



Supporting Students with Mobility Difficulties

Student Services

**DISABILITY AND
DYSLEXIA SUPPORT**



Learning and
Professional
Development Centre



Mobility Difficulties may be **permanent**, **intermittent** or **temporary** and can stem from a number of causes, including paralysis, impairment of limb function, head injury and conditions such as cerebral palsy, chronic fatigue syndrome or multiple sclerosis. A person may use a **wheelchair or crutches full-time or part-time** and may do so because: they are unable to walk or stand; they can only walk/stand for short distances/short periods of time, which may be due to having a **reduced range of movement**; or, they have **difficulty with balance and coordination of movement**.

1) How might mobility difficulties affect someone at university?

- The main barriers to students with mobility difficulties is the physical accessibility of buildings/classrooms and different teaching and learning resources and activities.
- Students may experience pain and fatigue.
- Medication may cause side effects.

2) Suggested teaching and learning adjustments

General considerations

- **Don't make any assumptions** about students in advance. Remember that students will experience different types of mobility difficulty and will utilise different support strategies, assistive equipment and technologies. Be prepared to meet with students before teaching commences to get to know their individual needs.
- Try to **avoid approaching, greeting or speaking to wheelchair users from behind**, wait until they can see you before initiating conversation.

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- **Do not invade a wheelchair user's privacy** by leaning over them, putting your foot on their wheelchair or balancing/hanging things off their wheelchair.
- If your conversation is likely to last more than a few minutes consider sitting down to ensure you are at the **same eye-level as the person** who uses the wheelchair.
- If you want to offer any assistance to a wheelchair user, **always ask if they need help first**, before touching or pushing their wheelchair. If help is requested, ask how best you can assist, e.g. by opening doors or carrying items.

Teaching resources/materials, classroom set-up and teaching practice

- Students may have a **mobility assistant or support worker in classes**.
- **Give students and their support workers time to prepare** by providing presentation slides (PowerPoint, Google slides, Keynote etc.), handouts and other teaching resources in advance of class sessions (i.e. upload to the KLE and send email reminders). This will allow students plenty of time to access, print and read materials.
- **Provide reading lists as far in advance as possible**, clearly highlighting and emphasizing key chapters and articles as well as core from secondary readings, enabling students to prioritise.
- Consideration will need to be given to **timetabling** and **teaching locations**, including the proximity of different teaching locations to one another.
- Check that **buildings, teaching rooms and other learning spaces are accessible** for wheelchair users and have the required space and/or seating arrangements, being mindful of any obstructions or hazards.
- Students may have a **preferred seating location in class**, may need to sit at the front and may need extra space for their wheelchair, equipment or support worker.
- **Communicate any changes with as much advance notice as possible**, including changes to familiar buildings, classrooms, course arrangements, etc.

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- Ensure students are aware of **emergency and evacuation procedures** for the buildings they are using. Students will have individual **Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs)**. Make sure you are familiar with the plans for each individual student with mobility difficulties that you teach.
- **Support students to revisit and revise lecture content** by using lecture capture technology or allowing audio recording of lectures. If students have a reasonable adjustment in place to allow audio recording of lectures, this must be permitted.
- Leave papers, lab equipment or other practical teaching resources where the student has placed them as it is likely they have been left where they will be easiest to retrieve.
- **Students may be late, need to miss some teaching sessions or take regular breaks.** Be understanding of transport-related issues, medical appointments, and illness.
- Students may require **adjustments in practical, field and lab-based settings**, e.g. a lower work-bench, a practical or mobility assistant, or regular breaks in activities. Some students may be unable to participate in some activities, for example, a fieldtrip that involves hiking. Students are likely to be able to gain the knowledge and skills from the trip in another way with reasonable adjustments. Discuss fieldwork, practical and lab adjustments with DDS.
- Students with some neurological conditions **may exhibit atypical responses** (e.g. may appear distressed, may laugh or cry) to certain stimuli in the classroom (e.g. increases/changes to noise, light). The best approach is to not draw attention to the student, but rather to find out more about the students disability and how you can best support them in the classroom in the future, by talking to them after class/via email, speaking to your local DLO, and/or checking the student's eVision page.

Assessment and feedback

- As appropriate, provide assessment questions, details and deadlines **as far in advance as possible** using specific instructions and concise/simple language.
- Always use **clearly defined assessment criteria** which link to the module ILOs.
- **Notify changes** to assessments or deadlines in plenty of time.
- Students may **require specific adjustments for exams and other assessments**, including the **provision of alternative forms of assessment** (e.g. a student may be unable to undertake written exams as a result of impaired hand/arm movement). Discuss requirements with your local Disability Liaison Officer (DLO), examinations officer and as required, contact Disability and Dyslexia Support (DDS) for advice.
- For a student who **dictates written work** to either a human note taker or a dictation software programme, a number of considerations may need to be taken in to account:
 - Their writing may **sound more spoken** and the student may need support with addressing stylistic aspects of their work, e.g. use of the passive voice.
 - **Early access to essay questions may be required**. As a guide it takes around twice as long to dictate a piece of written work, allowing for breaks, etc.
 - **Extensions may be required**, e.g. if a student who uses dictation has a chest infection the dictation process may take even longer than usual.

3) Bibliography and additional reading

This resource has been produced using a best practice guide for [teaching students with physical impairments](#) produced by the University of Cambridge.

*This resource was produced in 2018, updated January 2022
Disability and Dyslexia Support*



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