### WHAT?  
Consider barriers in assessment design  
Offer assessment options within a module  
Include variety across a programme

### HOW?  
Try to ensure that the method of assessment does not put any students at a disadvantage, and if you find this to be the case, consider whether there are alternative ways for students to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes.  
Provide a choice of assessment methods from the outset for students to demonstrate that learning outcomes have been met; for example group presentations could be undertaken as a one-to-one or written.  
Use a number of different assessment methods throughout a programme. Ensuring that you provide a model or example where assessment formats may be unfamiliar to some students.

### WHY?  
The way that an assessment is designed may create barriers for some students. The skills required to carry out a certain type of assessment may not be related to the learning outcomes. For example, if the assessment includes group presentations, this may be a barrier for students who experience high levels of anxiety with public speaking.  
This may enable students to choose assessment formats that fit in with their personal circumstances, learning styles and needs\(^1\),\(^2\) and ensure they can effectively demonstrate their learning.  
This ensures that the widest possible group are catered for as different types of assessment will be more suited to some students than others. For example, students who are weaker at traditional essay style assessments may excel in video-based assessments.

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1. Try to ensure that the method of assessment does not put any students at a disadvantage, and if you find this to be the case, consider whether there are alternative ways for students to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes.

2. This may enable students to choose assessment formats that fit in with their personal circumstances, learning styles and needs. For example, students who are weaker at traditional essay style assessments may excel in video-based assessments.

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Use e-assessment

Design computer-based assessments where students can get instant feedback to check their knowledge and understanding.

Traditional assessments disadvantage an increasing number of students.¹
Electronic methods of assessment allow disabled students to use their own assistive technology, at their own pace. As the feedback is automated and factual, there is no human interaction involved which will suit students on the autism spectrum and some students with mental health conditions.

Avoid ambiguity in assignment briefs and exam questions

Use the simplest and clearest possible way of asking the question, separating out multiple questions and clearly indicating the marks allocated to each part. These guidelines may help.

Students on the autism spectrum, those with specific learning difficulties (SpLD) and non-native speakers may find it time consuming to decode the meaning of the question, leading to misinterpretation and wasting time.³

Include extra time in in-class tests

Incorporate the needs of students who have 25% extra time (standard recommendation for most dyslexic students) by shortening the test, e.g from 1hr to 40 minutes so that those with extra time can still finish within the allotted hour.

By assuming there are likely to be dyslexic students in the group, it is less likely that you will need to make ad hoc arrangements, which may be time consuming.

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## WHAT?

Be explicit about requirements for written English

Provide detailed assessment criteria

## HOW?

Let students know in advance whether their technical accuracy in written expression is a specific learning outcome and is therefore going to be assessed.

Be explicit about the requirements and the level of detail, knowledge and skill that’s expected for a high mark. Discuss assessment criteria with students at the beginning of the module and explain the meaning of the criteria.

## WHY?

Students with SpLD and non-native speakers will be at a disadvantage where this is the case, and may need to access additional support in order to achieve the learning outcomes. The 2010 Equality Act specifies that where disabled students are likely to be put at a disadvantage due to assessment criteria, the criteria must be genuinely linked to the subject or discipline being studied.

Students will find it difficult to use feedback on their work constructively if they can’t understand why some areas of the work are weaker than others. The terms used in assessment criteria are not always self-explanatory to students.

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guide written by Dr Say Burgin and Jenny Brady

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REFERENCES


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