

# Equity Review Tool

A Process Guide for  
Equity-centered  
Instructional Materials



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# Introduction

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In the constantly and rapidly evolving landscape of higher education, it is important to seek opportunities for continuous evaluation and improvement. **This tool is designed for educators striving to create more validating and affirming learning experiences and environments for students who are Black, Latinx, Indigenous, poverty-affected, first-generation, non-male-identifying, LGBTQIA+, and/or disabled.** To do this well, it is critical to understand the intersectionality of these identities and how that may affect a student's experience.

One important aspect of creating a more validating learning environment is ensuring that the instructional materials being used in college courses are conceptualized and constructed leveraging **equity-minded competencies and processes**. Using this tool, educators will be able to develop and evaluate their resources and the language they use to ensure they are **asset-based** and supportive of a more equitable teaching and learning process.

This tool goes beyond the basics to help educators explore the “why” of a) developing instructional resources that amplify minoritized and marginalized voices and support optimal learning for students of a broad range of diverse backgrounds and b) using asset-based language that privileges, empowers and accurately represents students who have historically been excluded and marginalized in higher education due to their race, cultural background, etc. **This tool poses critical questions that help surface and confront privilege, bias, exclusion, and/or misrepresentation and promote the use of equity-minded language.** Rather than a simple checklist, the tools, resources, and processes provided are meant to be a continuous journey to enable reflection and discussion as often as possible during the process of creating or revising instructional materials.

## Introduction

It is important to note that this tool was designed to be used by individuals and teams who are either **creating original material** or **revising existing material**. The effectiveness of this tool relies upon the assumption that users of this tool:

- Are aware (and willing to learn) of their own racial identity and how that impacts the practices, processes, and procedures they use in the classroom.
- Are willing to acknowledge that teaching and learning practices centered around whiteness are failing all students, especially racially minoritized students.
- Seek to disrupt and replace white-centered teaching and learning practices and curriculum.
- Recognize that each student holds a large set of intersecting identities, meaning that the advice in this resource is not and will never be comprehensive enough to be inclusive of every student's needs.
- Understand the importance and ever-evolving nature of language when it comes to equity, which happens in relation to the histories and current experiences of oppressed groups.

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The **types of instructional materials** considered include the following:

- Syllabi
- Textbook and course readings
- Open Educational Resources (OER) (original or adapted content)
- Project/activity instructions and assignment prompts
- Assessments – formative and summative
- Rubrics
- Learning activities
- Lecture notes
- Content presentations
- Student messaging (emails, nudges, 1:1s, etc.)

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These materials may exist across a **range of media**:

- Print
- Learning Management System
- Online
- Media (photos, videos)
- Website
- Audio

## Introduction

Those who use this tool may be coming to it with a wide range of foundational knowledge about promoting equity and justice within the higher education landscape. This tool was designed to be accessible and actionable for anyone in the teaching and learning space **who is committed to the student-centered design, self-reflection, and group reflective process required to build and foster more inclusive, culturally responsive, and just learning spaces**. For optimal use of this tool, educators should:

