



How to describe your **Disability** to Instructors

The decision whether or not to disclose a disability is a very personal matter and one that varies from individual to individual. Some students are reluctant to disclose their disabilities for fear that disclosure may negatively bias their professors' perceptions of them. These students may also feel that they can successfully compensate for their disabilities in a particular class. Although compensating for a disability may appear admirable, it can also backfire if the student fails the first exam.

At that point, the distraught student has to approach the professor, knowing that it is probably too late to change the grade earned. As a general rule, *it is better to disclose to professors and to do so early in the semester, rather than to risk saying nothing about the disability.* A few general suggestions for students concerning disclosure are presented below.

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Before describing your disability to a professor, you may have to provide some education about what a disability is and is not. Some college professors do not expect to have students with disabilities in their classes. You may want to use the university's brochure on "Students with Disabilities at X" as an icebreaker. Show the brochure to your professor, and point out areas that may directly affect you. If professors are not familiar with the program and policy for students with disabilities here at StFX, give them some background information. That should further establish your credibility.

1

Make an appointment with your professor during office hours to discuss your disability and possible accommodations you may need in the course. You may choose to use the telephone to set up the appointment, or you may prefer to arrange an appointment with the professor immediately after the first class. (Don't tell your life story to the professor at that time - just set up an appointment.) Before your appointment with the professor, you may want to practice what you are going to say with a resource person from the Counselling Centre, or a student who has been through the process. These people can assist you by suggesting how to best approach professors and how to be a self-advocate.

3

Describe your learning style in simple language. Let your professor know about your abilities as well as your weaknesses. Provide concrete examples of how your disability may affect you in that particular class. Explain that you have gone through extensive diagnostic testing. Your professor may ask you to provide documentation of the disability. Decide, in advance, how much personal information you feel comfortable divulging. You are not required to show copies of your diagnostic evaluation to anyone, unless you choose to. The contact person can assist you in verifying your disability.

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4

You may prefer to have the professor contact

Mary Ellen Clancy

at

867-2281

if additional elaboration appears necessary.

She will not disclose any confidential information about you to anyone without your permission. Anticipate any special needs you may have and develop a plan of action with your professor for the course.

5

ASK YOURSELF:

- Will you need more time on exams?
- Will you need to find a note-taker who is willing to share class notes?
- Will you need to take your exam in a quiet room with a proctor?
- Will the professor permit you to use a calculator or a dictionary during exams?

As a courtesy, ask professors for permission to tape-record their lectures if this is one of the accommodations you need. You may want to point out that **Elizabeth Kell**, our **Resource Educator**, coordinates proctoring for all adjusted exams.

6

What if the professor is not sympathetic to your needs?

At some point in your career, you may encounter a professor who is not receptive to your unique needs. Such professors have often had limited direct contact with persons with disabilities. If you are meeting resistance from a professor, discuss the situation with Mary Ellen as contact person for students with disabilities. She can help you resolve the issue. You should avoid any direct confrontation with the professor.

Contact

Mary Ellen Clancy,
Contact Person for
Students with Disabilities
Health and Counselling Centre
Bloomfield Centre, Room 304
St. Francis Xavier University

Phone: 867-2281
Fax: 867-2406/5138

Office Hours:
9:00 a.m – 12:00 noon
1:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.
(Monday – Friday)

Please visit
StFX's Counselling Centre Website
for more helpful information.

The URL is

<http://www.stfx.ca/campus/stu-serv/counselling/>

We look forward to working with you
for a successful year.