



The Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the United States

LESSON PLAN

Making the Grade: Understanding Accessibility at Your School

Grades 6-12



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Making the Grade: Understanding Accessibility at Your School



Goal: To give students an understanding of the accessibility barriers faced by persons with disabilities.

Objectives:

- Students will understand what accessibility means.
- Students will examine and grade their own school's accessibility.
- Students will identify accessibility as a human right.

Essential Question: Is my school accessible to people with disabilities?

Resources:

- Chart paper, black or white board
- Slips of paper with the identities
- Handout: *Accessibility Checklist* (see pages 4-5)
- Handout: *Eliminating Stereotypes, Words Do Matter* (see pages 6-7)
- Pen/Pencil, clipboards for groups
- Handouts of Article 9 from the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Time Frame: 1-2 Class Periods

Grade Level: Grades 6-12

Procedure:

- 1. Brainstorm/Imagine.** Ask participants to brainstorm some typical life activities that most people in your community do (e.g., going shopping, going to work, going to school, talking to friends, taking public transportation, eating in a restaurant, attending a religious service, attending a cultural or sports event). List these so the class can see them.
- 2. Identify.** Divide students into pairs and ask each pair to choose two activities from the list you just brainstormed (more than one group may choose the same activity). Once they have chosen an activity, have each pair of students choose at random one of the slips of paper you have prepared with the following role-play identities on them:
 - You are a fifth grader who uses a wheelchair.
 - You are a health teacher who has bipolar disorder.
 - You are a sixth grader with Down syndrome.
 - You are an American Sign Language teacher who is deaf.
 - You are a blind fifth grader.
 - You are a sixth grader and have one broken leg.
 - You are a teacher who has dyslexia.
 - You are a fifth grader with autism.
 - You are a teacher who has one arm.
 - You are a seventh grader with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).
 - You are a janitor who has rheumatoid arthritis.
 - You are a gym teacher who has tinnitus (ringing in ears).
 - You are a sixth grader who has Asperger syndrome.
 - You are a seventh grader who has quadriplegia (paralyzed from the neck down).
 - You are a fifth grader with memory loss.
 - You are a math teacher with obsessive-compulsive disorder.





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Give the following instructions: “The paper slip you drew is your ‘identity’ for the rest of the exercise. Imagine what it would be like for you to participate in the activities you have chosen. What barriers to access might you encounter? What would it take for you to be able to participate? What accessibility features would you need? Consider the following:

- **Physical Barriers:** Something that prevents a person from physically accomplishing a task. (e.g., *lack of ramps for people in wheelchairs*)
- **Informational Barriers:** Something that prevents a person from obtaining information. (e.g., *information not available in alternative formats*)
- **Institutional Barriers:** Organizational policies or practices that restrict the involvement of persons with disabilities. (e.g., *strict time commitments*)
- **Attitudinal Barriers:** An attitude which prevents a person from accomplishing a task. (e.g., *discrimination, bullying from peers*)

Teacher’s Note: You may need to remind students of the different kinds of barriers and illustrate each. You may also have to give students time to research the disability represented in the role they chose and what accessibility features they might need. For more information on student supports and accommodations see <http://www.disability.gov/education/>.

- 3. Report.** Ask each group to describe their identities and what activities they chose. Then ask each to name the accessibility features they would need to be able to participate in their activities. List these barriers and the corresponding accessibility feature needed on the chart paper or board. Be sure to ask for informational, institutional, and attitudinal, as well as physical barriers.
- 4. Explain.** Explain to students that everyone has the right to accessibility. It is enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Americans with Disabilities Act, which are used to protect all the rights of persons with disabilities, including accessibility.
- 5. Read.** Download the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=13&pid=150>. Give each students a copy of Article 9 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to read so they can gain an understanding of the obligations the school has to persons with disabilities.
- 6. Grade Your School.** Keeping the students in their pairs from Activity 1, hand out one copy of the “Accessibility Checklist” to each pair and have them go out to assess the school. When all students are done answering the questions on the checklist, have each pair tally the score and give their school a grade. Have each pair report to the class how the school’s accessibility would affect their “identity” – is it accessible for them? Would it meet their needs?
- 7. Discuss.**
 - How did your school do on the Accessibility Checklist?
 - Do certain people have advantages over others?
 - How does having accessibility make a difference in the lives of individual people with disabilities in the school?
 - How does not having accessibility affect certain people in the school?
 - Does your school violate any parts of Article 9?
 - What do you think the school needs to do to improve its accessibility?
- 8. Take Action.** Ask students to write a letter to the school board recommending one change that they think could be implemented in order to make the school more accessible for persons with disabilities.
- 9. Reflect.** Ask students to reflect on their responsibility to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of persons with disabilities. Have them read and respond to the handout, “Eliminating Stereotypes, Words Do Matter.”

