
Accessibility in the multi-level classroom

Webinar handout

by **Emily Bryson**

This webinar celebrated the diversity of our classrooms and explored reasons for learners' mixed abilities. It shared practical ways to overcome barriers to learning such as neurodiversity, mental health, literacy and academic skills. It demonstrated some effective visual thinking strategies and tools which can be used to make learning accessible for all learners.

What is accessible learning?

Accessible learning refers to making the educational experience suitable for everyone. Every learner has their own needs, pace, preferences and skills. For this reason, the English language classroom can have mixed abilities. As teachers, we need to find creative ways to support and challenge every learner in order to keep them motivated and meet their goals.

What challenges are there?

There are many reasons why learners may require additional support, or extra tasks to push them forwards. Here are some examples:

- Neurodiversity (e.g. AD(H)D, autism)
- Specific Learning Differences (e.g. dyslexia, dyscalculia)
- Educational background (e.g. developing literacy, academic or digital skills)
- Disabilities (e.g. sensory impairment, mobility)
- Mental Health (e.g. depression, experience of trauma, unsettled home environment)

Simple strategies to differentiate learning:

Differentiating lessons to ensure every learner feels adequately supported and challenged doesn't mean preparing individual lessons for each learner. Here are some minimal-preparation ways to do this:

- Set 'Difficult' (ten questions) and 'Very difficult' tasks (five questions)
- Cover the text and copy or re-tell it (to practise speaking, spelling or writing)
- Rewrite or re-tell the text from another perspective (e.g. about the student)
- Read the text aloud in pairs & test each other (to practise literacy and pronunciation)
- Create questions for other learners to answer (or make fast finishers the 'teacher')
- Use digital resources (e.g. write a blog or social post, access a learning app)
- Ongoing projects (e.g. research something, add ideas to a presentation)
- Peer learning (e.g. support and explain content to another learner)
- Odds & Evens (e.g. some students answer the 'odd numbered questions')
- Multi-choice (for learners needing more support) vs. Open Questions (for fast finishers)
- Use visual thinking strategies and tools (e.g. graphic organisers, mind maps)

Accessible layout:

It is important that educational resources are accessible too. Making content such as worksheets available in multiple formats can support learners with various needs. Students can make use of online features such as enlarging texts, adapting colours, translation tools, screen readers, captions and AI to support their learning.

Here are some guidelines to help you create accessible resources:

- Use large fonts (minimum size 12 for Word, 24 for PowerPoint; though larger is better – especially if your learners are using their mobile phones).
- Use minimum 1.5 line spacing.
- Choose 'Sans Serif' fonts such as Arial, Trebuchet, Calibri as they are easier to read.
- For literacy learners, avoid fonts with 'a' and 'g' as these might confuse learners or over-complicate their handwriting (Century Gothic and Comic Sans are good alternatives; 'ɑ' & 'g' / 'α' & 'g').
- Use dark grey, dark blue or black text on a light or off-white background.
- Use **bold** for emphasis rather than *italics* or underlining.

A recording of Emily Bryson's webinar can be found here:

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/news-and-events/webinars/webinars-teachers/planning-every-learner-mini-event>

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