

Equitable Learning Services

**Enabling
Assistance
Student
Handbook**



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1 General Information

Equitable Learning Services employs enabling staff: note-takers, sign interpreters, exam scribes, readers/clarifiers and participation assistants, through an external agency, Echo. Echo is responsible for hiring all enabling staff working at RMIT.

If you are assessed as requiring the services of enabling staff, you will be asked to sign a Student Enabling Assistance Agreement (Attachment Four) and email a completed timetable form to us as early as possible (els@rmit.edu.au). We will make the appropriate booking for the length of your course. You will need to complete the timetable form each semester.

Once the booking has been lodged, Echo will email you within five working days to advise you of your enabling staff member's name and asking you to check and confirm the booking details. If the details are incorrect, it is your responsibility to email the corrected information to us as soon as possible.

Enabling staff can be booked 30 minutes earlier than the required start time for the first class only, please let us know if this is of interest to you. You could use this extra time to meet with your new enabling staff member and discuss any requirements you have, such as seating arrangements, formatting of notes, etc.

If you have a preference to work with a particular enabling staff member, Echo will try to accommodate you, although at times preferred staff may not be available.

While Echo will do everything possible to ensure that all your timetabling requirements are covered, there may be times when they are unable to provide you with interpreting/notetaking support. You will be notified as soon as possible if this happens.

In the event that one of your classes cannot be covered, we suggest that you contact your academic to explain the situation and request that study material be provided to you. Please also check whether the materials are available to you through other means e.g. on the distributed learning service. If you need help, please contact us.

Please make an appointment with us if your situation changes and additional enabling assistance is required. Echo is not able to make these changes.

2 Guidelines for students receiving note taking or participation assistance

Enabling staff work in lectures, tutorials, seminars, practical sessions and exams. Their role is to provide clear, concise, legible and comprehensive notes, taking into consideration your needs and requirements. **Enabling staff do not provide tutoring.**

Your responsibilities include but are not restricted to:

- Providing us with a copy of your timetable form as soon as possible to allow for enabling staff to be booked. If you need enabling staff for classes or events that are not timetabled please remember to give this information to us as soon as possible and no later than five working days ahead of the required time. Additional classes/events will need to be discussed and approved prior to a booking being organised.
- Always be on time for class and undertake to attend all classes and tutorials.
- Provide 24 hours minimum notice via email or phone call to Echo and Equitable Learning Services if you are unable to attend the assigned session or if there is a change to venue (i.e. room location) or a cancellation of any of your classes, lectures or tutorials. See Section 5 of this document for Echo's contact details.
- You will need to contact us immediately on email els@rmit.edu.au if there are any permanent changes to your timetable.
- You must phone Echo if your enabling staff member has not arrived for the scheduled class. Please also notify us so as action can be taken if necessary.
- Arrive a few minutes early to classes to find appropriate seating.
- Read and review your notes regularly.
- Introduce yourself and enabling staff to teaching staff and briefly explain

why they are present.

- Provide constructive feedback, as needed, to enabling staff. This could include discussion on seating arrangements.
- If there is a problem with the clarity or style in which the assistance is provided (e.g. with the notes, or participation in class) communicate your concern to the enabling staff member in the first instance. If it is not resolved, talk with your Equitable Advisor.
- Make arrangements to catch up with your enabling staff at the end of class, so you can briefly review their notes and seek clarity from them before they go if required.

It is **not** the role of enabling staff to explain the content of academic work, clarify with academic staff issues that have arisen from the class, return books to the library or seek extensions of time for assignments. It is not their role to provide attendant care, transport or assist with personal matters. Please see Attachments 1 and 2 for further information on the roles of enabling staff.

Absences and general conduct

Equitable Learning Services keeps a record of student attendance for the purpose of monitoring notetaker and participation assistant usage. If you are absent from three or more classes without adequate explanation, Equitable Learning Services will invite you to a meeting to discuss your circumstances and to check whether you require additional supports. We reserve the right to revisit the provision of services if you fail to consistently attend classes without the required notice, are constantly late or do not adhere to any other student responsibility outlined in this Booklet.

