



**Teaching Handbook**

# **Academic Accommodation Support**

Fall 2019

**Ryerson  
University**



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# We are Academic Accommodation Support (AAS)

As Ryerson University's disability services office, we work with incoming and returning students who live with both temporary and permanent disabilities that impact their academics. Partnering with students and instructors to implement individualised accommodation plans, we ensure that students can fully access their studies free from disability-related barriers.

## **Professional standards and team**

We follow a rigorous process for registering eligible students and developing their plans. Our professional team of academic accommodation facilitators - who hold graduate degrees from practice-based fields such as Occupational Therapy, Nursing, Social Work, and Counselling - assess mandatory medical and psychological documentation issued by regulated health professionals as the basis for a student's plan.

## **A shared, legal responsibility**

Access to education for students with disabilities is a human right in Ontario. Through provincial law and university policies, Ryerson recognizes that academic accommodation is a shared responsibility between the student, their instructors, AAS and university administration. Collaboration and communication are essential between all stakeholders to ensure equal access while upholding Ryerson's academic integrity standards.

### **Consult with us:**

#### **Academic Accommodation Support**

[aasadmin@ryerson.ca](mailto:aasadmin@ryerson.ca)

416.979.5290

Student Learning Centre - 4th floor

#### **Test Centre**

[testcentrefaculty@ryerson.ca](mailto:testcentrefaculty@ryerson.ca)

416.979.5000 ext. 3592

85 Victoria St. (VIC-B-15)

# Your role in accessible education

Your role is paramount to ensuring that the institution meets its obligations to provide reasonable and appropriate accommodations. As detailed in the university's Senate policy<sup>1</sup>, your role is to make course curriculum, materials, and activities accessible to all students. While AAS assesses a student's needs to develop individualized plans, your role is to ensure each student's accommodations are implemented.

## As a Ryerson instructor<sup>2</sup>, you need to:

### Review and confirm accommodation letters and test requests

Use our secure, online system, Clockwork, to acknowledge that you are aware of each student's recommended accommodations and test requests.

### Respect student privacy and confidentiality

Understand that the nature of a student's disability, as well as their registration with AAS, is strictly confidential; information can't be discussed beyond the course's assigned instructor(s) and teaching assistants without consent.

### Engage students about their needs

Include a sentence in your syllabus that encourages students to talk privately with you about their accommodation plans as a first step. Remember to focus on the recommended accommodations and not the nature of their disability.

### Consider the details of required accommodations

Consider the specifics of the accommodation details with respect to your course. A student with accommodations is not exempt from meeting program standards or essential academic requirements.

### Consult with us

Contact AAS or the accommodation facilitator identified in a student's accommodation letter with any questions or concerns.

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**Each of your responsibilities is described in more detail on the following pages.**

<sup>1</sup> Ryerson University Senate Policy 159: Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities.

<sup>2</sup> "Instructor" refers to all Ryerson teaching staff, including faculty and part-time/sessional contract lecturers.

# Understanding accommodation plans, letters and test requests

## How accommodation plans are developed

A student who has a documented, temporary or permanent disability (or multiple disabilities) is required to register with AAS to receive accommodations. We recommend that students register as soon as possible to ensure their accommodations are active as close to the start of classes as possible, but it is up to the student to book a registration appointment. A student's needs may also change during a semester so flexibility is important.

Plans are developed following professional standards and involve three general steps:

1. The student submits current documentation to AAS:
  - The documentation must be completed by a registered healthcare professional who is qualified to diagnose the disability; and
  - The documentation must clearly state the impact(s) of the disability(ies) on the student's academic functioning. There must be a direct correlation between the impact(s) and the accommodation(s) that are requested in the documentation.
2. An AAS accommodation facilitator reviews all relevant documentation. Not all recommendations made by the healthcare professional are necessarily accepted. Each recommendation is evaluated and only put in place when it is required for the student to access course content and demonstrate their mastery of course material.
3. The student attends an in-person registration appointment to:
  - Understand the accommodation facilitator's assessment of their submitted documentation and how it will impact their learning;
  - Discuss their individualized accommodation plan and additional supports/services; and
  - Be informed of their responsibilities and significant dates.

The type of documentation a student is required to submit depends on the nature of their disability.

Common diagnoses, such as a learning disability, require a current psychoeducational assessment.

This assessment is comprised of standardised psychological tests that result in objective, detailed information about a student's cognitive functioning and the subsequent impacts on their academics.

