

Tips for Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment

At the SPS (Special Educational Support) unit, we are seeing a growing demand from lecturers for tools to better support students with special needs in their teaching. In collaboration with Learning Lab, we have therefore developed a set of tips aimed at fostering an inclusive learning environment where all students can thrive and participate on equal terms.

High Proportion of SPS Students at DTU

At DTU, approximately 10% of our students receive special educational support (SPS) due to a permanent disability. These students may have dyslexia, a mental health diagnosis, a developmental disorder, or a physical disability. In addition to the 10% who receive SPS, there is also a group of students with special needs who, for various reasons, do not apply for SPS.

These students face a wide range of challenges, which may include fatigue, sensory sensitivity, difficulties interpreting social situations, attention disorders, etc.

What Should Lecturers Be Aware Of?

As a lecturer, you're not expected to have in-depth knowledge of all types of disabilities. However, it can be helpful to be aware of the following:

1. Disabilities can affect students across all academic levels and backgrounds.
2. In many cases, it is not at all obvious who has a disability.
3. Learning methods that work best vary greatly from student to student.

Small Steps Can Make a Big Difference for Everyone

An important point when it comes to creating an inclusive learning environment is that it doesn't only benefit students with special needs. The wider group of students also gain significantly when the lecturer communicates clearly and uses didactic tools that support a learning space where diversity is welcomed.

This doesn't mean that everything must be changed. In fact, it is often recommended to start with small adjustments that can potentially make a difference for all students.

We therefore hope that you, as a lecturer, will find inspiration in the tips below.

Creating a Safe Learning Environment

- **Openness About Special Needs:** Mention options such as SPS and special exam conditions at the start of the course—this signals that diversity is welcomed. (The SPS unit has created a PowerPoint slide for this purpose that you can use.)
- **Share Experiences:** Talk about what previous students found challenging in the course—and, if relevant, what you as a lecturer have found challenging.
- **No Such Thing as a Stupid Question:** Emphasize that all questions are welcome. Consider setting up an anonymous digital Q&A channel alongside the course.
- **Include Breaks:** Schedule short breaks during teaching to support concentration and focus.

Structure and Clarity

- **Clear Course Overview:** Use for example a visual timeline that is updated continuously throughout the course.
- **Clear Information:** Communicate practical matters (deadlines, locations, changes) clearly and repeatedly.
- **Early Access to Materials:** Make texts, study plans, and other materials available as early as possible, before the course starts.

Framing and Purpose

- **Clarify the Course Purpose:** Show how the lectures support the learning objectives—not just at the beginning of the course, but throughout.
- **Ensure Continuity Between Courses:** Explain the connections between previous and upcoming courses.
- **Learning Objectives in Practice:** Specify how learning objectives help students build skills that are relevant to the job market.
- **Explain Learning Activities:** Connect exercises, presentations, group work to learning objectives and their practical application in the workplace.

Clear and Consistent Communication

- **Few and Fixed Channels:** Use as few communication platforms as possible—and be consistent in how you use them.
- **Repeat Key Points:** Highlight and repeat central messages and concepts during lectures.

Variety in Teaching Formats

- **Different Learning Styles:** Use a mix of visual (slides, videos, quizzes), auditory (podcasts), and tactile (exercises) learning materials.
- **Vary Activities:** Include group work, reflection exercises, discussions, and peer feedback.

Concrete Examples

- **Real-World Cases:** Use everyday examples to illustrate theory.
- **Sample Assignments:** Show previous exam questions, assignments, and submissions to clarify expectations and requirements.

Facilitating Group Work

- **Support Group Formation:** Either form groups for the students or help structure the group formation process.
- **Strengthen Collaboration:** Encourage groups to create group contracts and align expectations early on.

Digital Accessibility

- **Digital Documents:** Provide materials in digital formats accessible to screen readers, e.g., PDFs with text layers (not scanned images), Word, or HTML.
- **Proper Document Structure:** Use headings (H1, H2, etc.), bullet points, and tables of contents so screen readers can navigate effectively.
- **Video and Audio:** Use subtitles for videos and provide alternative formats (text-to-speech, transcripts).
- **Images and Graphics:** Add alternative text (alt-text) to images, figures, and graphs to ensure they are understandable for screen reader users.

The above tips are inspired by [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#), an educational approach aimed at making learning accessible and meaningful for all students—regardless of differences in abilities, prior knowledge, or backgrounds. You can find more UDL tips [here](#).