3 Guidelines for students receiving sign interpreting services

Sign language interpreters use predominantly Auslan (Australian sign language) to facilitate communication for deaf and hard of hearing students at university. Interpreters employed by the specialised agencies, engaged by RMIT, will be qualified and accredited by the National Accreditation Authority of Translators and Interpreters (NAATI). Sign language interpreters work in lectures, tutorials, seminars and practical sessions.

Your responsibilities include but are not restricted to:

- Provide us with a copy of your completed timetable form as soon as possible to allow for interpreters to be booked. If you need an interpreter for classes or events that are not timetabled, please remember to provide this information to us as soon as possible and no later than five working days ahead of the required time. Additional classes/events will need to be discussed and approved prior to a booking being organised.
- Provide 48 hours' notice to the Agency and us if you are unable to attend the assigned session or if there is a temporary change of venue, or cancellation of one of your classes. Please see Section 5 for agency contact details.
- Contact us immediately on email els@rmit.edu.au if there are any permanent changes to your timetable.
- You must message us and the agency if your interpreter[s] does not arrive for the scheduled class.
- Always be on time and try to attend all classes. Should you be late your interpreter(s) will wait for 20 minutes and then leave. Your interpreter will not participate in the class or provide information on what has occurred prior to your late arrival.
- Please arrive a few minutes early for class to arrange for appropriate seating.
- If you are unhappy with the clarity or style in which the interpreter is communicating to you please discuss with interpreter. If your concerns are not addressed, talk with us.
- You should allow for an initial period of time to establish fluent communication and a good rapport between yourself, interpreter and academic staff.
- Please provide the interpreter with a glossary of subject specific vocabulary including definitions, if possible.
- Identify and allow for language variation and accents between interpreters.
- Introduce yourself and the interpreter to the academic staff and briefly explain why they are present.
- Discuss any queries in the working procedure with the interpreter and give constructive feedback to ensure that the most beneficial service is provided.

If you use two interpreters and, in the event only one of your interpreters is available, the interpreter will not be able to cover the class because of OH&S requirements. If this happens, use your interpreter to discuss with the lecturer what alternate ways there are to gain access to the lecture material.

It is **not** the role of your interpreter(s) to explain the content of academic work, clarify with academic staff issues that have arisen from the class, return books to the library or seek extensions of time for assignments. It is not their role to provide attendant care, transport or assist with personal matters.

Equitable Learning Services reserves the right to revisit the provision of services by conducting a review of your situation, if you fail to consistently attend classes without the required notice, are constantly late or do not adhere to any other student responsibility outlined in this Booklet.

4 Changes, cancellations and absences

Enabling staff are booked for the entire semester as per your timetable.

It is imperative that you advise us and the agency by email if:

- you cannot attend on a particular day. Unplanned absences can occur; however, if you are regularly absent from class without notice, we may need to review your circumstances and the appropriateness of previously agreed enabling assistance offered to you.
- there has been a temporary room change or class cancellation. Please ensure, where reasonably possible, at least 24 hours' notice for note takers and participation assistants and 48 hours for interpreters. Agency contact details are listed in Section 5.
- there are any permanent changes to timetabling including changes in classroom venue or study programme. Please see Section 5 for contact details.

In addition to above please contact us and your agency if enabling staff fail to attend. The agency may be able to send another person if time/resources permit.

5 Complaints and problems procedures

If there is a problem with the clarity or style in which the assistance is provided, communicate your concern to the enabling staff member in the first instance. If the matter is not resolved, please inform us as soon as possible after the incident occurs.

An Equitable Adviser will meet with you either face-to-face or over the phone to ascertain the nature of the complaint. Where the complaint relates to the quality of the enabling staff, your advisor will raise the matter directly with Echo, by phone in the first instance, followed by an email. Where the issue is related to other matters i.e. general unhappiness with your course or wanting a higher level of service than agreed, the advisor will address the matter with you.