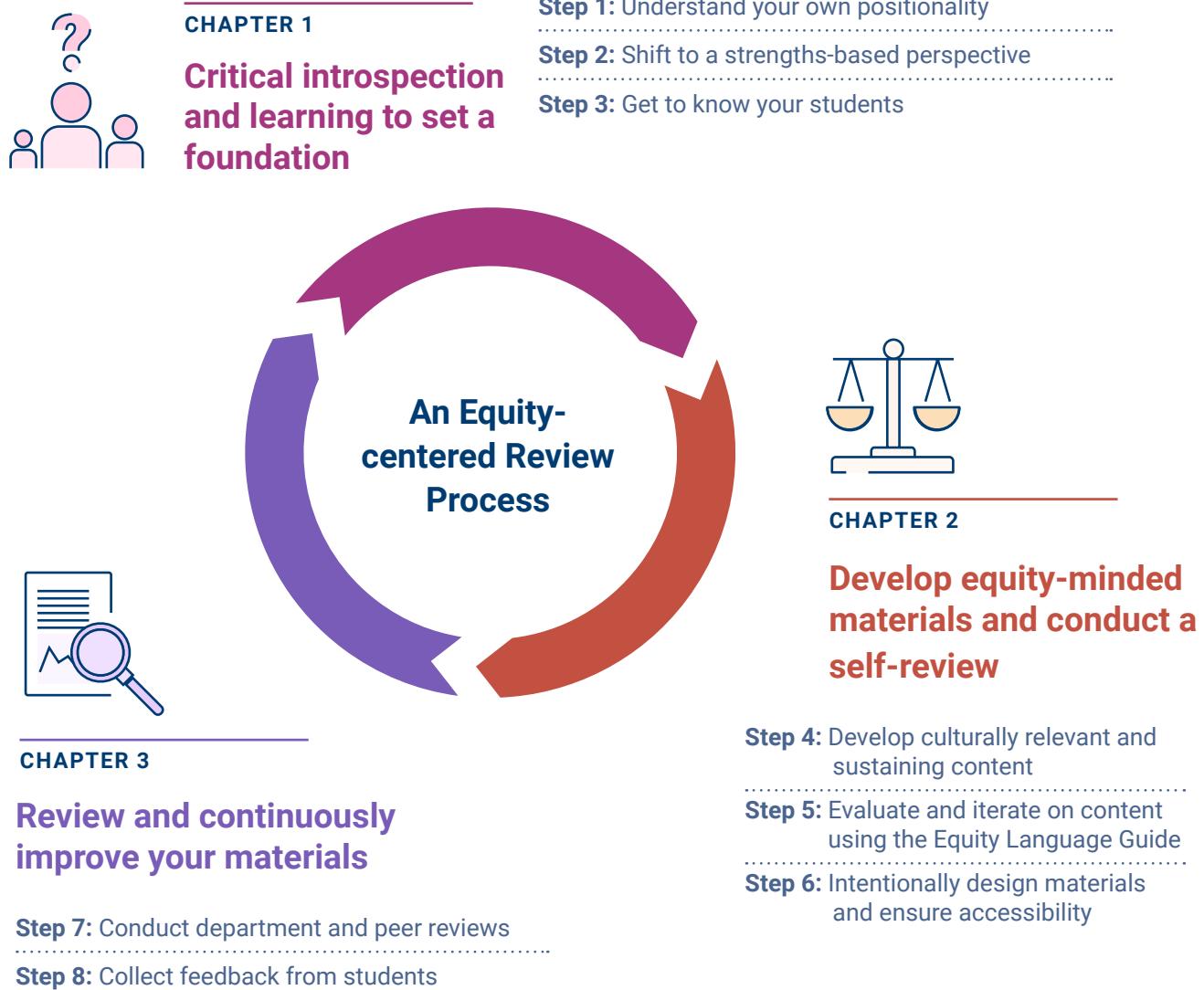
- Commit to interrogating instructional materials to **identify barriers** to learning, ensuring that students are never positioned as part of the problem.
- Acknowledge that effective and successful equity-centeredness requires educators to be **active, intentional, and consistent** in their commitment to this work.
- Recognize that creating more equitable, culturally responsive, and just learning materials and resources **requires dismantling systems and processes** that have been upheld by the status quo. Dismantling and redesigning these systems (in this context instructional materials) may result in educators experiencing discomfort as they work together create inclusive, culturally responsive, and just learning spaces.
- Apply a **strength-based approach** to instruction, which requires an intentional mindset shift away from student blaming and deficit thinking.

## Introduction

### How to use this tool

As previously described, this tool is designed to be used by individuals and teams who are either creating original materials (as listed in the previous section) or revising existing materials.

The resource contains three chapters with eight steps in total. Each step is designed to provide educators with **strategies for application**, as well as **resources**, to aid in the creation or revision of instructional materials. Each chapter concludes with a set of **reflection questions** that educators can reflect and act on to strengthen their materials and/or approach. It is important to note that the authors of this resource intended the steps to be a suggested sequence of processes, and many, if not all steps will likely be revisited multiple times throughout the development process.



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# Common Understanding of Terminology

<b>Anti-racist</b>	One who is supporting an anti-racist policy through their actions or expressing of an anti-racist idea (Kendi, 2019).
<b>Culturally relevant/sustaining pedagogies</b>	Pedagogical frameworks that seek to provide educators with a praxis to culturally affirm and sustain student identities, disrupt euro-centric curriculum, and focus learning by centering students and developing students' cultural competence and critical consciousness (Paris & Alim, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2014).
<b>Equity</b>	<p>The intentional practice of identifying and dismantling unjust structures, policies, and practices that perpetuate systemic oppression based on but not limited to race, gender, ethnicity, language, ability, sexual orientation, and/or religion, to establish corrective justice actions to realize students' academic and social mobility goals (Achieving the Dream, 2022).</p> <p><b>Racial equity:</b> The state in which health, social, and economic outcomes are no longer predicted by race (McDermott et al., 2021).</p> <p><b>Gender equity:</b> Fairness of treatment for people of all genders, according to their respective needs in different life domains (e.g., the economy, social life, politics, education, health care). This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities (Mercarini, 2014).</p> <p><b>Ethnic equity:</b> Practicing equitable policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages in society where ethnicity is no longer a predictor of outcomes</p> <p><b>Language equity:</b> accommodating linguistic difference so that it does not hinder one's personal autonomy and development, social integration and cohesion, facilitates ethnocultural preservation and political integration; by creating access to/knowledge of the language and its use—as a human right and tool to prevent violence and oppression (Arzoz, 2010).</p> <p><b>Health equity:</b> The practice of designing inclusive physical and social structures, processes, and systems that can be accessed by people of all abilities; systems in which people can live and pursue their goals without experiencing limitations from physical or socially constructed tools, spaces, or information (Burgstahler, 2020).</p> <p><b>Sexual orientation equity:</b> The state in which health, social, and economic outcomes are no longer predicted by sexual orientation.</p> <p><b>Religious equity:</b> The state in which diverse spiritual interests are valued with consistency; the creation of systems where conservative mainline traditions cannot be privileged over less traditional expressions or non-faith and vice versa (Hunter-Henin, 2021).</p>
<b>Equity gap</b>	Disaggregating racial demographic data to its finest point to understand student outcome data between racial groups. This process requires practitioners to disaggregate the traditional "all students" or "under-represented minority" to gain a deeper understanding of what is happening between racial groups and to critically address and eliminate institutionalized mindsets, policies, practices, and norms that are perpetuating the gap (Brown McNair et al., 2020).

