

Rīga Stradiņš University Guidelines for Study and Environmental Accessibility

1. General Provisions

- 1.1. Every RSU employee should, within their capabilities, encourage and support students with functional limitations that require to ensure the study environment and process that create equal opportunities to receive the higher education.
- 1.2. The study process involves a variety of actions and activities (e. g. reading, writing, speaking, listening, moving, etc.), while functional limitations, which can also be very diverse (e. g. movement disorders, vision impairment, cognitive impairment, etc.), have a significant impact on the performance thereof.
- 1.3. Adjustments do not mean any special discounts for students with functional limitations, lowering requirements or treating them differently from fellow students. These are simple actions that can be done without much effort or additional cost, but help the student achieve learning outcomes by reducing the impact of their functional limitations on the study process. Such adjustments must be inconspicuous yet effective.

2. General Adjustments and Recommendations

- 2.1. General adjustments apply to all students, so that the study process can be fully mastered and made equally accessible to all;
- 2.2. Make sure that the student with functional limitations needs help before providing it;
- 2.3. If students with functional limitations require support, provide clear information on who to address for assistance with problems in the study process;
- 2.4. The student is responsible for informing about their situation and the need for adaptation of the study environment or materials;
- 2.5. With reference to the Academic Regulations I, descriptions of study courses and course literature are available to students before the beginning of the study course. This allows the student to get acquainted with the requirements of the study course and prepare for the course in time. The information included in the description of the study course allows the student to understand and evaluate the necessary adjustments;
- 2.6. Place study materials or information about them in e-studies platform or announce them in time so that the student can evaluate the availability of materials and ask to adapt the materials if needed;
- 2.7. Place information about study assignments, lesson activities, examinations, intermediate examinations, and final examinations in e-studies platform or inform about them in a timely and exact manner;

- 2.8.If necessary, specify the assignments of the study course, adjust the format of study literature and assignments; if necessary, allocate time to convert the material to other formats. (Audio, word processing format, etc.);
- 2.9.Clearly define requirements and submission dates for study course assignments (writing assignments, reading assignments, etc.). Especially students with functional limitations often need extra time to complete them; accurate information helps them plan the work;
- 2.10. Provide or suggest alternative opportunities for studying for lectures and classes (printouts of presentations, audio / video recordings of lectures, summaries, lecture notes from other students, magnified printouts, etc.);
- 2.11. Timely provide the student with lecture handouts or other alternative opportunities to help them learn the topic of the lecture;
- 2.12. Change the room or its layout so that the student with functional limitations can access it;
- 2.13. Use contrasting colours in your presentations (for example, black on a white or light yellow background) and use letters with reduced blurring in your text;
- 2.14. Allow the student to choose a place in the room (depending on visual impairment, they may choose to sit closer or farther from the lecturer);
- 2.15. Read aloud the text from the board or handouts and repeat other students' questions and comments if it helps master the studies (the lecturer, other students);
- 2.16. Supplement the spoken text with written assignments and comments and use more visual materials (photos, films) during the study process;
- 2.17. Allow the student to use audio recorders, laptop, tablet, or other device for taking notes (if they are in the student's possession, they can be used in the learning process);
- 2.18. Allow the assistant to take part in the study process and during the examination (if the student has an assistant);
- 2.19. In addition, inform the student if the study schedule or the location of the class is changed.
- 2.20. Keep the classroom quiet (free from noise and other environmental stimuli).

3. Adjustments in the E-Environment

- 3.1 The availability of the RSU website is ensured in the e-learning environment (according to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/>);
- 3.2 Presentations and other materials in the e-environment are sufficiently legible, their font size and colour can be changed so that any student, even with functional limitations, can perceive the text written in the material and adapt the text in a format that they can understand.

