



University
of Windsor

University of Windsor

Accessible Customer Service Training

Handbook and Learning Module

About this training booklet

The Accessible Customer Training booklet has been adapted from the materials produced by the Government of Ontario, made available on the [AccessForward](#) website. The content of the training aligns with the requirements under the Integrated Accessibility Standards (O.Reg. 191/11).

Departments and units can opt for group training for people working in their areas or for volunteers participating in campus events. This training is provided by the Office of Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Mediation (OHRCRM).

If you require this booklet in an alternative, accessible format, contact OHRCRM:

- By written request to OHRCRM, University of Windsor, 401 Sunset Avenue, Windsor ON, N9B 3P4;
- By telephone at (519) 253-3000, extension 3400;
- By email request at HRCRM@uwindsor.ca

Contents

About this training booklet	2
Introduction to Accessible Customer Service.....	4
The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005	5
What are the Accessibility standards?.....	5
Who must comply with the Accessibility Standards?	5
The Customer Service Standard	6
What must organizations like the University of Windsor do to meet the Standard?	6
Serving People with Disabilities.....	7
Introduction	7
Providing Accessible Customer Service	9
People with physical or mobility disabilities	9
People with low vision	9
People who are d/Deaf or are hard of hearing	10
People who are deafblind	10
People with speech or language disabilities	11
People with learning disabilities	11
People with developmental disabilities	12
People with mental health disabilities	12
People who use service animals.....	13
When a service animal is prohibited by another law.....	14
People with a support person.....	15
People who use assistive devices	16
People who are neurodivergent	16
Serving people with disabilities – At home or over the phone/online	17
If there are difficulties accessing your goods, services or facilities.....	18

Introduction to Accessible Customer Service

The University of Windsor campus is a vibrant and diverse community, welcoming thousands of people each year—including students, faculty, staff, volunteers, retirees, visitors, and community members with disabilities. Here, people come together to learn, work, socialize, and participate in a wide range of academic, cultural, and recreational activities.

To ensure that everyone can fully participate in campus life, we strive to provide accessible customer service in accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). This means treating all individuals with dignity, independence, integration, and equal opportunity—regardless of whether a disability is visible or not.

Accessibility is not just about physical spaces—it's about attitudes, awareness, and actions. A simple question like, “How may I help you?” can open the door to a more inclusive and respectful experience for everyone. By being mindful of accessibility needs and responsive to individual preferences, we can create a campus environment where everyone feels welcomed.

This training booklet will guide you through the principles and practices of accessible customer service, helping you contribute to a more inclusive university community.

Who should take this Training?

The Customer Service Standard requires the following to take this training:

- All faculty, staff, student employees, volunteers, and third-party contractors who interact with the public
- Individuals who help develop organizational policies

The Customer Service Standard mandates that this training include:

- The purpose of the AODA
- An overview of the Customer Service Standard
- How to interact with people with various disabilities and/or rely on various supports (i.e., assistive devices, service animals, and support persons).

Once you have read this booklet, you must complete and submit the [quiz online](#). Upon completion, please ensure you keep the completed quiz on file.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) is a provincial law. The AODA helps identify, remove and prevent barriers to inclusion for people with disabilities in Ontario. Its main goal is to achieve accessibility by developing, implementing, and enforcing accessibility standards in key areas of daily life. These accessibility standards were designed to help move Ontario forward on its journey to create a more accessible and inclusive province.

What are the Accessibility standards?

The accessibility standards are the legal requirements that organizations in Ontario, like the University of Windsor, must follow to become more accessible to people with disabilities. They address key areas of daily life, including:

- customer service
- information and communications
- employment
- transportation
- design of public spaces (built environment)

The standards are found in the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, which was established under the AODA.

Who must comply with the Accessibility Standards?

The standards must be followed by:

- the Ontario government and Legislative Assembly
- all designated public sector organizations, which include municipalities, universities, colleges, hospitals, school boards and public transportation organizations
- private businesses and not-for-profit organizations that have one or more employees in Ontario

The Customer Service Standard

What must organizations like the University of Windsor do to meet the Standard?