It is **not** the role of enabling staff to explain the content of academic work, clarify with academic staff issues that have arisen from the class, return books to the library or seek extensions of time for assignments. It is not their role to provide attendant care, transport or assist with personal matters.

6 Contacts

Equitable Learning Services

RMIT City Campus Building 28, Level 5, 360 Swanston Street, Melbourne Vic 3001

Phone: +61 3 9925 5000

Email: els@rmit.edu.au

Web: www.rmit.edu.au/equitable

Echo Interpreting

Sign Interpreting

Email: info@echointerpreting.com.au

Mobile: 0449 259 153

Notetaking / Participation assistance

Email: notes@echointerpreting.com.au

Mobile: 0409 054 326 or 03 9761 2208

Attachment One: Role of the Note-Taker

The role of the note-taker is to provide classroom assistance to enhance your learning opportunities. This is achieved by providing concise notes that not only reflect true content, discussion and instructions expressed in the lecture/class/tutorial but are also written at a language level that you will understand. All work undertaken on your behalf is your property.

Notes may also be taken of videos, overheads, classroom discussions and the like.

It is important the note-taker discusses with you where you are to meet, where you wish them to sit in class and in what format the notes will be presented to you (e.g. on disk or paper).

What are the responsibilities of the note-taker?

- The note taker will wear an identification badge to identify themselves to you. If you do not want other students to be aware that you have enabling assistance, the note-taker must be sensitive to this and respect your desire for privacy.
- The note-taker must provide pens for note taking. The best colours to use are blue or black as these colours photocopy well.
- Notes must be proof-read and spelling checked before handing work to you.
- Punctuality is crucial. It is the note-taker's responsibility to notify their employer as soon as possible if they are unable to attend a scheduled class so that arrangements can be made to find a replacement.
- The note-taker should be unobtrusive in class. It is not the role of the note-taker to interact in class activities.
- Academic/teaching staff may assume that the note-taker is a student. It is therefore the note-taker's responsibility to indicate at the start of semester or first session in an unobtrusive manner that they are providing enabling assistance for a student with a disability.
- It is important that the note-taker maintain confidentiality.

- If a lecturer/tutor asks your note-taker a question with regard to you, it is your note-taker's responsibility to indicate to the teacher that they are to refer questions to you. Communication is to be between academic/teaching staff and you, not through the note-taker.
- If you are unable to attend, the note-taker will continue to take notes for the duration of the lesson. The note-taker will then send a copy of their notes to els@rmit.edu.au, clearly marked with your name and student number, and explain that you did not attend. ELS will then forward you the notes for your missed class. ELS monitors student attendance and will contact students who fail to attend 3 or more classes to discuss their circumstances and see if additional supports are required. Please be aware that repeated non-attendance without adequate explanation may result in cancellation of your note-taking services.
- If a note-taker is feeling uncomfortable with the way they are being treated, they must in the first instance discuss this with you. If this fails to resolve the problem, the note-taker should discuss this with their employer.

What is not the role of the note-taker?

- To add their own comments
- To let their own opinion influence the notes recorded
- To take responsibility for your results
- To interact with members of the class
- To be responsible for communication between you and teacher
- To be responsible for communication between you and Equitable Learning Services
- To pass on the notes to other students in the class
- To answer questions intended for you
- To correct the teacher
- To be an advocate for you
- To be a friend

Hours

We will nominate how many hours per week are to be allocated for enabling assistance. This will be discussed with the note-taker or their employer. No payment will be made for unauthorised work.

Attachment Two: role of the Participation Assistant

What is the role of the participation assistant?

The role of the participation assistant is to generally assist you to participate in the classroom environment. The participation assistant is not a replacement or substitute teacher. The role will vary depending on the specific needs of the individual student and may take the form of one or more of the following duties:

- To provide concise notes in a format that the student will understand. These notes will give a true record of the content, discussion and specific instructions expressed during the class.
- To provide back-up instructions and assistance to reinforce the teacher's instructions.
- To explain the procedures, words and new concepts expressed in the classroom.
- To provide physical assistance where necessary, such as taking books out of the student's bag and opening doors.