4. Adjustments During Examinations

- 4.1.If necessary, hold consultations and / or offer test alternatives before the test (written / oral, additional time – 150%, 200% of the test time, which can be determined individually by prior agreement and taking into account the severity and nature of the functional limitations);

- 4.2. The student has access to an environment suitable for studies and, if necessary, the possibility to take the examination remotely, the use of specific aids or applications of assistive technologies, etc.;
- 4.3. Use alternative formats and materials during examinations, such as assignments in audio format; the text of the assignment written in a large font; allow use of text-reading devices (if the student possesses one), use the option to record answers in audio format instead of answering in writing, extend the examination time (different adjustments can also be combined);
- 4.4. Adequate and high-quality lighting (at least 300 lux or additional lighting if necessary) must be provided during the test;
- 4.5. If necessary, allow the use of additional devices (computer and other electronic devices for writing, Braille display, etc.);
- 4.6. If necessary, allow the personal assistant to take part in the test or interpret, explain the questions asked;
- 4.7. During the test, the student with functional disorders is supervised in the same way as all students, and the student is obliged to comply with the provisions of internal regulatory documents. If the student uses personal devices, the academic staff has the right to check the files and programmes in them before the start of the examination. The student is obliged to inform about their situation and individual needs in the study process in order to be able to successfully master the study material and participate in examinations;
- 4.8. In order to successfully organise examinations, it is necessary to get acquainted with the Guidelines for Organising Electronic Examinations.

5. Specific Adaptations

- 5.1. For successful mastering of the study process, the student uses combinations of different senses. In case of a sensory system disorder or malfunction, specific adjustments are required:
- 5.2. **In case of visual impairment:** perceives the adjustment of light or font size and, in some cases, also Braille.

Recommendations:

1. Introduce yourself at the beginning of the conversation so that the student knows you are in the room;
2. During the conversation, it is desirable to verbally emphasise the main points of the conversation, because the perception of non-verbal gestures depends on visual acuity;
3. Allow the student to use the aids / assistive technology available to them (white cane for mobility, text enlargement devices, etc.);
4. Give straightforward directions about activities in the room (“to the right” or “to the left”, “step up” or “step down”, information about obstacles such as “a chair on your left” or “stairs three steps ahead”).
5. Let the student take the most comfortable position in the room so that they can see and hear; if possible, allow to touch different objects / materials to explore them;
6. Introduce the student to the layout of the room or laboratory with emphasis on the nearest exits and the location of the security equipment;

7. Help the student by marking lab materials with contrasting colour so that they are easily distinguishable / identifiable.

5.3. In case of hearing impairment: lip reading, sign language. Sign language is a communication system characterised by its own grammatical structure, different from that of verbal language. The minimal unit of sign language is a gesture or manual sign that serves as a self-contained medium. (The material structure of a manual sign consists of several components: hand shape, hand position, sign location, movement.)

Recommendations:

1. Look directly at the student speaking, even if a sign language interpreter is present;
2. Before starting the conversation, make sure the student is paying attention to you;
3. Talk in short sentences in conversational volume, articulating the sounds accurately. Speak briefly and at a slower pace, stressing the key words in the sentence;
4. Keep in mind that the interpretation process takes time, there is no need to rush;
5. Complement your speech with vivid expressions and natural gestures as needed to enhance emotional impact;
6. If a sign language interpreter is available, allow them to participate in the study process.

5.4. In case of movement disorders

Recommendations:

1. Consider lecture / class planning and localisation – it may take longer to get from home to classes / from one room to another / from one building to another (if the lectures are not held in one place);
2. Organise lectures in a building with facilities for people with functional limitations;
3. Provide accessible lecture and classroom facilities (for example, if the student is in a wheelchair, there must be adequate space for manoeuvring);
4. Allow the student to choose a place in the room (closer to the door, closer to the lecturer), using a desk of suitable height and width where possible.
5. Allow the student to use a tablet or laptop (if the student has difficulty writing);
6. Allow the assistant to take part in the study process and during the examination (if the student has an assistant);
7. When talking to a student in a wheelchair, provide an opportunity to sit in front of him (at eye level);
8. For a student in a wheelchair, the number of hours in a study day is important – provide time for the student to change posture and lie down to prevent bedsores. Allow and support the organisation of student leisure time and type. This also applies to students with other movement disorders, such as hemiparesis, who may become tired during the study process;
9. Extend the deadline for submitting individual assignments, or plan the execution of assignments in parts (depending on the type and amount of the student's functional limitations);

10. Extend the examination time (including rest breaks if necessary). By extending the examination time for students with functional hand disorders, the examination may be divided into several parts or the student may be given the opportunity to take the exam orally or on a computer.

