Motivating learners with accessibility professionalism

A TEACHING ACCESSIBILITY QUICK START GUIDE

To embed accessibility in the digital world, people working in technology must treat accessibility as a core requirement. However, many tech workers are unaware that accessibility is a consideration for their role [1]. To close this skills gap, educators must raise awareness and foster commitment. But learners may not be motivated to engage with accessibility topics or see accessibility as an essential skill [2]. Evidence tells us we can promote engagement by teaching 'valued forms of knowledge' that represent 'quality, standards and expertise' in the field [3]. In this guide, we discuss teaching strategies to motivate learners by establishing accessibility as a necessary and valued knowledge area in professional culture and practice.

What is motivation?

Motivation is key to learner engagement and optimal learning outcomes. With *extrinsic* motivation, learners are motivated by external prompts, such as grades or sanctions. With *intrinsic* motivation, learner motivation comes from internal values, being self-determined by learners who perceive importance, value and enjoyment in their learning. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) frameworks of motivation emphasise the importance of learner *autonomy* rather than behaviouristic control to motivate learners [4]. SDT also forefronts a need for *competence,* enabled by positive feedback, optimal challenges and opportunities for growth, and *relatedness*, arising from a sense of belonging and connection.

Why motivation is important

Learners may begin learning about digital accessibility lacking motivation and interest. They may not have a personal connection with disability. They may not see the benefits of accessible technology or be aware of the relevance to their field. Research has found learners were not motivated *'because they did not see accessibility as an essential skill in all computing careers'* [2]. If learners are only motivated by extrinsic factors, such as course, degree, or employer requirements, their engagement with the topic may be limited. Intrinsic factors are more likely to persist, fostering ongoing interest and engagement [4]. Educators can build on learners' intrinsic motivation to be successful by positioning accessibility so that learners perceive accessibility competence as benefiting their learning, career, and future.

Ways to foster motivation

Embedding accessibility: Integrate accessibility throughout learning and training programmes rather than as a separate component that can be perceived as optional and less relevant.

Professionalism: Convey the career benefits of accessibility knowledge and skills. Share evidence and examples of how accessibility is valued in professional contexts.

Positive associations: Highlight success stories and positive outcomes. Share perspectives from users who benefit from accessible technology and from industry experts who practice accessibility.

Experiential learning: Use project-based learning to teach professional practices. Choose methodologies and frameworks that incorporate accessibility in meaningful ways.

Scaffolding: Support learners engaging with accessibility topics. Guide them toward greater awareness of professional obligations.

References

[1] PEAT. (2018). *Accessible Technology Skills Gap Report*. peatworks.org/accessible-technology-skills-gap-report

[2] Conn, P. et al. (2020). Understanding the Motivations of Final-year Computing Undergraduates for Considering Accessibility. *ACM Trans. Comput. Educ.*, 20(2):15.

[3] James, M. & Pollard, P. (2011). TLRP's ten principles for effective pedagogy: rationale, development, evidence, argument and impact, *Research Papers in Education*, 26:3, 275–328.

[4] Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020) Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemp Educ Psychol*. 61.

Examples and resources

Help learners see accessibility as a core value and professional requirement

Share industry perspectives. Arrange for lectures, forums, and other opportunities to learn how accessibility is valued and experienced in professional contexts. Highlight companies with an inclusive culture and strong accessibility program.

Define professional expectations. Share policies, codes of practice, and other resources that define accessibility expectations in technology disciplines and roles. Make sure learners know how accessibility responsibilities are defined and codified in their field.

Emphasize employability. Provide insights into how accessibility impacts employability. Share job postings and role descriptions that include accessibility qualifications. Walk through how accessibility factors into recruitment, hiring, and assessment.

- ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct provides guiding principles for tech professionals, including avoiding actions that cause discrimination.
- Accessibility Skills Hiring Toolkit from Teach Access describes accessibility job responsibilities and qualifications for different technology roles.
- a11yjobs lists a range of opportunities related to digital accessibility.

Help learners experience and recognize accessibility practices

Model accessibility practices. Evidence value by modelling accessibility in teaching practices. Use inclusive teaching methods and share accessible learning materials. Develop and adopt accessible learning platforms and resources. Highlight these actions to learners.

Use accessibility resources. Teach using design and development technologies and frameworks that support accessibility. Provide learning materials with accessibility guidance.

Embed accessibility. Incorporate accessibility when teaching research, design and development methods and processes. Include accessibility requirements and milestones in specifications and timelines. Provide accessibility details in personas and user stories. Involve disabled and older people in user research and usability studies.

- The University of Washington's Inclusive Teaching guidance and resources support embedding accessibility in education.
- Apple's Human Interface Guidelines and Developer Documentation incorporate accessibility guidance into practice.

Help learners overcome barriers to motivation and engagement

Provide disability perspectives. Use videos and expert demos to illustrate how technology can help overcome impairments. Share how inattention to accessibility produces technology barriers that keep people from accomplishing tasks.

Foster positive associations with disability. Involve disabled and older people in lab- and project-based learning, as team members, clients, expert-users, and evaluators. Provide opportunities for learners to overcome anxieties and challenge misconceptions through discussion and collaboration.

Generate enthusiasm. Share examples of mainstream technologies that have accessibility features. Demonstrate how focusing on accessibility needs leads to high-quality products with innovative features.

- Our Scaffolding Quick Start Guide provides teaching ideas and resources to support learners engaging with accessibility.
- Apple Accessibility and Windows Accessibility YouTube playlists provide video demos and perspectives of platform features.

About our Quick Start Guides

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Further guides in this series are in production. Look out for them on our Teaching Accessibility website. We also appreciate feedback to inform future work.