To provide accessible customer service, organizations must:

- Create accessible customer service policies. To learn more about the University of Windsor policies, guidelines and procedures, please visit: [Accessibility & Accommodations | OHRCRM](#)
- Provide accessible customer service by:
 - Considering a person's disability when communicating
 - Ensuring people with disabilities can use their personal assistive devices when accessing goods, services, or facilities
 - Providing access to people with disabilities who bring their service animals with them into areas open to the public or third parties
 - Welcoming support persons accompanying people with disabilities
 - Informing the public when accessible facilities or services are temporarily unavailable
 - Inviting customers to provide feedback
 - Training staff and others on providing accessible customer service and how to interact with people with various types of disabilities as soon as is practicable

The **four principles of accessible customer service** are:

1. Dignity

Provide services in a way that respects the dignity of people with disabilities. This means treating them as valued customers who are deserving of the same level of service as anyone else.

2. Independence

Allow people with disabilities to do things on their own, without unnecessary help or interference. This includes providing tools or supports that enable independent access.

3. Integration

Deliver services in a way that allows people with disabilities to benefit from the same services, in the same place, and in the same or similar way as others, whenever possible.

4. Equal Opportunity

Give people with disabilities the same opportunity to access your goods or services as others. This means removing barriers that might prevent full participation.

Serving People with Disabilities

Introduction

What is a customer?

Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and its Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR)—specifically the Accessible Customer Service Standard—a customer in a university setting can be broadly defined as any person who accesses or uses the university's goods, services, or facilities.

The term “customer” is not limited to those who pay for services. It encompasses anyone who benefits from or interacts with the university's offerings, especially those who may face barriers due to disabilities.

Who is a "Customer" in a University Context?

- Students (including prospective students)
- Faculty, staff, and retirees
- Visitors and guests
- Alumni
- Community members
- Volunteers
- Third-party service providers
- Anyone interacting with university services or facilities

Accessible customer service is about

- not making assumptions about what a person can or cannot do because of their disability
- inclusion – making everyone feel welcome and included
- understanding that people with disabilities may have different needs

Person-first vs identity-first language

Serving customers with disabilities is also about showing sensitivity and respect. A good starting point is using appropriate language and terminology.

Person-first language places emphasis on the individual before the disability (e.g., "person with a disability"), while identity-first language presents the disability as an inherent part of the person's identity (e.g., "disabled person"). Person-first language was traditionally

recommended to combat stigma by focusing on the whole person and is still widely used today. However, many disability communities, like the Autistic community, now prefer identity-first language to assert pride and reject the idea that disability is separate from the person. When unsure, the most respectful approach is to ask the individual or community for their preference.

Examples of person-first language: Person with a disability, person who has low vision, person who has autism.

Examples of identity-first language: Autistic person, Deaf (note: capital “D” if person identifies as culturally Deaf), disabled person.

Definition of Disability and Being Alert to Barriers

The AODA uses the same definition of “disability” as the Ontario Human Rights Code, which includes physical disabilities, as well as vision, hearing, speech, developmental, learning and mental health disabilities. A disability can be temporary or permanent.

Use the right words

- Use “disability” not “handicapped”.
- Avoid statements that convey pity, such as victim of, suffers with, confined to a wheelchair, physically challenged, or stricken with a particular illness or disability.
- Avoid offensive euphemisms such as “intellectually challenged”, “differently abled”, and “special needs”. It’s okay to say “disability”.

Providing Accessible Customer Service

People with physical or mobility disabilities

Only some people with physical disabilities use a wheelchair. Someone with arthritis may use a cane or walker, while someone with a heart or lung condition may not use a mobility device but may have difficulty walking longer distances.

Tips:

- Ask before you help. People with disabilities often have their own ways of doing things. Waiting for permission to help respects the autonomy and independence of the individual.
- Don't touch or move a person's equipment (e.g., walker, wheelchair) without permission.
- If you have permission to move a person's wheelchair, don't leave them in an awkward, dangerous, or undignified position, such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.
- If you need to have a lengthy conversation with someone who uses a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so you can make eye contact at the same level.
- Think ahead and remove any items that may cause a physical barrier, such as boxes left in an aisle.
- Note that not all wheelchair users are unable to stand or walk. Some individuals use a wheelchair part-time or for specific reasons, such as fatigue management, pain reduction, balance or safety, or managing medical conditions.
- Keep in mind that a person's physical disability may not be visible or obvious. For example, a person may have difficulty standing for long periods of time and may ask to sit while waiting to be served.

People with low vision

Having low vision can restrict someone's ability to read documents or signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. Some people may use a guide dog, a white cane, or a support person such as a sighted guide, but others may not.

Tips:

- When you know someone has low vision, don't assume the individual can't see you. Not everyone with low vision is totally blind; many have some vision.
- Identify yourself when you approach and speak directly to the individual, even if they are with a companion.