What are the responsibilities of the participation assistant?

- They must be on time. It is the participation assistant's responsibility to notify their employer as soon as possible if they are unable to attend a scheduled class or arranged meeting time, so that arrangements can be made to find a replacement.
- If working in a classroom setting, the participation assistant must be unobtrusive in class. It is not the role of the participation assistant to interact in class activities. Their role is to assist you in participating in the class.
- If a lecturer/tutor asks your participation assistant a question with regard to you, it is your participation assistant's responsibility to indicate that they are to refer questions to you. Communication is to be between academic/teaching staff and you, not through your participation assistant.

- If you do not turn up for class or meet at the arranged meeting place, the participation assistant will remain in class to take notes. The participation assistant will then send a copy of their notes to els@rmit.edu.au and explain that you did not attend. ELS will then forward you the notes for your missed class. ELS monitors student attendance and will contact students who fail to attend 3 or more classes to discuss their circumstances and see if additional supports are required. Please be aware that repeated non-attendance without adequate explanation may result in cancellation of your enabling staff services.
- You may not want other students to be aware that you have an enabling assistant. The participation assistant must be sensitive to this and respect your desire for privacy.
- It is important that the participation assistant maintain confidentiality.
- If the participation assistant is feeling uncomfortable with the way you or a teacher is treating them, they must in the first instance discuss this with you or your teacher. If this fails, the participation assistant should discuss this with their employer.
- The participation assistant should dress in a manner that allows them to blend in with the students.
- Other duties and responsibilities will be defined in your individual support plan and discussed with the employer of the participation assistant.

What is not the role of the participation assistant?

- To act or be treated as a substitute teacher
- To be solely a personal carer
- To read material and provide a summary for you
- To be a researcher of material for you to undertake an assignment
- To add their own comments
- To let their own opinion influence the notes recorded
- To take responsibility for your results
- To be responsible for communication between you and your teacher
- To be responsible for communication between the student and Equitable Learning Services
- To pass on the notes they produce to other students in the class
- To correct the teacher
- To be an advocate for you
- To be a friend

Hours

Equitable Learning Services in consultation with you will nominate the number of hours per week for enabling assistance. This will be conveyed to the participation assistant or their employer. Any unauthorised work will not be paid.

Attachment Three: Working with a Sign Interpreter for Deaf Students

Interpreters may be present in your classroom to allow a student who is deaf or hard of hearing to access information. Their job is well defined with boundaries to ensure that your role as a teacher is not impinged upon.

Role of the Interpreter:

- To interpret any communication between people without addition or deletion of content
- To provide culturally appropriate information relevant to the interpreting process
- To treat information that they interpret as confidential
- To state whether the message has been successfully delivered through the interpreting process

It is not the interpreter's role to:

- Liaise between the student, teacher and disability services other than by direct interpretation
- Act as a teacher's aide or tutor
- Add comments or participate in the class
- Have private conversations or interact during class time with either the teacher, students or other interpreters
- Be responsible for the student's behavior or academic results
- Discuss the student's progress
- Let their own opinion influence the information being interpreted
- Answer questions intended for the students
- Correct the teacher
- Breach confidentiality or repeat hearsay
- Provide advice to or about the deaf person

Expected behaviour and attitude:

- To be reliable and punctual
- To respect the student and their choices
- To encourage independence and positive self-esteem
- To honour the student's rights to dignity, privacy and confidentiality

- To be as inconspicuous as possible in the class situation

How teaching staff can best assist during classes:

