# Access to teaching materials before lectures, seminars, practical classes and other teaching sessions

## At least 24 hours before

“It’s good when a lecturer is happy to put slides to Moodle in advance - but not an hour before, at least a day in advance!”

Student focus group, PESE Project 2016

* Materials to be available a minimum of 24 hours prior to the session.
* Explain what students can expect to receive.
* Give details of where the information can be accessed.
* State when it will be available.
* As well as including in the Module handbook, find alternative ways to give this information.

Students should be given advance access to any materials including PowerPoints and handouts which are to be used in a lecture or other academic contact session at least 24 hours before.

This enables students to read and process the information prior to the lecture. Ideally, we recommend that you aim for 48 hours or more to allow students time to fully prepare.

The Module handbook should state clearly what type of documents students can expect to receive prior to the teaching session, when it will be available and where they can find it as well as outlining the learning objectives for each session. This is included in the Module handbook templates in use at Oxford Brookes. It can be helpful to show here how the learning objectives for each session link to the overall learning outcomes and assessments of the module. Module Guides should be available to download from Moodle so that students can format it into a version which they find more accessible.

As well as stating what information will be available when and in what format, state also if there are sessions where, for pedagogical reasons, there will not be any materials to be viewed in advance or where they may need to be amended after first being uploaded to Moodle. The explanation for this will help students prepare for this session.

The learning experience is enhanced when students understand why the teaching is delivered in a particular way and how they will learn from this. With a view to providing multiple ways to engage, you could upload a screencast to Moodle to explain this to students whilst also showing them around your Moodle site using [My Media Site](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/it/services/lecture-capture/).

## Presentation slides

* If using PowerPoint or similar, upload a copy to Moodle.
* An amended version of slides can be put on Moodle if you wish to reveal some elements in the class.

Having access to teaching materials ahead of lectures, seminars and other teaching sessions helps students to engage with the lecture because they can reduce the need for reading and listening simultaneously which puts a high demand on working memory.

The benefit of this is particularly felt by those with dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties, disabilities, English as an additional language and those with non-traditional educational backgrounds, who learn more effectively when they:

* can read any documents beforehand.
* can print handouts in a particular format (larger or on, coloured paper.
* can use [assistive technology (such as text-to-speech software)](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CenxcqvG7YFHMGZhEHQjQ_WDiArIMysn933KunJRzXA/edit).

It is therefore important that if a PowerPoint or similar, is being used, copies of slides are uploaded onto Moodle before and not after the lecture. An amended version of the slides can be uploaded before the lecture, if, for example, the slides contain spoilers.

If a different version has been uploaded in advance it should correlate closely to the version used on the day, leaving gaps where content has been removed. The amended version can be replaced with the final version on Moodle after the session. Significantly different versions of slides can be distracting as focus is taken away from what is being said to finding where the slide is on the handouts they have printed (PESE, 2016).

## Other documents

“You need to be prepared before the lecture and know (in advance) what you are going to discuss because it takes a lot of concentration to follow.”

Student focus group, PESE Project 2016

* Upload any handouts you will be using to Moodle.
* An outline of the session can be used instead of slides.

Effective study skills are particularly important for students with disabilities and Specific Learning Difficulties and students who experience these difficulties are particularly likely to access materials before taught sessions to support their learning (Mark J. Taylor et al, 2009).

For example, a student with dyslexia may use text-to-speech software to read through materials beforehand as they know they cannot read quickly enough in the lecture and a student with a visual impairment may wish to print handouts in a larger font. Students are able to annotate the handouts either using a print-out or one of the many available apps to annotate documents electronically.

The recommendation to give lecture notes in advance or to provide students with copies of PowerPoints should not be restrictive. Using a range of approaches to share knowledge with a diverse group of students forms one of the principles of inclusion, or universal design for learning (Rose and Meyer, 2008) and tools such as PowerPoint or Prezi will not always be used. If you are not using slides an alternative method can be used to give students information about what to expect from this session.

One example of this is to create an outline of this session which includes the key topics being covered, details of the session structure, a brief summary, dates and key names of people or places. Reviewing this information enables the student to feel prepared and ready to take part when they attend the class. Research has shown that when students have not had access to materials to prepare before a session they can feel anxious about what will follow and lack confidence and are therefore less engaged (PESE, 2016) and that having such access may actually increase attendance at lectures (Babb, K.A., 2008).

## Variety of formats

* Consider different learning needs when choosing course materials.
* Guide students to access knowledge through a variety of formats.

Multi-sensory teaching to give alternative ways for students to access the information is seen as key to inclusive teaching.

Higbee and Goff (2008) in their model for Universal Instructional Design explain the need to consider the diversity of learners, including learning needs and prior learning experiences.

For example, students with dyslexia and specific learning difficulties are often acutely aware of how they learn best and have developed strategies for study which play to their strengths. The structure of courses with a combination of prior learning, lectures, seminars and practicals, forms the basis of a multisensory approach.

It is evident that a deeper understanding can be achieved through exploring the topic with the aid of a variety of resources. Greater variety in these resources will enhance the experience for many students. Examples of ways to present information include flowcharts, mind maps, videos and podcasts, interactive sessions, practical exercises and text (given in advance).

The Higher Education Academy explain that “All students have different learning approaches. Inclusive curriculum design should involve reflection on the opportunities for different approaches to learning to be embedded and/or offered as alternatives within the curriculum” (HEA 2011).

## Key terminology

“there is a lot of medical terminology, and we get advance core reading and questions that I find stimulating, and it’s easier to follow, so providing the terminology in advance is helpful”.

Student focus group, PESE Project 2016

* Give key terminology, names, dates and formulae.
* Explain jargon, acronyms and abbreviations.

Key terminology and formulae should be given to students at least 24 hours prior to the lecture or other contact session enabling students to familiarise themselves with new words before the session and ensuring a student with hearing or auditory processing difficulties has the opportunity to understand.

It also helpful to explain any jargon, acronyms and abbreviations that may be used.

## Reading lists

* Indicate which reading is essential and which is supplementary.
* Indicate the most important chapters or articles.

Prioritise reading lists and indicate which reading is essential. Identifying the most important chapters or articles helps students with dyslexia who typically have to re-read materials multiple times and have difficulty skim-reading.

### Library Reading List Project

* Design your reading list so that it delivers the Learning Outcomes of your module - make it as relevant and important to the learning process as any other part of the module.
* Tell your students how you want them to use the reading list and what they're meant to learn from the reading.
* Link the reading list with the module's assessment and face-to-face teaching to motivate them to engage more with the reading.
* Ask students to complete activities that direct their attention to what you want them to learn and to deepen their engagement with the reading.

If you would like to know more about the research being carried out as part of this project please contact Dan Croft at <mailto:dcroft@brookes.ac.uk>.