- Ask if they would like you to read any printed information out loud to them, such as a menu, a bill or a schedule of fees.
- When providing directions or instructions, be precise and descriptive.
- Offer your elbow to guide them if needed. If they accept, lead – don't pull.
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient the person to the surroundings. For example, if you're approaching stairs or an obstacle, say so.
- If you need to leave the individual, let them know by telling them you'll be back or saying good-bye.
- Don't leave the person in the middle of a room – guide them to a comfortable location.

People who are d/Deaf or are hard of hearing

People who are hard of hearing or d/Deaf may identify in different ways. They may be Deaf, deaf, oral deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing. These terms are used to describe different levels of hearing, someone's relationship to Deaf culture, or the way a person's hearing was diminished or lost.

A person who is hard of hearing may have preferred ways to communicate, for example, through sign language, by lip reading, using a pen and paper, or typing on a cell phone.

Tips:

- Once the person has self-identified as being hard of hearing, make sure you face them when talking and that you are in a well-lit area so the person can see you clearly.
- As needed, attract the person's attention before speaking. Try a wave of your hand, or perhaps a gentle touch on the shoulder.
- Maintain eye contact. Use body language, gestures, and facial expressions to help you communicate.
- If the person uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or, if possible, move to a quieter area.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example, using a pen and paper, or typing on a cell phone.
- When using a sign language interpreter, look and speak directly to the individual you are helping, not to the interpreter. For example, say "What would you like?" not "Ask them what they'd like."

People who are deafblind

A person who is deafblind may have varying degrees of hearing and vision. People who are deafblind are often accompanied by an intervenor, a professional support person who helps

with communication. Intervenors are trained in various forms of communication that may involve touching the hands of the person they are supporting.

Tips:

- Speak directly to the individual, not to the intervenor.
- The person is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistance card or a note.

People with speech or language disabilities

Cerebral palsy, stroke, or other conditions may make it difficult for a person to pronounce words or express themselves. Some people who have severe difficulties may use a communication board or other assistive devices.

Tips:

- Don't assume that a person who has difficulty speaking doesn't understand you.
- Speak directly to the individual and not to their companion or support person if present.
- Whenever possible, ask questions that can be answered "yes" or "no."
- If the person uses a communication device, take a moment to read visible instructions for communicating with them.
- Be patient. Don't interrupt or finish the person's sentences.
- Confirm what the person has said by summarizing or repeating what you've understood, and allow the person to respond – don't pretend if you're not sure.
- If necessary, provide other ways for the person to contact you, such as email.

People with learning disabilities

The term "learning disabilities" refers to a range of diagnoses. One example is dyslexia, which affects how a person takes in or retains information. This disability may become apparent when the person has difficulty reading material or understanding the information you are providing. People with learning disabilities just learn in a different way.

Tips:

- Be patient and allow extra time if needed. People with some learning disabilities may take a little longer to process information or to understand and respond.

- Try to provide information in a way that works for the individuals accessing your services. For example, some people with learning disabilities find written words difficult to understand, while others may have problems with numbers and math.
- Be willing to rephrase or explain something again in another way, if needed.

People with developmental disabilities

Developmental disabilities (such as Down syndrome) or intellectual disabilities can play a role in the unique ways someone may learn, communicate, or accomplish everyday physical activities.

Tips:

- Don't make assumptions about what a person can or cannot do.
- Don't exaggerate your speech or speak in a patronizing way.
- Use plain language.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.
- If you're not sure of what is being said to you, confirm by summarizing or repeating what was said, or politely ask them to repeat it – don't pretend if you're not sure.
- Ask the person if they would like help reading your material or completing a form and wait for them to accept the offer of assistance.
- Be patient and allow extra time if needed.

People with mental health disabilities

Mental health disability is a broad term for many conditions that can range in severity. For example, a person with a mental health disability may experience depression or acute mood swings, anxiety, or a panic disorder. It may affect a person's ability to concentrate or remember things.

You may not know someone has this disability unless you are told. Stigma and lack of understanding are major barriers for people with mental health disabilities.

Tips:

- If you sense or know that an individual has a mental health disability, treat them with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Listen carefully and work with the person to meet their needs.
- Respect personal space.
- Limit distractions that could affect the individual's ability to focus or concentrate – loud noise, crowded areas, and interruptions could cause stress.