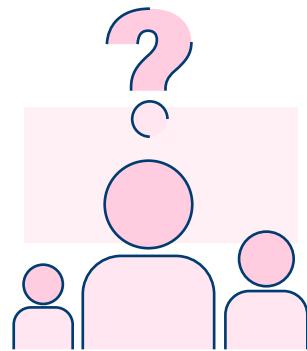
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<b>Equity-first</b>	Faculty and others creating instructional materials should be committed to personal and professional growth with regards to equity, which includes being receptive and responsive to feedback from those with both lived and learned expertise. Educators should elevate the voices of authors whose primary or “first” priorities are to support achievement and success for minoritized student populations, as reflected by their organization’s mission, goals, programming and research agendas, and organizational make-up. They should have or actively seek to build knowledge of equity principles and related standards that will inform all aspects of their work. Throughout the development of the material or resource, they should build and sustain effective partnerships with leaders and other members of minoritized communities (EquityWorks, 2019).
<b>Equity-mindedness</b>	A perspective or mode of thinking exhibited by practitioners who call attention to patterns of inequity in student outcomes. These practitioners are willing to take personal and institutional responsibility for the success of their students, and critically reassess their own practices. It also requires that practitioners are race-conscious and aware of the social and historical context of exclusionary practices in American Higher Education ( <a href="#">Equity Mindedness, n.d.</a> ).
<b>Ethnicity</b>	A category of people who identify as a social group on the basis of a shared culture, origins, social background, and traditions that are distinctive, maintained between generations, and lead to a sense of identity, common language or religious traditions.
<b>Hidden curriculum</b>	The unspoken or implicit values, behaviors, and norms that exist in the educational setting ( <a href="#">Alsubaie, 2015</a> ). These values, behaviors, and norms are based on our assumptions around students having pre-existing knowledge and experience with them and they tend to be white-centric.
<b>Implicit bias</b>	The process of associating stereotypes or attitudes toward categories of people without conscious awareness. Implicit bias affects behavior because human beings process an enormous amount of stimulus by organizing the environment into categories consisting of automatic associations between concepts that share similar characteristics.
<b>Intersectionality</b>	The interplay of one’s identities that are centered around their racial identities, the status of those identities, and the situational context of how, when, and where those identities show up and influence personal experience(s) within multiple dimensions of societal oppression. Intersectionality is a term coined by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to explain how individual aspects of our identities (our gender, race, ethnicity, class, etc.) interact with race. It is not intended to replace discussions about race, but utilizes race to guide a broader discussion of intersectionality.
<b>LGBTQIA2S+</b>	Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, two-spirit (used particularly by Indigenous communities), and more. Sometimes, when the Q is seen at the end of LGBT, it can also mean questioning. LGBT and/or GLBT are also often used. The term “gay community” should be avoided, as it does not accurately reflect the diversity of the community. Rather, LGBTQ+ community is preferred ( <a href="#">Achieving the Dream, 2022</a> ).
<b>Microaggressions</b>	The everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership (Sue, n.d.).

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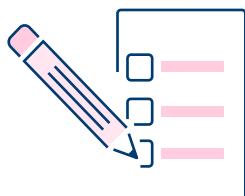
<b>Minoritized (versus minority versus marginalized)</b>	The social processes by which particular groups are defined as lesser or outside the mainstream (Gillborn, 2010). Groups that are different in race, religious creed, nation of origin, ability, sexuality, and gender and as a result of social constructs have less power or representation compared to other members or groups in society. ( <a href="#">Smith, 2016</a> )
<b>(white) Normative culture</b>	Operates as a social mechanism that grants advantages to white people by giving white people the ease of social navigation by both feeling normal and being viewed as normal ( <a href="#">Diversity, 2021</a> ).
<b>Positionality</b>	The occupation or adoption of a particular position in relation to others, usually with reference to issues of culture, ethnicity or gender ( <a href="#">Center for Social Solutions, 2021</a> ).
<b>Privilege</b>	An advantage that only one person or group of people have due to societal or systemic structures, processes, etc. ( <a href="#">Center for Social Solutions, 2021</a> ).
<b>Race</b>	A socially constructed system of categorizing humans largely based on observable physical features (phenotypes) such as skin color and ancestry. There is no scientific basis for or discernible distinction between racial categories. The ideology of race has become embedded in our identities, institutions, and culture, and is used as a basis for discrimination and domination ( <a href="#">Center for Urban Education, 2020</a> ).
<b>Racism</b>	Widely thought of narrowly as personal prejudice, racism is a complex system of racial hierarchies and inequities. At the micro/individual level of racism are internalized and interpersonal racism. At the macro level of racism, we look beyond the individuals to the broader dynamics, including institutional and structural racism ( <a href="#">Center for Urban Education, 2020</a> ).
<b>Strength- / asset-based mindset</b>	A mindset that recognizes the individual and collective cultural resources, knowledge, value, and cultural capital that students bring into the classroom with them.
<b>Systemic oppression</b>	A dynamic system that produces and replicates oppression, ideologies, identities and inequalities that devalue, undermine, marginalize, and disadvantage social identities in contrast to the privileged norm; when some people are denied something of value, while others have ready access. The systematic subjugation of one social group by a more powerful social group for the social, economic, and political benefit of the more powerful social group ( <a href="#">National Museum of African American History &amp; Culture, 2019</a> ).