# Reviewing and confirming accommodation letters

Students are responsible for activating their accommodation plans through AAS' secure online system, Clockwork. Through Clockwork, a student is able to send each of their instructors an accommodation letter that outlines their accommodations and the contact information for their accommodation facilitator. We encourage students to send their letters **as soon as possible after registration with AAS (and each subsequent semester)**, but we cannot guarantee this as a number of factors impact a student's ability to send the letters.

If a student in your course requires accommodation:

1. You will receive an email alerting you to view their accommodation letter in Clockwork. A link to Clockwork is included in the email.
2. Click on the link to Clockwork and use your Ryerson credentials to log in.
3. You will be prompted to confirm that you have read the letter, including the student's required accommodations for your course.
4. If you have questions about the student's accommodations, contact the accommodation facilitator identified in the letter.

After a student activates their accommodations by electronically sending you the letter, we expect them to reach out to you to discuss specific details that need further discussion. In some circumstances, the student may request that their accommodation facilitator reach out on their behalf. There are many reasons why students may not approach you to negotiate the details of their accommodations at the beginning of the semester; however, if the student requests use of their accommodations at any point, it is important to consider the request and remain flexible.

## Supplemental information

### Interpreters

For D/deaf<sup>3</sup> and hard of hearing students, access to education can be predominantly understood as access to communication. Often, American Sign Language (ASL) is the primary mode of expression for D/deaf students and an interpreter is required to translate between ASL and spoken English.

These professional interpreters require access to course materials in order to prepare; access is facilitated most effectively by adding the service provider as a content-viewer to your D2L shell. You will receive an email with instructions from AAS if a student in your class requires these accommodations.

**Email:** AAS Accessibility Assistant at [aasbookings@ryerson.ca](mailto:aasbookings@ryerson.ca) for questions about students requiring interpreters.

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<sup>3</sup> "Deaf" (capital "D") refers to those with a hearing impairment that identify with the Deaf community as a whole. For those that don't, "deaf" (small "d") is preferred. The most inclusive term for referring to the collective is "D/deaf" (Canadian Association of the Deaf, updated 2015).

## Note-taking

AAS offers two types of note-taking support, depending on need.

**Service providers:** Some students might require notes taken specifically for them, by a note-taker who is contracted as a service provider with Ryerson University.

A hired note-taker will identify themselves to you at the beginning of the course and should be added to your D2L course shell.

**RU Noted:** For other students, RU Noted Peer Note-taking is more appropriate. RU Noted is an AAS program where students already enrolled in your course can share their notes with classmates who are AAS registered with the RU Noted accommodation. All notes are kept on an AAS secure server and only shared with those students who have the accommodation. Both the identity of the note-taker and student requiring notes is kept confidential.

If you have a student registered with RU Noted:

1. You will receive an automated email at the beginning of the semester to let you know the student is requesting a peer note-taker.
2. Post the announcement (link in email) to your D2L shell.
3. Post the RU Noted recruitment video on D2L and/or share it during lecture.<sup>4</sup>

Peer note-takers are generally not needed for online courses.

Some students send their requests prior to seeing your syllabus, so a note-taker may not actually be needed in your course (experiential learning, online, etc).

**Email:** [runoted@ryerson.ca](mailto:runoted@ryerson.ca) if you have any questions.

## Experiential Learning

Experiential learning opportunities include work terms, placements, practicums, and co-ops. Collaborating with necessary Ryerson departments, AAS helps students with disabilities navigate what can be a new set of barriers. These new learning environments necessitate additional steps in the accommodation process and may require greater communication and collaboration between the department and a student's facilitator. Placement offices have established processes for accommodations and work closely with AAS to ensure that students' accommodation needs are met. Please contact the placement office in your department if you would like information about the process in place.

## Graduate Studies

The diversity of graduate student accommodations reflects Ryerson's wide variety of graduate programs. Coursework only programs will generally see similar classroom and assessment accommodations as undergraduate programs. Graduate students completing coursework, independent projects and/or placement options can also arrange accommodations within their own department (eg. flexible timelines for work completion). For specific information about implementing accommodations in your graduate program, contact AAS directly.

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<sup>4</sup> Instructors are integral to RU Noted's note-taker recruiting process. Sharing information about RU Noted in your classroom significantly increases our ability to support students with this accommodation.

# Reviewing and confirming test and exam requests

Students also use Clockwork to submit to you their requests for approved test and exam accommodations. Accommodated tests and exams are facilitated through Ryerson's Test Centre (which is integrated within AAS).