- Respond to the person's immediate behaviour and needs. Don't be confrontational. If the person seems distracted, be open to repeating information and providing time for them to respond.

People who use service animals

The University of Windsor has a [Service Animals on Campus Policy](#) that outlines the procedures related to our specific campus in compliance with the AODA and the Ontario Human Rights Code. Please refer to this policy for specifics. The information below provides tips for accessible customer service for individuals who rely on the support of service animals.

Many types of service animals support people with various types of disabilities.

- People with low vision or who are blind may use a guide dog.
- Hearing alert animals help people who are hard of hearing or d/Deaf.
- Other service animals are trained to alert a person to an oncoming seizure, or to assist people with autism, mental health disabilities, physical disabilities, and other disabilities.

Under the Customer Service Standard, there are no restrictions on what type of animal can be used as a service animal.

An animal is considered a service animal if:

- you can easily identify that it's a service animal through visual indicators, such as when it wears a harness or vest, or
- the person with a disability provides documentation from a regulated health professional¹ that confirms they need the service animal for reasons relating to their disability

Tips:

- Don't touch or distract a service animal; it's not a pet. It's a working animal and has to pay attention at all times.
- If you're not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal, you may ask the person. You may ask to see their documentation from a regulated health professional. The

¹ Defined as a member of one of the following: College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists of Ontario; College of Chiropractors of Ontario; College of Nurses of Ontario; College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario; College of Optometrists of Ontario; College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario; College of Physiotherapists of Ontario; College of Psychologists of Ontario

University also provides a service animal verification letter for staff, faculty and students once the animal has been registered with Human Resources or Student Accessibility Services. This letter should be accepted in place of documentation from a healthcare provider.

- In general, individuals should only be asked to verify whether the animal is a service animal by staff/faculty of the University, particularly where necessary for health and safety or operational reasons.
- The handler is responsible for the care and supervision of their service animal. However, you can provide water for the animal if the person requests it.
- The University allows non-service animals on the grounds but not inside facilities. Ensure other animals keep a respectful distance from service animals and do not interact with them.

If another person's health or safety could be seriously impacted by the presence of a service animal, such as a severe allergy

Consider all options and try to find a solution that meets the needs of both people. For example:

- creating distance between the two people
- eliminating in-person contact
- changing the time the two receive service
- any other way that would allow the person to use their service animal on the premises

If you can't easily identify that it's a service animal

- Don't make assumptions. You can ask the person to provide documentation (such as a letter, note, or form) from a regulated health professional that states that they require the animal because of their disability or a University of Windsor service animal verification letter. In general, individuals should only be asked to verify whether the animal is a service animal by staff/faculty of the University, particularly where necessary for health and safety or operational reasons.
- If the person shows you the documentation, then they must be allowed to be accompanied by their service animal.
- The person is not required to disclose their disability or demonstrate how the animal assists them.

When a service animal is prohibited by another law

- The law requires you to allow a person to bring their service animal with them into areas of the University's premises open to the public or to third parties.

- Areas are considered open to the public even if they are only open to those people who have paid an admission fee, are members, or have met certain eligibility or entrance requirements. In cases where another law prohibits a service animal from entering certain areas, provide another way for the person to access your services.
- While a service animal may be prohibited from certain areas, service dogs are allowed in areas where food is sold, served, or offered for sale. This includes dining areas on campus.

Tips if the service animal is prohibited by another law:

- Explain why to the individual, and discuss other ways to serve them, for example,
 - ask the handler if there is someone they trust to watch the animal, then offer assistance to the person while they're separated from the animal, or
 - serving the person in another area where the animal is allowed
- Consider options ahead of time that you could offer when a service animal is prohibited.

Tips for decision makers – When an animal is prohibited by law

- Refer to the [Service Animals on Campus policy](#), which identifies where service animals are prohibited by law. This may include the use of service animals in certain locations due to health or safety.
- Consider options ahead of time that you or your staff could offer when a service animal is prohibited.
- If you are uncertain of where animals may be prohibited or how to accommodate, contact the [Office of Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Mediation](#)

People with a support person

A support person can be a paid personal support worker, an intervenor, a volunteer, a family member, or a friend. A support person might help the person with a disability with communication, mobility, personal care or with accessing services.

A person with a disability is permitted to bring their support person with them to any area of the University's premises that is open to the public or to third parties.

If there is a charge for admission, there must be advanced notice of what admission fee or fare, if any, will be charged for a support person.