# Chapter 1



## Critical introspection and learning to set a foundation

Chapter 1 provides an intentional process to ensure educators enter into the process of developing materials and resources with a foundational understanding of their positionality and the institutional and environmental factors that affect students' experiences.



- **Step 1: Understand your own positionality**
- **Step 2: Shift to a strengths-based perspective**
- **Step 3: Get to know your students**

### Step 1: Understand your own positionality

Every educator enters the classroom with their own individual worldview that is shaped by their lifetime of socio-cultural experiences. As a result, they may choose course materials and design learning environments that align with their experience and perspectives. To create course materials that are aligned to students' experiences, culture, goals, and diverse perspectives, teaching and learning professionals must continually identify their own individual perspectives, assumptions, privileges, and biases often brought into the development and/or revision of their instructional materials.

Educators must also recognize the power they hold as the primary curator of the learning experience. While some educators may have little to no control over department level policies and norms, they can focus on creating teaching and learning processes that center, value, affirm and validate historically marginalized and racialized students. Educators can practice checking their biases, assumptions, and power in a transparent way with students by finding opportunities to co-construct the learning experience (Brown, 2011).



#### Application Strategies

- 1. Regularly identify and check your own biases, assumptions, privilege, and power.**  
Resource: [Unpacking Teachers' Invisible Knapsacks: Social Identity and Privilege in Higher Education](#), Barnett, 2013; [Social Identities and Systems of Oppression](#) (National Museum of African American History & Culture, 2019)
- 2. Identify actionable ways developed or revised material can authentically incorporate perspectives, knowledge, practices, and experiences from marginalized communities.**  
Resource: [Funds of Knowledge: Honoring Students' Cultural Experiences and Resources as Strengths](#), Kiyama, J.M. & Rios-Aguilar, C, 2018; [Student-Centered Learning in Higher Education](#) (Brown, 2022).
- 3. Intentionally address individual and institutional bias and privilege in course materials.** Consider how materials can address racial bias, positionality, and the development of racial literacy. Describe specific opportunities where these can be added.
- 4. Review and include both quantitative and qualitative data in the learning process and course materials.** Quantitative and qualitative evidence together create a deeper understanding of the breadth, depth, and varied experiences marginalized communities experience ([Embracing diversity through mixed methods research](#), Ågerfalk, 2013).

### Step 2: Shift to a strengths-based perspective

Shifting from a deficit-based to a strengths-based (sometimes referred to as asset-based) perspective requires educators to recognize the individual and collective cultural resources, knowledge, value, and community cultural wealth and capital that students bring into the classroom with them. A deficit-based perspective “holds students from historically [marginalized] populations responsible for the challenges and inequalities that they face” (Davis & Museus, 2019). Educators holding strength-based perspectives as they develop or revise materials are aware of what students bring into the classroom as an asset.

For students to contribute their wealth of knowledge and community cultural capital and see themselves reflected within the lessons, educators must create meaningful learning environments by intentionally designing materials that make space for students to contribute their wealth of knowledge and cultural capital.

Shifting to a strength-based perspective requires practice. To learn more about the concept of strength-based teaching practices read resources such as [An Asset-Based Approach to Education: What It Is and Why It Matters](#) (NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, 2020).



#### Application Strategies

1. **Identify and remove any language that is deficit-minded from instructional materials.**  
Resource: [An Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework for Research on Students of Color in STEM](#), Harper, 2010.
2. **Practice creating and reinforcing teaching and learning practices where students are consistently encouraged, and welcomed to contribute their voices, perspectives, resources, knowledge, and talents into the course.**  
Resource: [Funds of Knowledge: Honoring Students' Cultural Experiences and Resources as Strengths](#), Kiyama, J.M. & Rios-Aguilar, C, 2018; [Syllabus Review Guide: A inquiry tool for promoting racial and ethnic equity and equity-minded practice](#), Bensimon, n.d.
3. **Interrogate your own assumptions around student achievement and the capabilities students bring into the classroom.** If the assumption around performance and achievement centers students or the communities as the problem, adjust your thinking to consider the systems, policies, practices, and norms that created those circumstances in the first place ([Concepts and Activities for Racial Equity Work](#), Center for Urban Education, 2020; [From Equity Talk to Equity Walk: Expanding Practitioner knowledge for Racial Justice in Higher Education](#), Brown Mcnair et al., 2020).

### Step 3: Get to know your students

Educators can create a student-centered learning process by being mindful of who the students are in their classrooms. Developing a deeper understanding of students will require faculty to learn the demographic makeup of students in their classes and on campus, know what communities are represented on campus, and develop an understanding of the intersectional identities within those communities. This will be an ongoing process that can solicit opportunities to collaborate and learn along side with other faculty and staff or partnering with the academic department, department of equity, or institutional research.

