
CHAT ROOMS

Chat rooms can be beneficial in online courses, allowing students to communicate in real time. However, they can provide a challenge for students with some disabilities. Many of the chat programs do not work well with screen readers, so blind or low vision students cannot access them (HTML based chats are more accessible than Java chats). Students with disabilities that affect the use of their hands or arms cannot type fast enough (or at all) to participate. Students who do not read quickly may have difficulty keeping up with the conversation. And a fast paced chat room can lead to confusion and frustration for students with certain learning disabilities and Attention Deficit Disorder.

Voice chats are becoming more popular, but are problematic for Deaf or hard of hearing students, or those with auditory processing disabilities.

If you are going to include chats, you may want to have a moderator who can control the flow of the conversation and make sure everyone has a chance to participate. Discourage off-topic chatter. Try to use an HTML chat program if available, or instant messenger programs, which tend to be more accessible. You can also provide chat logs for students to review later. These techniques won't solve all issues of accessibility, but will help.