to use in different teaching contexts. In this comprehensive [resource from BCCampus](#), you will find information on captioning and transcribing tools (see Accessibility FAST), and much more. Below are a few other options to explore.

- [Rev](#): High accuracy, fast turnaround, manual and AI options.
- [YouTube Auto Captions](#): Free but require manual review and correction.
- [Amara](#): Web-based manual captioning and translation tool.
- Otter AI: This live transcription is often favored by students for impromptu group meetings and discussions.

Faculty Practices & Student Benefits Summary

Faculty Practices	Student Experience/Benefit
Provide course materials in advance and in accessible formats (digital, captioned, large print).	<i>"I have time to review materials with my interpreter or captioner so I can participate equally in class."</i>
Use captions for all videos shown in class.	<i>"I can follow along and fully understand the content without missing important details."</i>
Face the class and avoid talking while writing on the board.	<i>"I can speech-read or follow interpreters more easily, reducing stress and confusion."</i>
Offer flexible assessment methods (extra time, alternate formats).	<i>"I can show my knowledge fairly, without my access needs becoming a barrier."</i>
Respect communication preferences (ASL, captions, notes, etc.).	<i>"I feel respected, included, and confident to participate."</i>
Normalize accommodations (e.g., explain interpreter role to the class).	<i>"I don't feel singled out — everyone sees access as part of learning."</i>
Encourage peer connections through group work and mentoring.	<i>"I can connect socially and academically with classmates, not feel isolated."</i>

Continuous Learning

Explore this [ACE-BC Tapestry resource](#) to learn more about Deaf, hard of hearing and DeafBlind individuals. For many, deafness is a cultural and linguistic identity, not just a disability. This online tool also touches on communication accessibility options and considerations. As new technologies, approaches and students' needs emerge, continue building your knowledge to ensure your teaching remains responsive and equitable. *For more resources, visit [ACE-BC.ca](#), contact us at Office@ace-bc.ca or connect with your institution's accessibility services office.*