



Barriers to Accessibility

There are five common barriers to accessibility for students with disabilities:

1. Attitudinal
2. Organizational or systemic
3. Architectural or physical
4. Information or communication
5. Technical

Of these, the first two are considered historically to be the most common and critical in the delivery of services to students.

Attitudinal Barriers

Attitudinal barriers are behaviors, perceptions and assumptions that discriminate against students with disabilities. These barriers often emerge from a lack of understanding, which can lead people to ignore, to judge, or have misconceptions about a person with a disability.

Examples of attitudinal barriers include:

- Assuming a student with a disability is inferior.
- Assuming that a student with a speech impairment cannot understand you.
- Forming ideas about a student or group of students due to stereotyping or a lack of knowledge.
- Making a student feel like you are doing them a 'special favor' by providing their accommodations.

As an educator, you can help remove attitudinal barriers in a number of ways:

1. Avoid making assumptions about a student's disability or capabilities.
2. Encourage students with disabilities to come forward and speak with you about the way they learn and what may be barriers in your classroom or teaching.
3. Respect the privacy of students with disabilities.

Assignment Question 1

List at least three other ways you can remove attitudinal barriers. How might each of these barriers be perceived by the student? How would you deal with that?

Organizational Barriers

Organizational or systemic barriers are policies, procedures or practices that unfairly discriminate and can prevent students and their parents from fully participating in a situation. Organizational or systemic barriers may be created unintentionally.

Examples of organizational or systemic barriers include:

- Requiring all students to take a full course load.
- Poorly defined or unclear learning objectives for a course.
- Requiring students to express their understanding of course content in only one way.



As an educator, you can help to remove organizational or systemic barriers in a number of ways:

1. Identify and clearly express essential course content and provide flexibility so that students can express their understanding of essential course content in multiple ways.
2. Encourage students to speak to you about accessibility issues in the classroom or about your course or lessons.

Assignment Question 2

List at least three other ways you can remove organizational or systemic barriers. How might each of these barriers be perceived by the student? How would you deal with that?

Additional Assignment Questions

What architectural, communication, and/or technology barriers have you encountered or are you aware of?

Have you ever considered how your own classroom may provide barriers (e.g., insufficient lighting, desk height, room layout)? When setting up your classroom at the beginning of the school year, what other things might you check for?

Are all of the documents and organizers used in your classroom easily read by all students? Do all of the videos you present have captions if needed? What other communication issues should you consider?

Are all of your classroom handouts or student take-homes available in hard copies only? Does all of the digital content used by your students work with screen reading technology? What other technology issues might you consider?