

# Guideline Universal Design

## Sheet 10: Communication



### What? <sup>1</sup>

Inclusive communication is an approach that seeks to create a supportive and effective communication environment by using every available form of communication to understand and be understood.

### Why and for whom? <sup>2</sup>

Students can experience various communication barriers. Think of **material thresholds** (e.g. accessibility of infrastructure), **physical thresholds** (e.g. sensory limitations), **intellectual thresholds** (e.g. information processing, question formulation) but also **psychological thresholds** (e.g. fear of failure, stress). In addition, communication that is not inclusive and universally designed can cause a feeling of exclusion for certain students or reinforce prejudices between groups of students. By becoming aware of different ways in which a person can communicate, each student is enabled to make choices and understand them, to express opinions and concerns and to involve themselves in the context around them.

### Tips & Tricks <sup>2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7</sup>

#### Personal communication

- Diversity policy** | Inquire about the diversity policy of the institution, accessibility aspects of documents and procedures for requesting support (e.g. an interpreter).
- Spoken language** | Use simple and clear language according to the understanding level of the person you are communicating with.
- Body language** | Use body language and gestures that support the spoken word.
- Direct contact** | Address your questions directly to the person.
- Articulate** | Articulate well, keep your mouth visible and talk loud enough, but don't shout.

- **Talk quietly** | Talk quietly and repeat if necessary, check if you are understood. Note when there is uncertainty or when something is not understood.
- **Interpreter** | If necessary, speak to a staff member who knows sign language or hire an interpreter.
  - Speak directly with the person and not with the interpreter.
  - Be patient. If the person's first language is a visual language (VGT), communication may take longer.
- **Accessible meeting space** | Meet all students in a conversation room that is accessible to everyone and where it is quiet (no constant passage or background noise).
- **Time** | Offer the student sufficient time to answer or think if necessary. Sometimes a second conversation is necessary.
- **Transfer of information** | Communicate information in the way that best meets the needs of the person.
- **Eye contact** | Remember that not all students are familiar with direct eye contact.
- **Repeat** | Ask to repeat information when you have misunderstood something.
- **Conversation containing bad news** | Start a bad news conversation in an appropriate way: prepare yourself well, bring the news directly, allow the student to process the news and conclude by offering solutions or alternatives.
- **Respond to the student:**
  - Give a student who is afraid of a difference of opinion sufficient time and ensure a safe atmosphere and space. Check whether the student genuinely agrees with what you are saying.
  - Give a student that offers strong resistance sufficient room to ventilate. Do not stray from your message and repeat it clearly.

### Communication via e-mail

- **Layout** | Keep the layout simple. Graphic components are more complex, more difficult to read for reading software and can delay the smooth reception of emails.
- **Structure** | Provide a clear structure: introduction, middle and final.

- ❑ **Accessible documents** | Take the guidelines for accessible documents into account, both in the e-mail itself and within the attachments (also check out Sheet 12: PDF and Word).
- ❑ **Subject** | Provide a short, clear description of the content of the e-mail via the subject of the e-mail.
- ❑ **Attachments** | Indicate in the e-mail whether attachments have been added and give them clear file names.
- ❑ **Images** | Use images, photos and symbols that support both the spoken and written word and provide an alternative text (Alt text).
- ❑ **Hyperlinks** | Provide hyperlinks with a clear description for reading software (e.g. "click here to register" instead of simply linking the hyperlink to the word "here").
- ❑ **English** | When sending e-mails to large groups of users, also provide a concise English version of the content to accommodate the large cultural variation within the target audience in an academic context. Also adjust the language to the target audience.
- ❑ **Platforms** | First send the e-mail to yourself and if possible also view it in different mail clients (Microsoft Outlook, Gmail, Hotmail, etc.) and on different platforms (computer, laptop, tablet, smartphone).
- ❑ **Transparency** | For agreements on communication via e-mail, clearly state in advance when the sender can expect a reply.

## Know more?

- ❑ Read some [useful tips for e-mailservices](#) here (Dutch).

## In practice

“Students used to be overwhelmed by emails. We have now decided to put all central communication in the newsletter. Students can indicate whether and when they want to receive updates in the electronic learning environment. This is how it is clustered.”

“A distinction is made between "need to know" and "nice to know".”

“ Mails are read very little. You can spread the news better in the cafeteria, according to the students. ”

“There is a need for a single point of contact. If there is anything wrong, there is a channel that you can go to. That person then forwards you to the other important channels.”

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Inclusive Communication Essex. (2019). What is inclusive communication? Geraadpleegd op 24/01/2019 via <http://www.essexice.co.uk/about-us/what-is-inclusive-communication/>
- <sup>2</sup> Goubin, E. (z.d.). Inclusieve communicatie, want iedereen verdient vakantie. Toerisme Vlaanderen. Geraadpleegd op 25/01/2019 via <https://kwaliteit.toerismevlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Inclusieve%20communicatien.pdf>
- <sup>3</sup> National Disability Authority. (2014). Email and Newsletter Guidance. Geraadpleegd op 28 maart 2018 via <http://universaldesign.ie/Products-Services/Customer-Communications-Toolkit-for-the-Public-Service-A-Universal-Design-Approach/Digital-and-Web-Based-Communication-Systems-and-Services/Email-and-Newsletter-Guidance/>
- <sup>4</sup> Van Keer, H. (2015-2016). Zorg, coaching en begeleiding [Cursus]. Gent: Universiteit Gent, Pedagogische Wetenschappen/Pedagogiek en Onderwijskunde.
- <sup>5</sup> Steunpunt Inclusief Hoger Onderwijs (2017). Universeel ontwerp [onuitgegeven intern document]. Gent: Steunpunt Inclusief Hoger Onderwijs
- <sup>6</sup> Thurber, A. and Bandy, J. (2018). Creating Accessible Learning Environments. Retrieved [18/01/2019] from <http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/creating-accessible-learning-environments/>.
- <sup>7</sup> Kelly, Anna M., and Padden, Lisa (2018). Toolkit for Inclusive Higher Educations Institutions: From Vision to Practice. Dublin: UCD Access & Lifelong Learning