5.5. In case of learning disabilities (Dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, and others)

Recommendations:

1. Let the student choose a place as close to the lecturer as possible (front row);
2. A font for dyslexics can be used in presentations (<https://www.dyslexiefont.com/en/dvslexie-font/how-dyslexia-works>);
3. At the beginning of the lecture, repeat what was said in the previous lecture (to help remembering);
4. Schedule breaks during lectures or examinations to promote holding attention;
5. Schedule shorter, quick tasks in classes and examinations (like shorter tests, but more often during the semester);
6. Give clear instructions on how to complete the task and give information in the most appropriate way (written or oral). If necessary, create brief instructions for tasks (little text, more pictures);
7. Use less text in presentations, give more information orally;
8. Schedule submissions of independent papers in parts, reducing volume and setting a reasonable deadline;
9. Use audio tracks instead of written text or read aloud the instructions for assignments, for example, in exams;
10. Extend the examination time to facilitate the perception of written information;
11. Allow the examination to be taken orally if necessary;
12. If the student has bad handwriting, allow the written examination to be typed;
13. Avoid all kinds of distractions in the environment.

Description of Functional Limitations

Vision Impairment

The following terms are used to describe vision impairment:

- a) Complete loss of vision, blindness – the student learns through Braille or other non-visual media.
- b) Partial loss of vision – a student who has less than 20 / 200 vision in the functioning eye or a very limited field of vision.
- c) Low vision – refers to severe vision impairment at a distance and to near vision.

Hearing Impairment

Hearing impairments limit language perception, communication with other people, and perception of sounds in the environment. The adjustments required depend on a number of factors: the degree of hypoacusis, age at onset of the functional impairment; languages used by the student.

The following terms are used to describe hearing impairments:

- a) Deafness – a hearing impairment that also affects language acquisition, the person reads lips or uses sign language for communication.
- b) Hypoacusis – a hearing impairment that affects speech perception and independent speech, the person still has the ability to learn a limited vocabulary.

Sign language interpreter – both directly and reflexly translates texts into Latvian sound and sign language in communication between a deaf person and a hearing person, using oral, visual (manual), and written translation skills, translates lectures, speeches, as well as other forms of oral communication in Latvian and is proficient in at least one foreign sign language.

Learning Disabilities

A learning disability (e. g. dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia) is a problem of neurobiological origin where the functioning or structure of the human brain is different and affects the processes that ensure the understanding or use of spoken or written language. Such problems can occur if a person has difficulty listening, thinking, speaking, writing, reading, spelling, or performing mathematical calculations. A person with a learning disability is considered to have difficulty processing information, which affects the normal learning process. The most common learning disabilities are difficulties in learning to read and write, so specific reading, writing, dyscalculia and language signal (visual and audio) processing disorders can be discussed.

The following terms are used to describe learning disabilities:

- a) Dyslexia – specific reading disorder, it manifests itself as difficulties in recognising words

fluently, spelling them, and understanding the meaning of what is read, as well as problems with orthography. Signs of dyslexia include difficulty learning to speak, learning the alphabet and the sounds of letters, remembering numbers, dates, facts, reading, writing and learning foreign languages, and performing arithmetic operations. A student with dyslexia may have problems with spatial perception, so they see letters in reverse or confuse letters within a single name. Misreading interferes with understanding the meaning of what is read. In the case of these students, short-term memory is dominant, students are characterised by attention deficit disorder, they are sensitive to environmental stimuli, and their handwriting can be illegible.

b) Dyspraxia – difficulty planning and coordinating movements (motor planning difficulties such as apraxia of balance, posture, hand function, tongue, jaw movement or speech, etc.).

c) Speech apraxia – a disorder that affects speech planning and expression. This disorder affects the ability to move the jaw, lips and tongue to make sounds. Such a person is more likely to listen to what they are told than to say something himself; the person uses excessive gestures, imitates speech directly, improvises and produces words less.

d) Dyscalculia – a medical diagnosis characterised by difficulty performing arithmetic operations, it is associated with brain dysfunction.

Movement System Impairment

Movement system impairment can be a consequence of diseases such as cerebral palsy, stroke, head injury, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, spinal cord injury, etc. Restricted movements can occur both in the upper part of the body when hand functions are impaired (fully or partially) and in the lower body, and the movement is limited. The student may use a mobility aid to facilitate moving (e. g. walking sticks, crutches, rollator, wheelchair, etc.).