

Communicating with Instructors

The accommodation process requires communication. The student must communicate with each instructor to disclose how the disability affects academic functioning, to identify which accommodations will be needed, to make arrangements for these accommodations, and to report any barriers to access.

Disclosure

See also: Disability Disclosure: http://www.ncsu.edu/dso/home/disability_disclosure.html

The primary way that the student formally discloses to the instructor is by requesting a DSO Letter of Accommodation. This letter informs the instructor that the student has a documented disability, states which accommodations the student is eligible to receive, and provides information about how to arrange the accommodations.

No matter how comprehensive and well-written the letters of accommodation are, there is no substitute for student input. Therefore, once the letter is sent, the student must communicate with each instructor to discuss the letter and to set up accommodations.

Whenever possible, it is recommended that the student contact instructors before the semester begins or at the start of the semester. This will allow instructors to have the necessary information in time to arrange accommodations. In addition, early, private contact can guarantee confidentiality by preventing on-the-spot disclosure, possibly in the presence of others.

If a student's functional limitations include difficulty with communication, the student should contact the DSO Service Provider to request assistance communicating with instructors regarding accommodation needs.

Methods of Contact

The student can often choose the method of contact to use to communicate with instructors.

This important decision should be based on:

- Communication skills – what is the best method of communication for the student.
- The campus culture - how most students communicate with instructors.
- Instructor availability – contact information for instructors is usually listed on the course syllabus. Instructors may tell students the best way to make contact either via the syllabus or during the first class meeting.

Most often, several different methods of communication will be used throughout the semester. The student should inform instructors if there is a preferred method of communication or a need to use a particular method for access reasons. Regardless of the method, it is imperative that the student effectively communicate with instructors regarding accommodations. The DSO Service Provider is available to assist students who are having difficulty communicating about accommodations (919-515-7653; disability@ncsu.edu)

❖ **In-Person**

If effective for the student, an in-person contact is highly recommended either as a primary or secondary method. This will allow the student to demonstrate abilities and difficulties and to show any equipment or materials. In addition, it will allow instructors to show course materials, websites, locations, etc. It will also usually allow time for questions or clarification.

❖ **Email**

Email is a good way to make an initial contact with instructors, to request a meeting time, and to make follow up contacts. Students have used email to share information prior to the in-person meeting especially when accommodations are needed for the meeting. Email may also be used as the sole method of communication when a student has disability-related communication difficulties.

At NC State University email is a common form of communication and one preferred by many instructors. Email provides a written record of what was shared. For some students, email communication can reduce the anxiety of a face-to-face contact. It can also be useful for students who benefit from visual supports. Email can also be used to follow up on in-person meetings to summarize, ask additional questions, ask for clarification, provide reminders, etc. One limitation regarding email communication is possible lack of confidentiality. Therefore, some professors may not share certain information by email such as course grades.

❖ **Telephone**

Telephone contact can reduce time and travel. It can be a good choice for students who have strong auditory skills or those who benefit from auditory format. It is often used for follow up meetings and as a friendly reminder of accommodation needs (i.e. testing accommodations).

Self Advocacy Skills

Self advocacy skills are needed to request academic accommodations. The following seven (7) steps for effective written and verbal communication will help the student become a better self advocate. DSO Service providers are available to meet with students individually or in groups to learn and practice these steps. Interested DSO students should call 919-515-7653 or email disability@ncsu.edu to arrange an appointment.

Seven Steps for Effective Communication

1. Introduction - greeting, name, and reference to the course the student is taking
2. Disclosure – statement of disability-related academic difficulties, presented in functional terms
3. Solution - previous accommodations used, benefit, and statement of desire to use similar accommodations in this course.
4. Resources – explanation of sources for accommodations and what the student will do to implement them.
5. Agreement – a question as to the acceptability of accommodations and arrangements and a statement of affirmation.
6. Summary – restatement of accommodation, what the student will do and what the instructor role of responsibility will be
7. Closure - general positive statement and expression of appreciation.

1. Introduction

The introduction is a friendly greeting that tells the instructor who the student is and opens the conversation.

Whenever possible, it is helpful if the student:

- Approaches the conversation in a relaxed manner.
- Avoids fidgeting or verbal signs of nervousness such as "Uh," or "Um."
- Makes eye contact and extends a hand for a handshake when appropriate.

- Smiles and maintains a relaxed posture.

The goal of the introduction is to:

1. Establish a friendly basis for interaction; and
2. Let the instructor know who the student is and the relationship that the student has with the instructor

Examples

Make a formal greeting statement that addresses the instructor by name such as:

"Good morning, Dr. Hunt"

"Good afternoon, Mr. Brooks"

"Hello, Dr. Fox."

Then, state name and course. Be specific as to course number and section. For example:

"My name is Jane Black. I'm taking ENG 101 082 with you on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 1:30."

"I'm John Brown, and I'm in your MA 205 001 course; the section that meets on Monday-Wednesday-Friday at 10:15- 11:05."

Summary

- ✓ Greet the professor,
- ✓ Introduce yourself, and
- ✓ State the course and section.

2. Disclosure

Disclosure is a brief explanation of how disability limitations affect academic performance, current difficulties, and solutions that will allow improved functioning and access.

The key to successfully communicating accommodation needs is to:

- Focus on the functional areas that the accommodation will address.
- Explain how the disability affects ability to function in the classroom.

The goal of Disclosure is to:

1. Explain the disability in functional terms.

Examples

Explain how the disability affects you. Define your accommodation needs without focusing on the disability itself.