To start, faculty may be able to gather disaggregated data from their department or institutional research office to understand the historical outcomes of students taking the course and identify ways to have sociocultural conversations with students to understand how students are experiencing the class.

It is important to remember that quantitative data can paint broad strokes, but qualitative data is necessary to understand students' experiences beyond the 'race/ethnicity' checkbox. Through this process, educators inform course design or redesign by creating a learning experience with opportunities for students to connect course outcomes with their own learning goals. Educators can also curate culturally relevant content that centers accurate representation of communities, stories, history, and experiences of minoritized communities by engaging with students in the course to select material relevant to their lived experiences.

Data from government or institutional sources often aggregates marginalized groups into a limited number of racial/ethnic categories. In many circumstances percentages for some populations are considered so small, the reports are unable to make any "statistically significant" findings, or those communities are not included in data samples at all. As a result, educators are unable to understand the student experience for populations that are not largely represented in data. This also contributes to educators perpetuating harmful and inaccurate stereotypes in course materials. Teaching and learning professionals must resist the erasure of Indigenous, South-East Asian, Asian, and Pacific Islander students. Consider if the gathered data include Indigenous, South-East Asian, Asian and Pacific Islander students. If not, is it possible to include this information? If presenting data to students, explicitly state that it was not possible to obtain data disaggregated to this level.

 Resource: [Beyond the Asterisk](#), Shotton et al., 2012; [The Racialized Experiences of Asian American and Pacific Islander Students](#), CARE, 2016.



### Application Strategies

1. **Create welcoming, friendly, and asset-based language in materials that signals to students that the faculty member respects them and welcomes their perspectives, experiences, and voice in the class.**  
Resource: [Syllabus Review Guide: A inquiry tool for promoting racial and ethnic equity and equity-minded practice](#), Bensimon, n.d.
2. **Create opportunities for students to share information that is important to their intersectional identities and their communities.**  
Resource: [Equity-minded inquiry series: Conducting student interviews and focus group](#), Ching & Roberts, 2020.
3. **Remember intersectional identities and how those intersectional experiences may shape the students' emotions, experiences, and motivations they bring into the classroom.** At the same time, avoid using intersectionality as a proxy for talking about race specifically.  
Resource: [Promoting Equity in the Classroom with Intersectional Pedagogy](#), Every Learner Everywhere, 2022; [Knowing Our Students](#), Achieving the Dream, 2021. (Note: This resource was developed for use at the institutional level. While many techniques are applicable at the classroom level, a future version of this resource will be developed to provide faculty with course-level strategies.)
4. **Use historical course- and institutional-level data to identify policies, processes, and norms that may be creating undue burdens on Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and additional marginalized communities.**  
Resource: [Improving departmental equity IMPACT Toolkit](#), Sims, et. al., 2021; [Equity-minded inquiry series: Data Tools](#), McNair, et. al., 2020.
5. **Focus on understanding the experiences, emotions, and motivations students bring into the classroom with them.**  
Resource: [Caring for Students Playbook: Six Recommendations](#), Adams et al., 2021.
6. **Build connections and establish relationships with representative communities for the purpose of improving the capacity to support the needs of marginalized students and to recruit support where necessary to ensure their success.** This can include understanding the student support programs available to students on campus and through community-based organizations.

## Chapter 1: Critical introspection and learning to set a foundation



### CHAPTER 1

#### Reflection Questions

- What are my identities? Which identities are important to me? Why?
- How does my identity and role in the classroom influence the power dynamics in the teaching and learning process?
- How do I maintain awareness and challenge my own biases to ensure students can authentically and safely demonstrate their ways of knowing, being, and learning in my course?
- How does systemic oppression and/or privilege impact marginalized students, and how do the materials I am creating reinforce or disrupt the oppressive system?
- What classroom policies, practices and norms may be causing harm to Black, Latinx, Indigenous, South East Asian, or Asian American students as they progress through my class?
- How can I promote a teaching and learning process that supports students' authentic selves?
- What can disaggregated demographic information tell me about the students on campus, in my department, and in my classroom?
- What do I know about the racialized experiences students may be experiencing on campus? Have I critically reviewed my teaching materials to remove harmful or tone-deaf language and stereotypes?
- How can I design a teaching and learning experience that honors communities beyond a unit or a month?
- Have I asked my students...
  - Who do you trust?
  - Who are your allies?
  - Who are your leaders?
  - Who do you admire?
  - What brings you joy?
- How can I connect students' voices, goals, and aspirations to the course outcomes?



### CHAPTER 1

#### Additional Reading

[From Equity Talk to Equity Walk- Chapter 3: Using and Communicating Data as a Tool to Advance Equity](#) (McNair, et. al., 2020)

[Syllabus Review Guide: A inquiry tool for promoting racial and ethnic equity and equity-minded practice](#) (Center for Urban Education, n.d.)