Tips:

- If you're not sure which person is the customer, take your lead from the person using or requesting service, or simply ask.

- Speak directly to the individual seeking service, not to their support person.
- If the University/Department charges an admission fee or fare, be familiar with its policy on fees or fares for support persons.
- It's good practice to confirm with the person seeking the service that they want the support person to be present while confidential matters are being discussed.

People who use assistive devices

An assistive device is a piece of equipment a person with a disability uses to help with daily living, for example, a wheelchair, walker, white cane, hearing aid, oxygen tank, or a communication board.

Tips:

- Don't touch or handle any assistive device without permission.
- Don't move assistive devices or equipment (such as canes, walkers) out of the person's reach.

People who are neurodivergent

Neurodiversity is increasingly being recognized as a vital aspect of human diversity, especially within educational and workplace settings. The term "neurodiversity" refers to the many ways to think and interact with the world. "Neurodivergent" more specifically refers to those whose ways of thinking and being in the world are not aligned with the dominant norm.

Often, neurodivergence is associated with those on the autism spectrum; however, many other ways of thinking can be considered neurodivergent. This can include people who live with ADHD, OCD, intellectual disabilities, mood and anxiety disorders, dyslexia, and many more.

While many of these are medical terms, neurodivergence itself is not a medical diagnosis. Rather, it is a social identity that people can choose to claim (or not) on the basis of their lived experience with one or more of these conditions. Some neurodivergent people identify with the disability community, while others may not. In general, it is best to be open to human diversity and engage in respectful interactions.

Tips:

Be flexible in your approach to providing assistance

- Respect personal space.
- Be aware that loud sounds/music, bright or flashing lights, and strong odours can be overstimulating. Consider finding a quiet area with reduced distractions to have a conversation, if needed.

- If someone is showing signs of agitation, speak calmly and give space and time to respond.
- Use clear and direct communication, realizing that not everyone picks up nuances in conversation.

Serving people with disabilities – At home or over the phone/virtual calls

While University employees and volunteers do not usually provide in-home services, individuals working in Residence Services should consider the following.

Tips for providing at-home service:

- Don't arrive unexpectedly. Confirm your arrival time in advance.
- Respect requests made by the individual with a disability to accommodate their needs. For example, a person with an environmental sensitivity may require that you refrain from wearing scented products in their residence room. Another example may involve people who are immunocompromised and may ask anyone entering their living space to wear a mask.
- Be patient. You may need to wait a few moments for the person to open the door.
- Introduce yourself. Keep the person informed of what you're doing.

Make sure that you leave their room/living space exactly as it was when you arrived. For example, someone with vision loss will expect that their furniture is in the same place and could trip if you've moved the coffee table.

Tips for providing over-the-phone service or a virtual meeting:

- Speak naturally, clearly, and directly.
- Don't interrupt or finish sentences. Give your people time to explain or respond.
- If you're not sure what is being said to you, politely ask the person to repeat it, or repeat or rephrase what you heard and ask if you have understood correctly.
- If the person with a disability is using an interpreter or a telephone relay service, speak naturally to the individual, not to the interpreter.
- If you encounter a situation where, after numerous attempts, you and the individual cannot communicate with each other, consider making alternate arrangements that may work best for them.
- If you are using Teams, ensure that:
 - Your audio is clear
 - Consider using a headset
 - Minimize background noise, bright lights, or movement (e.g. ceiling fans)
 - Let the person know how to turn on live captions, if needed

If there are difficulties accessing your goods, services or facilities

If you notice that a person with disabilities is having difficulty accessing your goods, services or facilities, a good starting point is to ask, “How can I help you?”. Oftentimes, there are simple solutions. These could include providing clear directions on how to find a certain building or room, reading printed material aloud, or retrieving an item out of reach for someone.

When you ask if someone needs assistance, take the time to listen. They may decline because they are managing independently, even if it takes longer. If they accept, don’t make assumptions; try to understand what the request is and do your best to provide support.

Take time to ask, “How may I help you?”

Ask, don’t assume

Listen and speak directly to a person with a disability

Know how to accommodate

If you are unable to help, it may be reasonable to take the person’s name and preferred method of contact (e.g., phone number or email address). Talk to your supervisor to find out how to best approach the situation and ensure someone will respond to the individual.

If additional information is needed with respect to accessible customer service, contact the Office of Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Mediation:

- Ph. 519-253-3000, ext. 3400
- Email: hrcrm@uwindsor.ca
- www.uwindsor.ca/ohrcrm