- The interpreter should be located near the speaker so the student can see both
- Speak directly to the student and look at him/her - not at the interpreter
- Allow the student time to receive the message, make comment and/or seek clarification
- Be aware that the student cannot look at you, the Interpreter, and/or the notes at the same time
- Speak in your usual manner/rate, but be willing to slow down if the interpreter is unable to keep up
- Remember that a student who is watching an interpreter is always few seconds behind the message. This is because the interpreter must first listen to the message, understand it, and then reconstruct it using the target language. Pausing after asking questions or during lectures allows time for the interpreter to finish and the student to be involved in class discussions
- Pace yourself when reading or provide the student with a copy to read for themselves. Normal reading speed will usually be too fast for the Interpreter to absorb and translate
- Do not ask the interpreter to interpret only selected portions of what is said
- Do not ask the interpreter to provide advice to or about the student.
- Ensure that only one person speaks at a time, i.e. group discussions can pose problems.
- Do not include the interpreter in classroom activities.

Attachment Four: Role of the Reader/Scribe

The role of the Reader/Scribe is to provide exam assistance by reading the exam questions aloud to the student as needed, and writing down (i.e. scribing) the student's answer. Their job is well defined with boundaries to ensure that students receiving this support do not have an academic advantage compared to their peers, and that the academic integrity of the exam is maintained. For this reason, Reader/Scribes do not have expertise or extensive knowledge in the subject matter being examined. At all times, the student should demonstrate their knowledge as acquired throughout the semester by providing verbal instruction and direction to the scribe regarding how to write the exam answers.

It is the role of the Reader/Scribe to:

- remain with the student for the duration of the exam
- read the exam questions aloud to the student as required
- listen to the student's response
- write down on the exam paper exactly what the student tells them to write (inclusive of spelling, grammar, punctuation, paragraphs and any editing)
- if time permits, read aloud the student's answers so that the student can further clarify, expand, or edit their answers.

It is not the Reader/Scribe's role to:

- further explain the exam questions, beyond reading aloud the questions as written on the examination paper
- prompt or direct the student to provide a correct answer
- provide any feedback or information to the student
- write down additional information, beyond what the student has instructed the Reader/Scribe to write
- know or provide the correct spelling of any terminology specific to the course content
- take responsibility for the student's results.

Essential information:

The student should inform Equitable Learning Services if they are aware that the course content comprises terminology that is difficult to pronounce, equations, and/or formulas, because they will likely appear in the exam. In such circumstances, Equitable Learning Services will discuss alternative arrangements that may be possible, taking these complexities into account.

To ensure that academic integrity is maintained and that the work submitted remains that of the student in question, Equitable Learning Services policy is that if a student has a regular in class note-taker throughout the semester, and the student requires an exam scribe/reader, that the regular note-taker should not be allocated the role of exam scribe/reader.

If there is a problem with the clarity or style of the reader/scribe, the student should contact Equitable Learning Services within 48 hours after the exam. Please see the section, *Complaints and Problems Procedures*, for more information.

Attachment Five: Student Enabling Assistance Agreement

Student Name:

Student Number:

A student agreement is between you and Equitable Learning Services at RMIT.

Aims of Equitable Learning Services

Equitable Learning Services aims to promote access and equity for students with disabilities. Equitable Learning Services employs note takers, readers/scribes, interpreters and participation assistants to work with students across all campuses.

Student Responsibilities

It is expected that students will treat all staff with courtesy and respect. This includes any dealings with Echo and enabling assistance staff.

Equitable Learning Services reserves the right to review enabling assistance if a student fails to meet their obligations as outlined in the student booklet. In such situations Equitable Learning Services will, in conjunction with the student, review the situation and make recommendations accordingly.

UNDERSTANDING THIS AGREEMENT

If you do not understand something in this agreement, student booklet, or have any questions, it is important to discuss with an Equitable Learning Services staff member. If there is any aspect of the agreement that you do not agree with, or if you feel that you cannot meet some of the requirements, discuss this with us.

SERVICE AGREEMENT

STUDENT

I have read and understood the student booklet and agreement outlining my responsibilities and agree to follow these while receiving support from RMIT via Equitable Learning Services.

Student Name:

Student Signature:

Date: / /