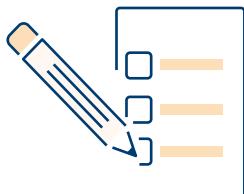
[Funds of Knowledge: Honoring Students' Cultural Experiences and Resources as Strengths](#) (Kiyama, J.M. & Rios-Aguilar, C., 2018)

# Chapter 2



## Develop equity-minded materials and conduct a self-review

This chapter contains steps for educators to develop and evaluate content for new classroom materials and resources. It is strongly recommended that users of this guide establish a thorough understanding of the contents in Chapter 1 before moving on to Chapter 2.



- **Step 4: Develop culturally relevant and sustaining content**
- **Step 5: Evaluate and iterate on content using the following Equity Language Guidance**
- **Step 6: Intentionally design materials and ensure accessibility**

### Step 4: Develop culturally relevant and sustaining content

Educators must create instructional materials that are [culturally relevant/](#) [sustaining](#) (Paris & Alim, 2017) and will remain applicable and inclusive into the future. Based on an understanding of their students and systemic factors at play, educators should clearly define objectives for the instructional material(s) being developed or revised that are based on the needs of their students and aligned to the learning objectives for the course.

In the words of Achieving the Dream's adapted [NYU Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecards](#), "Culturally relevant and sustaining content refers to the combination of teaching, pedagogy, curriculum, theories, attitudes, practices, and instructional materials that center students' cultures, identities, and contexts throughout educational systems." Gloria Ladson-Billings and Geneva Gay's scholarship is foundational to culturally responsive teaching. Some key principles of culturally responsive teaching include (1) validating students' experiences and values, (2) disrupting power dynamics that privilege dominant groups, and (3) empowering students.

We take the view that if content does not provide opportunities for culturally responsive and sustaining education, it cannot be high quality. Students deserve to learn content in ways that reflect themselves and their communities, are critical of power, identity, problems and solutions, and foster imagination about possibilities throughout the curriculum that meaningfully include people of color, women, LGTBQ people, people who speak multiple languages and more. It's important to make this note, because academic fields have a history of excluding groups of people and using credentials to gatekeep academic spaces. Educators' often view their discipline as containing neutral, apolitical, objective and factual content. Part of the work required to assess the quality of the curriculum is to explore and interrogate who is seen as field "experts", what "counts" as knowledge, and why (2021).

During the development process, it may be necessary to leverage information from a variety of sources. Selecting these references should be done intentionally, as the collection of sources and the identities of their authors will send a message to students about who has expertise and whose voices are most important to the subject matter.

Finally, educators must consider how their discipline intersects with marginalized communities. Consider how disciplines present and center the contributions and work of predominantly white-male scholars and how the department and institutional policies, practices, and norms were originally designed to exclude marginalized communities. The process of getting to know the students will require educators to have a strength-based perspective and recognize that marginalized students have experienced several racialized encounters while navigating a system that was originally designed to exclude their participation.



### Application Strategies

1. **Curate culturally relevant content that humanizes and centers accurate and positive representation of marginalized communities, stories, history, and experiences.** Engage with students in the course to select material relevant to their lived experiences.

Resource: [Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth](#); Yosso, 2019.

2. **Develop or revise content that is humanizing, liberatory, and equity oriented.**

Intentionally curate content that centers multiple perspectives throughout the content. Create clear prompts, activities, and content that connect students' learning to real-life issues and actions. This can be accomplished in some of the following ways (Achieving the Dream, 2021):

- Highlight non-dominant populations and their strengths and assets, so that students of diverse race, class, gender, ability, native language and sexual orientation can relate and participate fully.
- Provide avenues for students to connect learning to social, scientific, political, or environmental concerns that affect their lives, local community, and contribute to change in social conditions.
- Highlight and affirms the knowledge systems of Indigenous, Black/African, Brown, and non-Western conceptions of science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (such as interdependence, sustainability, and continual change).
- The content activities promote or provoke critical questions about the societal status quo. They present alternative points of view as equally worth considering.

3. **Develop or revise content that captures a wide representation of dynamic individuals and experts that are reflected in accurate and appropriate cultural and historical contexts.** This can be accomplished in some of the following ways (Achieving the Dream, 2021):

- Source and include photos/pictures, names, scenarios, and text that reflect the experiences and interest of racially minoritized students at the college and in the community.
- Acknowledge and incorporate the expertise of diverse communities, their cultures, and their historical and/or contemporary experiences.
- Ensure that individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds or English language learners are not represented stereotypically or presented as foreign, alien, or exotic.
- Depictions of people of various backgrounds are rooted in their own cultures and are not ambiguous.
- Racially minoritized people are not assumed to have low family wealth, low educational attainment and/or low income or other negative stereotypical portrayals.

