

Tips and Scripts for Supporting Students with Disabilities in the Classroom or Lab

If a student discloses a disability or medical condition to you....

1. **Offer thanks:** Thank the student for confiding in you.
2. **Offer help:** State that you work closely with AccessAbility Services to ensure that students with disabilities are appropriately accommodated and supported.
3. **Provide information about AccessAbility Services:** Indicate that AccessAbility Services facilitates the provision of academic accommodations for students with permanent, temporary, or even suspected disabilities. Say that even if the student is unsure of whether they qualify for AAS support, an AAS advisor can talk them through next steps, and refer them elsewhere if appropriate.
4. **Make a referral:** Ask the student if they are comfortable with you referring them to AccessAbility Services. You can offer to email AccessAbility Services on their behalf and cc them.
5. **Maintain the student's privacy:** Indicate that in order to protect their privacy, only AccessAbility Services will review and store medical documentation.

Note: If a student was not already registered with our office, AccessAbility Services (AAS) will ask them to supply the office with appropriate documentation, or support them in obtaining it. AAS will then review and vet documentation and meet with the student to develop an individualized accommodation plan.

6. **Follow up:** You can follow up with the student throughout the term to see how the course, and any accommodations, are meeting their learning needs. This discussion will not be about their specific disability, but rather about how the accommodations and classroom environment are working for them.

If a student is struggling academically and you suspect they may require academic accommodations or support...

1. **Offer hope:** Indicate that you have observed that the student is experiencing some challenges academically, and that you can help them get the support they need.
2. **Offer help:** State that there are a variety of campus supports and services that are designed to aid a student's success, including the Writing Centre, the Student Success Office, and Counselling Services, which are available to all students. Indicate that AccessAbility Services is another resource if they feel they may need academic accommodations or support.
3. **Provide information about AccessAbility Services:** You can indicate that AccessAbility Services facilitates academic accommodations for students with permanent, temporary, or even suspected disabilities. Say that even if the student is unsure of whether they qualify for AAS support, an AAS advisor can talk them through next steps, and refer them elsewhere if appropriate.
4. **Make a referral:** Ask the student if they are comfortable with you referring them to AccessAbility Services. You can offer to email AccessAbility Services on their behalf and cc them.
5. **Maintain the student's privacy:** Indicate that in order to protect their privacy, only AccessAbility Services will review and store medical documentation.

Note: If a student was not already registered with our office, AccessAbility Services (AAS) will ask them to supply the office with appropriate documentation, or support them in obtaining it. AAS will then review and vet documentation and speak with the student about the situation.

6. **Follow up:** You can follow up with the student throughout the term to see how the course, and any accommodations, are meeting their learning needs. This discussion will not be about their specific disability, but rather about how the accommodations and classroom environment are working for them.

If a student requests a retroactive accommodation on the grounds that the delay/failure/omission was disability-related, and you are unsure if the request should be granted...

1. **Offer help:** Inform students that retroactive accommodations will be thoughtfully considered.
2. **State AccessAbility Services will be consulted:** Inform student that in order to consider retroactive accommodations that are disability related, AccessAbility Services will need to be consulted and engaged in the process to protect the student's privacy and ensure the student is supported.
3. **Make a referral:** Ask the student if they are comfortable with you referring them to AccessAbility Services. You can offer to email AccessAbility Services on their behalf and cc them.
4. **Maintain the student's privacy:** Indicate that in order to protect their privacy, only AccessAbility Services will need to review and store medical documentation.

Note to the instructor: If a student was not already registered with our office, AccessAbility Services (AAS) will ask them to supply the office with appropriate documentation, or support them in obtaining it. AAS will then review and vet documentation and speak with the student about the situation. After doing this, AAS can provide the department/professor with our recommendations. Factors that are taken into consideration would include the knowledge of disability prior to request (of both student and instructor), the timing of the request, and the quality of documentation. The instructor/department can then use the information from our office to make an informed decision on whether the student should be accommodated after the fact.

5. **Follow up:** Let the student know that you will follow up with them once a decision has been made.

If you have collected private medical information from students and want them to be safely disposed of, or stored...

1. If the student has graduated, withdrawn or gone inactive more than two years ago, shred using UWaterloo's confidential shredding method.
2. If you are in contact with the student, ask them for consent to send it to AccessAbility Services for appropriate and confidential storage. While verbal consent is appropriate, you should follow up with an email summarizing your discussion.

If it is *essential* that you impose a restriction within the classroom or lab that may be a barrier to a student with a disability (e.g., banning technology or devices) ...

- Include a statement in the course outline or other materials such as this: "If this restriction poses a barrier to learning, or interferes with an approved accommodation, please contact AccessAbility Services".

If there are health and safety concerns that students need to consider prior to participating in your classroom or lab (e.g., pregnant women completing certain labs)...

- Indicate that: "In order to support the health and safety of students, those who have a permanent, temporary, or suspected disability/medical condition or pregnancy that may affect their ability to participate in/complete labs (or interfere with attendance at labs), are asked to contact AccessAbility Services to ensure that appropriate accommodations and preparations have been considered."