The Test Centre uses the same secure server as AAS, as well as a second, secure Ryerson server for tests and exams. Only full-time Test Centre employees have access to materials in advance of test/exam administration.

If a student in your course requires accommodation for a test or exam:

1. You will receive an email alerting you to review the request in Clockwork. A link to Clockwork is included in the email.
2. Click on the link to Clockwork and use your Ryerson credentials to log on.
3. Confirm the booking request and set parameters for the test (eg. start time, length/duration, delivery instructions, etc.). Please ensure all information is correct as students may enter incorrect dates, start times, parameters, etc.
4. Upload the test copy.
  - You can login to Clockwork at any time to upload the test — all tests should be uploaded at a minimum of 24 hours in advance of the scheduled test date.
5. The completed test will be returned to you according to the instructions provided.

The Test Centre also supports instructors with make-up tests and exams but the policies and procedures related to make-ups are not addressed in this handbook; see [ryerson.ca/studentlearningsupport/test-centre/](https://ryerson.ca/studentlearningsupport/test-centre/) for more information.

## Supplemental information

### “Time of writing” accommodations

Some students will have accommodations that are related to the timing of writing a test or exam. For example, a student may not be able to write a test before or after a specific time. In these circumstances, the Test Centre will automatically schedule the test to facilitate this specific accommodation, keeping the accommodated time as close to the course exam time as possible. In other circumstances, such as a student can only write one test/exam in a given period (eg. 24-hour), the student and you must work together to discuss an alternate test day. Communication is essential to these types of accommodations.

### Memory aid accommodations

Some students will have accommodations for a memory aid such as a formula sheet or memory cue sheet; if they do, they will be required to write their test in the Test Centre.

If a student in your course requires a memory aid for a quiz, test or exam:

1. You will need to approve the aid in advance, over email with the student or by signing a hard copy of the aid.
2. The student can bring the approved aid to the Test Centre or you can:
  - Upload it to Clockwork; or
  - Email it in advance of the test to [testcentrefaculty@ryerson.ca](mailto:testcentrefaculty@ryerson.ca).
3. If a student's aid is not approved and they still choose to use it, the Test Centre will email you immediately to indicate a potential breach of academic integrity.



## Understanding privacy and confidentiality

Confidentiality is essential to the accommodation process at Ryerson. Any documents submitted to AAS, as well as a student's registration with AAS and correspondence, is treated with strict confidentiality. All records are securely stored in accordance with the university's privacy and records policies.

At the same time, accommodations are facilitated through a joint model of support. We communicate with you and other Ryerson staff members for the purposes of facilitating a student's academic accommodations and related learning needs, but this is done with a student's consent.

### Guidelines for maintaining privacy

- Do not share the identity of students registered with AAS with other students or unnecessary faculty/staff.
- Do share information when team teaching and with teaching assistants on a need-to-know basis (i.e. a student may require an extension accommodation).
- Keep conversations about a student's particular accommodations private; hold discussions in private spaces as necessary.
- Do not ask the nature of a student's disability; focus on how their disability impacts their academic functioning.
- Do not accept any medical documentation related to accommodation from a student; direct them to AAS.<sup>5</sup>

## Understanding the details of an accommodation request: academic integrity

AAS is committed to upholding academic integrity within classrooms and courses, as well as at the program level. As content experts and course directors, you play a critical role in this process. Accommodations are only implemented when they are not compromising essential course or program learning objectives. If a required accommodation as outlined on a student's accommodation letter will not allow them to demonstrate the necessary knowledge and skills required in your course, we will work with you to find an accommodation that is a better fit.

Contact the student's accommodation facilitator (listed on the accommodation letter) with specific concerns about academic integrity and expectations.

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<sup>5</sup> Medical certificates submitted for academic consideration per course/program policy (such as absences from test/exams due to illness) are handed within the department, not AAS.

# Understanding how to engage students

In order to understand how to best engage a student about their accommodation needs, it is important to have a better understanding of accommodations, as well as giving consideration to how you can design your course to be more flexible.

“Academic accommodation means a planned variation in the way a student with a disability receives course curriculum and materials, participates in course activities or demonstrates mastery of course content and skills.”<sup>6</sup> Accommodations don’t require a change in what academic expectations you have of the student, but instead invite a shift in how the student meets them.

## Accommodation examples

Students may receive accommodations that affect how they access course content, how they engage with the classroom environment, and/or how they perform assessments and evaluations.

All accommodations are based on disability-related functional limitations and are uniquely designed to make the learning experience more accessible.