4. **If educators are developing or revising content sourced from textbook publishers (including Open Educational Resource content), keep the following in mind when you're considering the use of the text in the course.** (Achieving the Dream, 2021):
  - There is an abundance of guidance on engaging cultural responsiveness meaningfully throughout the instructional approach, assignments, assessments, and presentations, etc.
  - Culturally responsive guidance is clearly marked and presented as essential to effective teaching.
  - The text encourages instructors to consistently check their own biases and reflect on their practice.
5. **Ensure the marginalized communities and individuals within the materials are presented in a way that does not reflect bias or stereotypes.** This often happens in writing when the author makes implications or assumptions based on their worldview. Consider these tips to reduce bias in your writing (this list was adopted from the [University of Arizona](#)):
  - Use a third-person point of view to avoid assuming that writer and reader share a perspective.
  - Use neutral language if things must be compared to exclude personal feelings about the topic.
  - Be specific when writing about a person's race, ethnicity, culture, age, gender, etc.
  - Use "people-first" language to avoid reducing a person to a single trait: People should be referred to first, and then the descriptor should come after as part of a complete noun phrase. Examples include "a person experiencing homelessness," etc. This is not a universally accepted rule, but for most topics is aligned with recommended best practices today.
    - \* One caveat to the "people-first" rule is regarding "people with disabilities" vs. "disabled person": Person-first language (PFL) (ie. person with autism, student who is deaf) gained popularity in the 1980s, but many disability activists and community members opt for identity-first language (IFL) (i.e. autistic person, deaf person), arguing that PFL is primarily used by and for abled people and that it paints disability as negative and stigmatized. When possible, use the language an individual or a specific community uses to talk about themselves. (Ladau, 2015; Gernsbacher, 2017; Nichols, 2019; Person-first, 2019)
  - Use gender-neutral phrases, such as people, folks, workforce, and "staff a project" instead of terms like mankind, manpower, guy or guys, and "man a project."
  - When known, refer to people using their preferred personal pronouns. Otherwise, use inclusive personal pronouns such as they/their, to help identify a person without assuming a gender or implying a binary gender identity.
  - Check for gender assumptions like referring to a teacher as "she" without knowing the gender of the teacher.

## Chapter 2: Develop equity-minded materials and conduct a self-review

### Step 5: Evaluate and iterate on content using the Equity Language Guide

Educators must be aware of the ways that language choices can affect students' perspectives on the content. Writing in an equity-minded way requires intent and consistency. The following Equity Language Guide contains examples of potentially problematic language along with alternative recommendations and references for educators to learn more. The guide can be used to evaluate the language used on an existing resource or referenced as faculty develop their materials.

## Equity Language Guide

Refrain from this language	Instead use this strength-based and equity-minded language
"Minority", "underprivileged", "underrepresented", and "underserved"	<p>"Racially minoritized" or "marginalized identities"</p> <p>Note: If these are used, they should be preceded by a more detailed list of the populations being represented whenever possible. See next table item for more details.</p>
"Students of color...", "students with disabilities," "racially minoritized students," "BIPOC students," etc.	Explicitly list the groups of people you intend on discussing or working with. The following racial groups, at a minimum, should be named: Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian American, Pacific Islander and Southeast Asian, Alaskan/Hawaiian Native. Other intersecting identities to name include poverty-affected, first-generation, and LGBTQIA+. It is also preferred to be more specific about disabilities when possible to do so without violating boundaries or anonymity.
"When compared to white students...", "non-White", "able-bodied"	Do not use language that compares groups of students against each other, refers to white students in a normative way, or indicates a preference for white students. For example, instead of saying "non-white students," which centers whiteness, explicitly list the identities of students you're referring to (see above).
"Low-income", "economically disadvantaged", "poor", "at-risk", "needy"	"Poverty-impacted", "poverty-affected"
"Achievement gap", "attainment gap"	"Equity gap"
"Students with greater needs...", "disadvantaged"	"Students who experience more institutional/systemic barriers..." "Opportunity gap"

## Chapter 2: Develop equity-minded materials and conduct a self-review

Refrain from this language	Instead use this strength-based and equity-minded language
“Student failure”, “underprepared”, “learning styles”	<p>“Institutional failure” / “institutional underperformance”</p> <p>Learning styles have been repeatedly debunked by educational psychologists as a myth. Relying on learning styles can worsen inequitable student outcomes and play into preexisting racist stereotypes. Instead, use language that avoids labeling or “typing” students into categories of learners. Use language that recognizes individual students’ strengths and weaknesses; holistic and multimodal pedagogical approaches are recommended instead of learning style differentiated pedagogies (<a href="#">Lester et al., 2020</a>)</p>
“Non-traditional”	<p>This used to refer to age only, but has been used more broadly in recent years. Instead of this, name the specific groups being discussed or described (adult learners, veterans, formerly incarcerated, student parents, working students). It is acceptable to use an aggregate term (like “post-traditional”, the new majority) after listing out the specific groups being referred to.</p>
“Colored person”	<p>Opt for people-first language whenever possible. One caveat to this is regarding “people with disabilities” vs. “disabled person”: Person-first language (PFL) (i.e. person with autism, student who is deaf) gained popularity in the 1980s, but many disability activists and community members opt for identity-first language (IFL) (i.e. autistic person, deaf person), arguing that PFL is primarily used by and for abled people and that it paints disability as negative and stigmatized. When possible, use the language an individual or a specific community uses to talk about themselves. (<a href="#">Ladau, 2015</a>; <a href="#">Gernsbacher, 2017</a>; <a href="#">Nichols, 2019</a>; <a href="#">Person-first, 2019</a>)</p>
“Mentally retarded”, “afflicted with”, “defective” “crippled”, “victim”, “differently-abled”, “special needs”	<p>These are all derogatory ways to describe people with disabilities or terms that describe disability through an ableist lens. Choose a more specific and respectful way of describing a person’s disability, with preference to showing how the design of the environment, rather than the person, is the problem.</p>
“__man” or “__ess”	<p>Eliminating gendered language is critical for developing gender-inclusive content (learn more about gender identity <a href="#">here</a>). These male- and female-presumptive suffixes should be replaced with the suffix “__person” (ex. First-year student instead of freshman). Additionally, an individual’s self-identified pronouns should always be used whenever possible (commonly used pronouns are she/her/hers, he/him/his, and they/them/theirs, but this is not an exhaustive list).</p>
“All people”	<p>If language is race-neutral, reframe it to directly interrogate the impacts/outcomes that events and actions have on specific marginalized groups.</p>