"It is difficult for me to take notes as thoroughly as I need."

"It can take me longer to read and comprehend written material."

Summary

- ✓ Define the disability in functional terms.
- ✓ Explain how the disability will affect you academically.

3. Solution Statement

The Solution Statement includes an explanation of what has been successfully used in the past to allow access and a request to use similar accommodations in this course.

It is important to:

- Request the accommodation in a statement, not in a question.
- Provide possible access solutions rather than asking the professor to come up with possibilities. This is a key to successful advocacy.

The goal of the Solution Statement is to:

1. Cite an accommodation identified as effective,
2. State the benefit, and
3. Make a request, in statement form, to use the accommodation in the course.

Examples

First, give an example of an accommodation.

"I have used a note taker successfully in my other courses."

"I have learned that using a recorder helps me review the lectures."

"In the past I've used audio format and extended time when taking tests."

Follow this with an explanation of the benefit to you in course.

"This helps me focus on the lecture, and I can have complete notes when I study."

"This allows me to have access to what was discussed in class."

"I've found that this is a good way for me to effectively demonstrate what I have learned."

Complete the request by stating that you think the accommodation would provide access in this course.

"I would like to use a note taker in your course as well."

"I would like to record your lectures."

"I would like to use audio format and extended time on your tests."

Summary

- ✓ State the accommodation(s) you have successfully used in similar courses,
- ✓ State the benefit(s) from using the accommodation(s), and
- ✓ Make a request in statement form to use the accommodation(s) in this course.

4. Resources

At this point the student should mention the resources available to the instructor when arranging accommodations and explain what persons and offices can help implement the accommodations. This includes what role the student will play in putting the accommodations in place.

Goal of the Skill

1. Describe the resource(s) available to implement the accommodations, and
2. State what your role will be.

Examples

First, state who (or what office) will be able to assist in providing an accommodation.

"The Disability Services Office (DSO) may be able to provide an academic assistant for my CH lab."

“If you do not have an individual testing room at the department, the DSO may be able to provide the space.”

Then, state your responsibility for implementing the accommodation.

“I will contact the DSO to request an academic assistant. “

“I will contact the DSO after you complete the Modified Testing Agreement form to check to see if they have a room available.”

Summary

- ✓ State what resources are available for arranging accommodations and,
- ✓ Specify what you will do to facilitate their implementation.

5. Agreement

Agreement means that the student asks the instructor if the accommodations would be acceptable to use in this course. By this point the student has provided sufficient information about accommodation needs, which accommodations are needed for the course, and the resources and process for arranging the accommodations. Now the student is ready to ask for confirmation of the accommodations.

The goal of Agreement is to:

1. Ask for agreement from the instructor, and
2. Confirm the agreement with an affirming statement.

Examples

First, ask if the accommodation plan sounds agreeable to the instructor. You might ask a question like:

“Does this seem like a workable plan to you?”

Then, respond to the instructor's agreement with an affirmative statement such as:

“Good.”

“O.K.”

“Thanks.”

Summary

- ✓ Ask for confirmation or agreement to use the accommodation, and
- ✓ Make an affirming or acknowledging statement.

6. Summary Statement

The Summary Statement restates what has been agreed upon and who will be responsible for implementation. It is important for the student to clarify what accommodation(s) will be used and who will be responsible for each part of the implementation process. This review allows for any misunderstandings to be clarified and both parties to be aware of their responsibilities.

The goal of Summary is to:

1. Restate the accommodation(s) to be used in the class,
2. State what you will do to implement the accommodation(s), and
3. State what you understand the instructor's involvement or responsibility will be.

Examples

Begin by restating the solution

"Good. I'll plan to use a note taker in class and a scribe when I take a test."

"Great. I will plan to use audio format for my tests."

"O.K. I'll plan to audio-record the classes."

Follow by stating what you will do to arrange for the note taker or scribe.

"I will contact the DSO to request the scribe and follow up with the Testing Coordinator about getting on the schedule."

Then, specify what action the instructor needs to take. For example:

"So then, you will help me identify a student in the class who can share notes by making an anonymous announcement?"

If the professor does not need to take any action at this time, you could say:

"I think that will take care of everything." or

"I will let you know if there are any problems but I think that's all for now."

Summary

- ✓ Restate the accommodation(s),
- ✓ State what your role will be in implementing them, and
- ✓ State what, if any, action will be required of your instructor.

7. Closure

The Closure is a generally positive statement indicating a close to the conversation that contains an expression of appreciation. The Closure should be made in a comfortable, unhurried manner. It is important to continue the feeling of confidence, avoiding any sense of hurry or apology.

Just as in the introduction, whenever possible:

- Approach the conversation in a relaxed manner without verbal nervousness such as "Uh," or "Um."
- Maintain eye contact
- Extend your hand for a handshake if it seems appropriate and
- Smile!

The goal of Closure is to:

1. Make a positive statement about the course or the accommodation arrangements, and
2. Express your genuine appreciation for the instructor's time, attention, and assistance.

Examples

First make a general statement such as:

"I'm looking forward to your course."

"I'm pleased we were able to get these arrangements made."

Then express your appreciation by saying:

"Thanks for your help."

"I appreciate your help."

Summary

- ✓ Make a positive statement which suggests closure, and
- ✓ Express your appreciation.

Adapted with permission from Self Advocacy & Conflict Resolution: Strategies for the Classroom Accommodation Request by Phillip Rumrill, Charles Palmer, Richard Roessler, and Patricia Brown, Project Accommodations Planning Training (APT), Department of Rehabilitation, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas, Second Edition 1999.