



# CREATING AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

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## Purpose

This job aid outlines steps that can be taken to cultivate a learning environment in which all students feel valued and supported in their learning.

## Background

By striving to individualize your teaching and accommodating the diversity of your students' experiences, you can help to encourage an inclusive learning environment. Supporting a community in the classroom supports students in developing a sense of belonging among students and can foster a connection to the campus as a whole. (*Increasing Inclusivity in the Classroom*, n.d.).

Feeling excluded or alone is a significant barrier to their learning in the classroom (*Diversity and Inclusion | The Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning | University of Manitoba*, n.d.). Creating an inclusive classroom environment, helps to reduce this (along with other) barriers to student learning.

## How To

You can begin by examining barriers present in your courses, classrooms, and assessments by reflecting upon your classrooms and asking yourself:

What diversity exists in your classes?

How may the needs of these students differ?

Here you will discover strategies to reduce and/or remove barriers to student learning.

There are many factors that need to be considered when you are planning for inclusion in your classroom. Below you will find some examples of strategies that you could use to support the success of **all** learners in your classroom. The strategies are organized into six categories: classroom environment and community, instructional strategies, curriculum and design, learning resources, getting to know your students, and universal design.

### Classroom Environment and Community

Inclusive classrooms are places in which thoughtfulness, mutual respect, and academic excellence are valued and promoted. To optimize the learning community, instructors and students work together to create and sustain an environment in which everyone feels safe,

supported, and encouraged to express her or his views and concerns. The following are things you as an instructor can do to help to foster a positive learning community:

- Get a sense of how students feel about the cultural climate in your classroom. Tell them that you want to hear from them if any aspect of the course is making them uncomfortable.
- Diversity welcome – providing a diversity welcome to your students will create a safe space atmosphere in your classroom and demonstrates that you support individuals to be their authentic selves.
- While healthy debate should be encouraged, lay out expectations regarding behavior and civility for group discussions.
  - Outline who can speak and when.
  - Make it clear to all students that the classroom is a safe space to ask questions and make mistakes.
- Acknowledge students' individuality, get to know students for who they are as people.

### Instructional Strategies

While there are no universal solutions for how to

- Vary your teaching style – This supports the academic achievement of all students by allowing them to try different ways of learning (*5 Tips for Creating an Inclusive College Classroom*, n.d.).
- Structure content and information in a well-organized, simple and easy to grasp format so that it is more accessible to new participants
- Communicate multimodally- it is important to use multiple modes of communication to make it possible for more people to have access to the knowledge and activities of the group
- Use more than one way to demonstrate or explain information. All learners learn differently, so what works for one student may not be helpful for others.
- Crowd-sourcing notes – have students work together to create notes for the class.
- Keep instructions brief and uncomplicated.
- Allow time for clarification of directions and essential information.

### Curriculum and Design

- Where possible, include multiple perspectives throughout your course.
- Have multiple methods for course assessment – assessment can take many forms and does not always have to be a traditional test/exam. Consider a project, video an oral presentation as other options

### Learning Resources

Review the resources that are being used for the class. Do they embody the diverse nature of your campus? Do your examples or illustrations reflect the varying backgrounds of the student body in non-stereotypical ways?

- Include materials written by people of different backgrounds or perspectives (*Creating Inclusive College Classrooms | CRLT*, n.d.)
- Ensure materials for the course focus on underrepresented groups' experiences in ways that do not trivialize or marginalize these groups' experiences

- Whenever possible, select texts and readings whose language is gender-neutral and free of stereotypes, or cite the shortcomings of material that does not meet these criteria.
- Choose textbooks that have an eVersion – many students prefer a paperless version of a textbook so they do not have to carry several books, they may use a screen reader to support reading, if they are an auditory learner

### Use Universal Design

- Turn on Zoom captioning – this supports all student including those who are hearing impaired. Some students may choose to view a video again later without volume so as not to disturb others.
- Use captioned videos - turn on the captioning feature and caption any videos that you create – this makes them accessible to all learners
- Record lectures – this allows to students to revisit the material on their own, and as many times as needed.
- Read aloud what you write on the board or present on an overhead visual. This supports visually impaired students as well as both auditory and visual learners.
- Provide PowerPoints in advance – this allows students to review material in advance and prepare for notetaking during class.

## References

*5 Tips for Creating an Inclusive College Classroom.* (n.d.). Vector Solutions. Retrieved October 7, 2021, from [https://www.vectorsolutions.com/resources/%content\\_type%/5-tips-for-creating-an-inclusive-classroom/](https://www.vectorsolutions.com/resources/%content_type%/5-tips-for-creating-an-inclusive-classroom/)

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