Go Further! To learn more, download our *Disability Toolkit* at http://discoverhumanrights.org/Rights_of_Persons_With_Disabilities.html which includes a fact sheet, quiz, resources, and take action ideas. Also, check out this advocacy toolkit created by the UN Mine Action Team http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/disability/docs/CRPD_Advocacy_Tool.pdf.

Adapted from: Lord, Janet E., Katherine N. Guernsey, Joelle M. Balfe, and Valerie L. Karr. "Exercise 2.2: What Does It Mean to Enjoy Accessibility." *Human Rights. Yes! Action and Advocacy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Ed. Nancy Flowers. Vol. 6. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Human Rights Resource Center, 2007. 40-41.

Assessing Your School Environment for Access to People with Disabilities

<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>1. Is the international symbol of access (an outline of a person in a wheelchair) displayed in the entryway of the school?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>10. Is there an emergency exit plan that assumes the needs of people with disabilities?</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>2. Are forms of public transportation that reach the school accessible to people with disabilities?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>11. Are warning signals clear to people with disabilities? Can they be heard and seen by people with disabilities?</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>3. At entrances with stairways, are ramps available?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>12. Are there water fountains and phones at a height that can be reached by a person in a wheelchair?</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>4. Do the doors of the entryway(s) provide a clear opening of no less than 32 inches and can they be easily opened?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>13. Are there Braille signs in elevators, on restroom doors, on public phones, etc?</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>5. Is there a working elevator in the building? If not, are there enough classrooms on the first floor for all students who use a wheelchair? Or, do stairways have mechanical risers wherever possible or necessary? Are there enough classes scheduled in these accessible classrooms for all students who use a wheelchair?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>14. Are there restroom stalls that permit a full 36" rotation of a wheelchair? Are there grab rails surrounding the toilet seat? Are sink, soap, and paper towel holders at a height accessible to a person in a wheelchair?</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>6. Do all stairways have handrails?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>15. Are there tables in common areas (computer labs, libraries, snack bars) and in classrooms high enough so students who use wheelchairs can fit under them?</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>7. Do floors have a nonslip surface?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>16. Is classroom furniture arranged so that aisles are wide enough for students who are blind/visually impaired or who use wheelchairs or crutches?</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>8. Are the building hallways wide and flat enough to accommodate a person who uses a wheelchair, or other persons with different kinds of physical impairment?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>17. Are safety alarms, telephones, and room controls (lighting, heat, air conditioning, windows, window shades) within reach for a person in a wheelchair?</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>9. Are parking spaces available close to, and level with, the entrance to the school building and clearly marked with the international symbol of access (an outline of a person in a wheelchair)?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A</p> <p>18. Are common areas (library, cafeteria, auditorium and other common spaces) accessible to people who use wheelchairs?</p>



Accessibility Checklist



Assessing Your School Environment for Access to People with Disabilities

Yes No N/A 19. Does your school allow the use of a reader during test taking for students who have trouble reading test questions?

Yes No N/A 29. Does your school provide computer software that “reads” the print on screen to students?

Yes No N/A 20. Are students with disabilities given multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement throughout the curriculum and within the classroom?

Yes No N/A 30. Are there classes provided in sign language for students who are hard of hearing or deaf?

Yes No N/A 21. Are inclusion methods employed to include students with physical, mental, developmental, and/or learning disabilities in all aspects of classroom activity?

Yes No N/A 31. Are there athletic programs for students with disabilities, or athletic programs taught by a staff person with a disability?

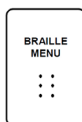
Yes No N/A 22. Are support services, special educational services, and paraprofessionals provided to students with disabilities as needed?

Yes No N/A 32. Are taped textbooks available to students with disabilities?

Yes No N/A 23. Are extracurricular activities provided for students with disabilities?

Yes No N/A 33. Does your school have a policy to allow students with learning disabilities extra time for test taking?

Yes No N/A 24. Are books in Braille provided to students who are visually impaired?



Yes No N/A 34. Does your school provide solitary and quiet places for students who are easily distracted to take their tests?

Yes No N/A 25. Are forms of assistive technology available to students with disabilities?

Yes No N/A 35. Overall, are students with disabilities given equal opportunity to learn in your school?

Yes No N/A 26. Are audio and visual devices equipped with captions?

The Accessibility Checklist is designed so that a “YES” or “N/A” (Not Applicable) answer indicates “ACCESSIBLE” and a “NO” answer indicates the existence of a “NONACCESSIBLE” feature in the school. All dimensions provided in this checklist are given in units of inches, unless otherwise specified.

Yes No N/A 27. Are large-print books provided for students who are visually impaired?



The Accessibility Checklist is based on the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG). The ADAAG and other accessibility-related information can be found at The Access Board Website: www.access-board.gov.

Yes No N/A 28. Are specially-equipped computers available to students who have difficulty writing on paper?