For example:

- A student with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may have difficulties with focus and organization. These impacts may compromise a student’s ability to divide their attention between listening to a lecture and taking notes. Accommodations for note taking support and copies of lecture slides are appropriate.
- A student with major depressive disorder may experience low motivation, decreased energy, and reduced concentration. Resultantly, they may have difficulty attending classes and their ability to work on assignments may be inconsistent. Accommodations for absences from class and extensions on assignments are commonly required.
- A student who is D/deaf will not be able to hear spoken English and may require other ways of communicating in the classroom. Accommodations often include a professional note-taker and interpreter(s), to facilitate communication between English and American Sign Language.

- A student with a learning disability (LD) that affects reading fluency and comprehension will require more time to read test questions and formulate their responses. Assistive reading software, use of a computer, and extra time on tests may also be included in their accommodation plan.
- A student with Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) may experience pain and fatigue, and as a result may require additional time on tests/exams, washroom breaks and access to medication.

## Tips for engaging students

- Include a sentence in your syllabus that encourages students to talk privately with you about their accommodation plans as a first step to signal you are aware that some students may require accommodation.
- Draw attention to the section of your syllabus that addresses academic accommodations when reviewing the course outline on the first day of class.
- Remind students that you are available for private conversations about accommodation needs during office hours when giving assignments.
- Respond to students in a reasonable amount of time; a delayed response can impact a student’s carefully considered time management strategy.
- Refer students to the accommodation facilitator within AAS if you are having difficulty supporting them with their needs.

<sup>6</sup> Ryerson University Senate Policy 159: Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities.

<sup>7</sup> Flexible learning is best practice for creating accessible and inclusive classrooms, but it is not an obligation under the Human Rights Code.

<sup>8</sup> Schwarz, M., Roach, N., Anwar, S., Tanner, J., Thistle, R. (2019). Flexible Learning Resource. Toronto: Ryerson University.

## Understanding how we consult

### Flexible learning<sup>7</sup>

Flexible learning is a mode of education that “supports a more equitable experience of education for all learners” than traditional teaching models (Flexible Learning Resource, 2019, p.1)<sup>8</sup>. Flexible learning means designing and delivering courses that offer students choices about their learning conditions with the goal of creating inclusive classrooms while making all students more self-sufficient learners. According to Ryerson faculty, “proactive flexibility has reduced the need for reactive accommodations and requests further in the semester resulting in higher engagement/commitment by students” (p. 11).

Suggested strategies for designing a more flexible and accessible classroom:

#### Participation

- Small group discussion.
- Written participation options.
- Online postings.

#### Course Content

- Make all material available prior to class.
- Post lecture audio recording on D2L shell.
- Closed captioning for video material.

#### Evaluation

- Choice of assessment type (eg. essay or test)
- Scaffolding assignments with rolling deadlines.
- Options for dropping lowest evaluation grades.

Communication between all stakeholders is essential to the accommodation process. AAS is always available to consult with you on any concerns you have. Your first point of contact is the accommodation facilitator listed on a student’s accommodation letter.

**High-volume, response times:** AAS works to support registered students and the instructors who teach them in a timely manner. We strive for responsiveness, however, response times are impacted as we register a high volume of new students at the beginning of each semester, particularly in the fall.

#### Key contacts

**General Inquiries**  
aasadmin@ryerson.ca  
416-979-5290

**Test Centre**  
testcentrefaculty@ryerson.ca  
416-979-5000 x.3592

**Accessibility - Special Requests**  
aasbookings@ryerson.ca  
416-979-5290 x.3766

**RU Noted (peer note-taking)**  
runoted@ryerson.ca  
416-979-5290 x.4762

# Partners in Accommodation

	Student Responsibilities	Instructor Responsibilities	How AAS can help
1	Send accommodation letter.	Review & confirm accommodation letter in Clockwork online system.	Clarify any questions with the Clockwork system or address concerns about listed accommodations.
2	Discuss accommodation needs with the instructor (when necessary), explaining what works best for them.	Foster an environment where students are encouraged to open a dialogue about their accommodation needs.	Remind students to approach instructors early and facilitate conversations between students and instructors, when needed.
3	Negotiate accommodation details in a responsible and timely manner.	Consider student requests, specifically in regard to course objectives and timelines. If negotiating details (eg. extension dates), explain your reasoning and offer clear alternatives.	Work with instructors and students to find suitable solutions, so that both are comfortable with how accommodations will be implemented in the course.

## Key contacts

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