

Making Your Classroom Program More Accessible

Practical guidelines for Renaissance Society program leaders in assigned classrooms

Accessible teaching does not mean you have to become an ADA expert. It means using simple classroom habits that help more people hear, see, follow, and participate comfortably.

Before Class Begins

Arrive early enough to check the room setup and make small adjustments before participants arrive.

- Aisles, doorways, and seating areas are clear.
- People can move safely with walkers, canes, wheelchairs, scooters, or other mobility supports.
- Seats are available near the front for people who need to see or hear better.
- The screen is visible from the back of the room.
- The lights are bright enough for reading and note-taking.
- The microphone or classroom audio is working.
- Your slides, handouts, videos, or demonstrations are ready before class starts.

Do not block accessible seating areas, ramps, aisles, or doorways with bags, chairs, carts, tables, or supplies.

Use the Microphone

Please use the microphone, even if you believe your voice is loud enough. The microphone helps people with hearing loss, people sitting farther back, people using assistive listening devices, and anyone who has trouble following speech in a group setting.

If audience members ask questions, repeat the question into the microphone before answering.

Example: “The question was, ‘Where can we find the handout after class?’”

Speak Clearly and Pace Yourself

Speak at a comfortable, moderate pace. Pause after important points. Give people time to process information, look at slides, take notes, or ask questions.

- Face the audience when speaking.
- Avoid talking while turned toward the screen.
- Give one instruction at a time.
- Pause before moving to the next slide.
- Summarize key points before changing topics.

Small steps. Big impact.

- Check in occasionally: “Would it help if I repeated that?”

Make Slides Easy to Read

If you use slides, keep them simple and readable.

- Use large text.
- Use strong contrast, such as dark text on a light background.
- Avoid pale gray text.
- Avoid busy backgrounds behind words.
- Keep each slide focused on one main idea.
- Use short phrases instead of long paragraphs.
- Do not rely on color alone to explain meaning.
- Avoid tiny captions, crowded charts, or complicated tables.

Helpful test: stand at the back of the room before class. If you cannot easily read the slide from there, some members probably cannot either.

Describe What You Show

When you show an image, chart, map, object, demonstration, or screenshot, briefly describe the important information out loud.

Instead of saying...	Try saying...
“As you can see here...”	“This chart shows attendance increasing from January through May.”
“Click this button...”	“Click the blue button in the upper-right corner labeled Submit.”

This helps people who cannot see the screen clearly, people sitting farther back, and people who process information better when it is spoken aloud.

Make Handouts Easy to Use

If you provide handouts, make them readable.

- Use clear headings.
- Use large enough type.
- Use strong contrast.
- Avoid squeezing too much information onto one page.
- Leave some white space.
- Use simple fonts.
- Provide an electronic version when possible.

If your handout includes a website link, use meaningful wording, such as “Visit the Fall Catalog page” rather than “Click here.”

Be Thoughtful With Videos

If you show a video, choose one with captions whenever possible and turn the captions on before playing it.

Before using a video, check that:

- The sound is clear.
- The captions are readable.
- The video does not move too fast for your purpose.
- The content can be understood by the whole group.

After the video, briefly summarize the main point.

Give People More Than One Way to Participate

Not everyone is comfortable speaking in front of a group. Some people may have hearing, speech, mobility, vision, anxiety, or processing challenges. When possible, offer choices.

Example: “You may share aloud, write down your answer, discuss with someone near you, or simply listen.”

If you ask people to work in groups, move around the room, come to the front, or write on a board, offer an alternative that does not require anyone to explain why they need it.

Avoid Putting Anyone on the Spot

Do not ask someone to explain a disability or access need in front of the class. If someone tells you they are having trouble hearing, seeing, moving around, or following the material, respond calmly and respectfully.

Helpful response: “Thank you for letting me know. Let’s see what we can adjust.”

Then make a practical adjustment if you can, such as using the microphone, enlarging the slide, repeating information, slowing down, moving closer, or sharing the handout.

Keep the Classroom Environment Welcoming

A welcoming classroom helps everyone learn.

- Start with a brief overview of what will happen.
- Let people know when breaks will occur.
- Repeat important instructions.
- Avoid rushing.
- Use plain language when possible.
- Explain unfamiliar terms.
- Encourage questions.
- Allow people to step out quietly if needed.

- Be patient with technology questions.

Know What Is Not Your Responsibility

Program leaders are not expected to personally decide formal ADA accommodations or handle specialized services on their own.

You are responsible for good everyday teaching practices:

- Use the microphone.
- Make slides readable.
- Repeat questions.
- Describe visuals.
- Provide clear handouts.
- Give people time.
- Be flexible and respectful.

Formal accommodation requests should be referred to the appropriate RS or Sac State contact.

Quick Checklist for Program Leaders

Before class	During class	After class
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Room is easy to enter and move through. <input type="checkbox"/> Aisles and doorways are clear. <input type="checkbox"/> Seats near the front are available. <input type="checkbox"/> Microphone works. <input type="checkbox"/> Slides are readable from the back. <input type="checkbox"/> Handouts are easy to read. <input type="checkbox"/> Videos have captions when possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Use the microphone. <input type="checkbox"/> Face the audience. <input type="checkbox"/> Speak clearly and slowly enough. <input type="checkbox"/> Repeat audience questions. <input type="checkbox"/> Describe important visuals. <input type="checkbox"/> Give one instruction at a time. <input type="checkbox"/> Allow flexible participation. <input type="checkbox"/> Pause for questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Share materials if appropriate. <input type="checkbox"/> Follow up on access concerns. <input type="checkbox"/> Note what could be improved next time.

You do not have to do everything perfectly. The most important steps are simple: use the microphone, make materials readable, describe what people need to see, repeat questions, and give people time. These habits help members with disabilities — and they make the classroom better for everyone.