

# Concussion Guide for College Educators

A guide to understanding concussion in college students

## The Role of College Educators

While college educators aren't directly involved in creating a return-to-learn plan or accommodations, they play an integral role in returning students to the academic environment. Educators should remain flexible and understanding as students with concussions navigate returning to coursework.

## What to Know about Concussions

- Students with a concussion cannot continue their workload as normal and should gradually start [limited cognitive activity in the early stages](#) of recovery (first 24-48 hours, “at a level that does not result in recurrence or exacerbation of symptoms.” Minimize tasks requiring mental exertion; students should take breaks as needed, limit activity based on symptoms, and spread tasks throughout the day. The amount of cognitive rest will differ from student to student; some students may need complete cognitive rest during this period
- The recovery process is variable and often invisible. A student may be better some days and worse on other days. For some concussions, new symptoms may appear or current symptoms may worsen over time. Just because one student recovers within a few weeks does not mean another student will follow that timeline. It may be impossible to tell how injured or recovered a student with a concussion is by looking at them. The best way to understand how they are feeling is to listen to and believe their experiences.
- Symptoms will vary by student. Many students will recover within 2-4 weeks but others will have symptoms lasting far longer. The differences in recovery make every student's return to coursework a little different.
- Concussions affect students cognitively, emotionally, and physically. Signs of a concussion may include moving clumsily, appearing dazed or confused, forgetting instructions, responding slowly to questions, and showing changes in mood, behavior, or personality.

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Students with concussions may report symptoms including headache/pressure in their head, sensitivity to light or noise, feeling sluggish, problems concentrating and remembering, feeling ‘not right,’ and double or blurry vision.

## **Return-to-Learn Plans**

Return-to-learn plans are developed by the concussed student in conjunction with the school’s accessibility office. This process entails reviewing medical documentation, specifics of the concussion patient’s symptoms, situation, and injury—and discussing ways to support the student in their recovery process. A student’s return-to-learn plan will be tailored to their needs, so these plans and accommodations will look different from student to student.

## **Campus Resources**

For more information or ideas on how to make the classroom more accessible for students with concussions, reach out to the college’s accessibility resources office (common names: Office of Accessibility, Accessibility Services, Accommodations and Accessibility, etc.). This office should be able to help navigate accommodations (the ADA calls them “auxiliary aids”) and answer any school-specific questions. They should also have access to accessibility technology, such as recording software, that can be implemented in the classroom.

## **Making the Classroom More Accessible**

The sections below contain ideas and questions to consider for making the classroom a more accessible environment for students with concussions and many other students with varying disabilities.

### **General Adjustments**

- Offer audio versions of materials
  - Listening creates a lower cognitive load than watching or a combination of listening and watching
- Offer asynchronous options for office hours and group work
  - Encourage Google Docs for collaborative group work
- Don’t require students to multitask
- Break tasks or classes into smaller sections
- Split tests/exams into smaller sections done on different days
- Offer alternative testing formats

- Oral exams, with or without a scribe

## General Adjustments (con't)

- One-on-one testing
- Quiet testing rooms
- Reduce unnecessary repetition of work
  - Such as assigning only odd-numbered problems for homework
- Reduce number and length of assignments
- Adjust due dates for extra time
- Exempt/postpone large projects, papers, or exams
- Provide class notes, written instructions, or written outlines for larger tasks
- Allow or provide recording of lectures
- Provide feedback in writing or orally
- Use organizational charts, concept maps, or mind maps
- Allow demonstration of learning in alternate formats
  - Such as a video or audio recording instead of a written paper or assignment
- Link new information to already-learned information
- Repeat instructions out loud
- Put the most important information in visible locations
  - Most important course information on the first page of the syllabus

## Adjustments to Visuals

- Pace and motion of screen material
- Font weight and style
  - Sans serif fonts are easier to read
- Color choice of text and backgrounds
  - Use highly contrasting text and background colors
  - Avoid colors that would be hard to read for color blind students, such as red and green
  - Software such as Microsoft Office's [Accessibility Checker](#) can assist with color choices and other visual changes

## Adjustments to Sound

- Consistent volume of recorded materials
- Offer audio versions of materials
  - Listening creates a lower cognitive load than watching or a combination of listening and watching

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## Adjustments to Learning Management Systems

- How is material organized?
- How many clicks does it take to get to course materials?
- Does the sequencing of materials make sense?
- Are important aspects of the course easy to access?
- Maintain logical and consistent placement of materials
- Ensure hard copies of materials can be made
- Offer audio version of materials
- Find videos with captions
- Make oral or video submissions possible, rather than just a paper
- If students are required to post comments, can this be done verbally instead?
- For distance contact, consider offering a phone call instead of only a video call

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## References

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