Accessible Information Design

Ensuring your communications are accessible for all students
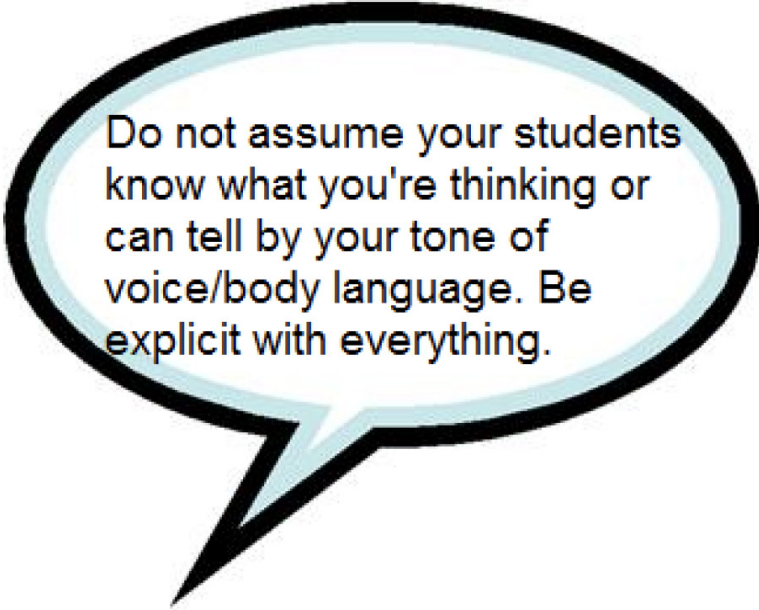
What is accessible communication?

Accessible communication refers to the measures lecturers and teaching staff should take to ensure that what they are communicating is reaching and being understood by all students. It is important, for example, to show respect and not offend people with disabilities. It is also important to take specific measures in your verbal and written communications to ensure that all students are receiving your messages. Follow the tips presented on this tip sheet to help you deliver accessible communications to your students.

Respectful communication

‣ Treat people with disabilities with respect, be patient and listen attentively
‣ Never make assumptions about what people can do
‣ Never attempt to speak or finish sentences when you are talking to people with disabilities
‣ Never use terms such as 'suffers from...'
‣ Address people with disabilities directly, not their support person
‣ Do not assume assistance is needed
‣ Accept a person's right to refuse help
‣ Be careful of the terms you use, e.g. preferably, they are a 'person with a disability', not a 'disabled person' to focus on the person, not the disability
‣ Avoid using collective nouns such as 'the disabled' or 'the blind' as these terms imply they are separate from the rest of society
‣ Use positive language. For example, use:
    ‣ 'accessible toilets/parking' not 'disabled toilets/parking'
    ‣ 'person with a learning disability' not 'slow learner'
    ‣ 'a wheelchair user' not 'confined to a wheelchair'
    ‣ 'person with a psychiatric disability (or specify condition)' not 'nutter'; 'crazy'; 'insane'; 'psycho'; or 'schizo'

Lectures and/or presentations

‣ Face your class, do not turn your back as those needing to lip-read need to see your face
‣ Make sure you do not have a light source behind you if you have a student using either an interpreter or lip-reading as it may place your face and upper body in shadow
‣ Watch your body language and do not rely on your body language to relay the meaning. If you are recording the lecture or even talking on the phone with the student, they cannot see your body
‣ Keep your tone of voice in the normal range, even if you have students with hearing impairments
‣ Be sensitive of terms you use, but don't change your natural language. You do not have to continually worry about using terms such as 'see' and 'hear'
‣ Be sensitive of physical limitations some students may have
‣ Do not rush through your material - communicate what you can clearly

> Do not assume your students know what you're thinking or can tell by your tone of voice/body language. Be explicit with everything.

Email

- Use a clear sans-serif font, such as Arial of at least 12 point font
- Avoid capitals, underlining and exclamation marks (unless grammatically necessary), as this equates to shouting at people
- Use a separate email for different subjects as this enables people to file them appropriately
- Avoid the use of emoticons (e.g.   ) for meaning because screen-readers don't see them and people may misunderstand your meaning
- Use a read receipt if you need to make sure the recipient has read your message
- Remember that emails are preserved documents, so don't say things you would consider private
- Avoid lengthy emails, attach a document if necessary
- Always remember to address and sign off, e.g. 'Regards', etc.
- Use the same manners and conventions you would in a letter
- Make sure you put in a subject or the recipients email may read it as junk mail

Overall tips

- Be seated when communicating with a wheelchair user
- Do not walk away from a person with visual impairment without indicating you are leaving
- Be aware of non-verbal communication when communicating with a person with an intellectual disability
- Some useful websites

Some useful website:

- Communicating comfortably with people with visual impairments
  http://www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=36&TopicID=163&DocumentID=194

Further information

For more information, please contact Equity, Diversity, and Disability (EDD): studentequity@ecu.edu.au or 9370 6960.

Specific needs

‣ **Hearing:** Digital voice recorders and hearing loops are available for loan from EDD and Multimedia Services
‣ **Visual (blind, visually-impaired, colour-blind):** Software available form EDD such as Zoomtext, JAWS, Computer profiles can be created via EDD and IT to set colours, font size etc. for whichever ECU computer is logged into
‣ **Physical (and mobility):** A tour of the University can be arranged with EDD
‣ **Language (ESL or foreign students):** A translator can be arranged in certain circumstances please check with EDD