Sources: “Assessing Your School Environment for Access to People with Disabilities,” Anti-Defamation League, 2005. http://www.adl.org/education/curriculum_connections/fall_2005/fall_2005_lesson5_sb_assessing.asp. “Accessibility Checklist,” Kentucky Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, 2001. http://ada.ky.gov/documents/Checklist_2000.pdf.



Eliminating Stereotypes: Words Do Matter



The words or expressions we use when referring to persons with disabilities are very subtle and might seem unimportant. However, when one considers that language is a primary means of communicating attitudes, thoughts, and feelings, the elimination of words and expressions that stereotype becomes an essential part of creating an inclusive environment. Every individual, regardless of sex, age, race, or ability, deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. As part of the effort to end discrimination and segregation—in employment, education, and our communities at large—it is important to eliminate prejudicial language.

Like other minorities, the disability community has developed preferred terminology—**Person First Language**. More than a fad or political correctness, Person First Language is an objective way of acknowledging, communicating, and reporting on disabilities. It eliminates generalizations, assumptions, and stereotypes by focusing on the person rather than the disability. Person First Language recognizes that individuals with disabilities are, first and foremost, people. It emphasizes each person's value, individuality, dignity, and capabilities. This philosophy demonstrates respect by emphasizing the *person first* rather than the disability and by distinguishing the person from the disability. It is the difference in saying “the autistic child” and “a child with autism.” The following examples provide guidance on what terms to use and which ones are inappropriate when talking or writing about people with disabilities.

Do Say:	Don't Say:
child with a disability	disabled or handicapped child
person with cerebral palsy	palsied, CP, or spastic
person who has...	afflicted, suffers from, or victim
without speech, nonverbal	mute or dumb
developmental delay	slow
emotional disorder or mental illness	crazy or insane
psychiatric disability	insane
person who is deaf or hard of hearing	deaf and dumb
uses a wheelchair	confined to a wheelchair
person with developmental disability	retarded
person with Down syndrome	mongoloid
has a learning disability	is learning disabled
non-disabled	normal, healthy
has a physical disability	crippled
congenital disability	birth defect
condition	disease (unless it is a disease)
seizures	fits
mobility impaired	lame
medically involved or chronically ill	sickly
paralyzed	invalid or paralytic
has hemiplegia (paralysis of one side of the body)	hemiplegic
has quadriplegia (paralysis of both arms and legs)	quadriplegic
has paraplegia (loss of function in lower body only)	paraplegic
person of short stature	dwarf or midget



Eliminating Stereotypes: Words Do Matter



What Should You Say?

- **Recognize that people with disabilities are ordinary people** with common goals for a home, a job, and a family. People with disabilities should be portrayed as actively going about the business of living as other people do, not as passive victims, tragic figures, or superheroes.
- **Never equate a person with a disability.** Never refer to someone as retarded, an epileptic, or quadriplegic. These labels are simply medical diagnoses. Use *Person First Language* to tell what a person HAS, not what a person IS.
- **Emphasize abilities, not limitations.** For example, say “a man walks with crutches,” not “he is crippled.”
- **Don’t categorize.** Avoid grouping people with disabilities into categories such as “the handicapped” or “disabled people.” Use language that reflects the idea that children/adults with disabilities are individuals and not a group with generalized traits.
- **Recognize that a disability is not a challenge to be overcome.** Don't say “people succeed in spite of a disability.” Ordinary things and accomplishments do not become extraordinary just because they are done by a person with a disability. What is extraordinary are the lengths people with disabilities have to go to and the barriers they have to overcome to do the most ordinary things.
- **Use “handicap” to refer to a barrier created by people or the environment.** Use “disability” to indicate a functional limitation that interferes with a person's mental, physical, or sensory abilities, such as walking, talking, hearing, and learning. For example: people with disabilities who use wheelchairs are handicapped by stairs.
- **Do not refer to a person as bound to or confined to a wheelchair.** Wheelchairs are liberating to people with disabilities because they provide mobility.
- **Do not use “special” to mean segregated,** such as separate schools or buses for people with disabilities, or to suggest a disability itself makes someone special.
- **Avoid euphemisms** such as physically challenged, inconvenienced, and differently abled.
- **Promote understanding,** respect, dignity, and a positive outlook.

Words to Avoid

Avoid words that have negative or judgmental connotation. Words like these fail to demonstrate respect and do not recognize the person's strengths and abilities. Avoid using words such as:

Afflicted	Confined
Disease	Crippled
Drain or burden	Inspirational
Poor	Stricken
Suffers from	Uplifting
Unfortunate	Victim

Sources: “Describing People with Disabilities” compiled by the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities. www.txddc.state.tx.us/resources/publications/pfanguuage.asp. *A Model for Accessibility*. Developed by the Center on Disability Studies, University of Hawaii at Manoa. November 2003. <http://www.cds.hawaii.edu/main/publications/modelforaccess/>.



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