

## DESIGNING ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY

Some students at USQ arrive with a range of conditions that are referred to as disabilities. These conditions can be divided broadly into: physical impairment, learning or information processing issues, and neurological, psychological or medical conditions.

In order to succeed in their studies, students who have one or more of these conditions must manage these in addition to the usual student work-life balance issues of work, friends and family.

### Accommodations or alternatives to existing assessment tasks

One way of addressing issues faced by students dealing with a disability is by making *accommodations* to existing assessment practices. A list of possible accommodations can be found at the [Student Services](#) website. This website also has a list of [contact staff members](#) in your faculty who you can speak to about designing assessments or accommodations for students with a disability.

In addition to any accommodations requested by registered students via Student Services, it is also important to consider the following issues when designing or managing assessment:

- students may be unable to complete assessment on time because they cannot predict when their particular condition will improve or worsen;
- they may be unable to remain calm, sit still or concentrate for long periods of time, as in exams;
- students may have to negotiate accommodations or defer assessment, such as field or work placements, if they are required to physically access specific community and work spaces.

Where student learning is negatively affected by particular modes of assessment it may be necessary to consider alternatives that develop or test the same key course objectives. This process is represented in the table below:

Course objective (s)	Assessment mode (s)	Comment
1. demonstrate problem-solving skills; 2. comprehend and apply relevant management theories and concepts.	Written case study, oral presentation, exam, oral exam, short answer questions, case-based CMS questions etc...	Theoretical comprehension and application and problem solving skills can be demonstrated using a range of assessment modes.

### Maintaining standards in our use of alternative assessment modes

Course examiners who set exams are often concerned about maintaining standards in their discipline. However, exams do not automatically equate to standards, which can be defined as an agreed-upon minimum threshold or level of student performance.

This minimum threshold correlates with the standard of student performance required for a passing grade *in any given assessment task*. For this reason many differing modes of assessment can be used to maintain disciplinary standards.

## Where the use of alternative assessments may not apply

Exams are an effective means of ensuring genuine ownership of student work. For this reason some external accreditation bodies require a certain percentage of assessment to be in the form of supervised exams.

Some key non-negotiable course objectives, such as written or oral communication skills, or interpersonal skills, can only be developed or tested by using specific modes of assessment.

In such cases, the use of accommodations is the most appropriate way of helping students with a disability to manage their learning.

## Other factors to consider

- the general accessibility of assessment support materials, and whether they are provided in different formats, such as written, spoken and audiovisual;
- whether course materials and *StudyDesk* are clearly structured, easy to navigate, and use simple font that offers a high contrast with the background of the website;
- whether websites use distracting or flashing images that may disorient some students;
- whether assessment support materials are easily accessible to students using Assistive Technologies: software that is designed to assist individuals with particular impairments (see Assistive Technology section of the CATS website below).

## Resources and further reading

Creating Accessible Teaching and Support (CATS), n.d, viewed April 7 2010, <<http://www.edcet.edu.au/cats/>>.

Hammer, S, Werth, S & Dunn, PK (2009) 'Tertiary students with a disability or chronic illness: Stigma and study', In: 3<sup>rd</sup> National Conference of Enabling Education: Enabling Pathways, 25-27 November 2008, Toowoomba, Australia, viewed April 7 2010, < <http://eprints.usq.edu.au/6278/>>.

Noble, J. (2010), '5 tips to immediately improve your website accessibility from a visually impaired web developer', *UI Trends*, website, viewed April 7 2010, < <http://uitrends.com/>>.

Learning & Teaching Support  
T: +61 7 4631 1685  
E: [academicdev@usq.edu.au](mailto:academicdev@usq.edu.au)  
W: [www.usq.edu.au/learnteach](http://www.usq.edu.au/learnteach)

USQ

UNIVERSITY OF  
SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND  
fulfilling lives