*This table was adopted from original work by Dr. Estela Bensimon as a part of her role in the Center for Urban Education within the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California.*

### Step 6: Intentionally design materials and ensure accessibility

Design materials for students to consume, understand, grasp and take in information from varied modalities and multiple pathways. Ensure materials, especially electronic materials, are accessible to accommodate students with disabilities as well as the wide range of learning preferences that students have. Provide clear instructions and organize the content with informative page titles and a consistent heading structure. Ensure writing is clear and concise by providing definitions for all key terms and deconstructing normative language, jargon, and legalese. Finally, ensure that hyperlinked text is meaningful and relevant to the link, provide informative text alternatives for images, and create transcripts and captions for multimedia.



#### Application Strategies

- 1. Use accessible design methodologies from the start of design** (color contrast, tagging for screen readers, alt text for figures/images, etc.).
- 2. Create multiple pathways for students to access information** (audio, video, text) and demonstrate their learning.
- 3. Run accessibility tests on all LMSs, digital tools, courseware products, and digital documents to ensure students who require accommodations can access the materials.** Some helpful tools include the [WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool](#) (WebAIM, 2021), the [WebAIM contrast checker](#), and the [Canvas accessibility checker](#) (there are other LMSs that have built-in checkers as well).
- 4. Refer to the [UDL Guidelines](#)** (CAST, 2018) for more information about developing accessible content.
- 5. Refer to these guides for instructions on developing accessible content** in Microsoft [Word/Powerpoint](#), Google [Docs/Slides](#), and [Adobe](#) products.
- 6. Ensure any [tables are built in an accessible way](#)** (W3C, 2020).
- 7. Consider the cost of materials.** Identify low or no-cost solutions to ensure students impacted by poverty are not presented with unnecessary barriers to accessing materials.
- 8. Students will have varying degrees of comfort using technology.** Create detailed onboarding instructions for the digital tools that will be utilized in the course. Ensure those instructions can be accessed in multiple modalities.

## Chapter 2: Develop equity-minded materials and conduct a self-review



### CHAPTER 2

#### Reflection Questions

- What culturally relevant and sustaining activities will build on students' prior knowledge and engage them in the content and activities in the course?
- Am I describing and representing Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and additional racially minoritized communities from a strength-based approach?
- In what modalities will students be able to access the materials?
- How can I create avenues for students to have choice and autonomy in my instructional materials?
- Will students with temporary or permanent disabilities be able to access all my materials?
- Will screen readers and assistive technologies have trouble interpreting my resource?
- Do all the images have alternative text?
- Have I examined perspectives that have been left out of the disciplinary knowledge due to biases or assumptions I have identified about myself? How is that examination reflected in the materials being developed?
- Have I designed a teaching and learning experience that honors communities beyond a unit or a month? What makes the teaching and learning experience relevant to students' everyday reality?
- Have I created opportunities for students to engage in higher-order thinking and have agency in their learning?



### CHAPTER 2

#### Additional Reading

[NYU Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard](#) (NYU Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative, n.d.)

[Writing for Web Accessibility](#) (Initiative (WAI), 2021)

[Decolonizing the Curriculum](#) (Montgomery College, n.d.)

[Understanding by Design](#) (Adams et al., 2020)

[Designing Intersectional Online Education](#) (Woodley & Rice, 2022)

[What Inclusive Instructors Do](#) (Teaching in Higher Ed, 2021)

[Course-level equity assessment](#) (Every Learner Everywhere, 2022)

[Naming student groups](#) (APA, 2022)

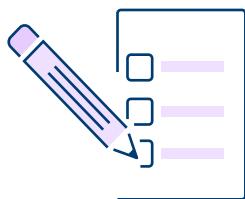
[Culture, Literacy, and Learning: Taking Bloom in the Midst of the Whirlwind](#) (Multicultural Education Series (Lee, 2007)

# Chapter 3



## Review and continuously improve your materials

Throughout the development process, educators must have a mindset of continuous improvement and seek out assistance and feedback from people who can offer a diverse range of viewpoints. This includes departmental colleagues, instructional designers, the center for teaching and learning, and, most importantly, students (i.e., peer mentors, student tutors, current students in the course).



- **Step 7: Conduct department and peer reviews**
- **Step 8: Collect feedback from students**

### Step 7: Conduct department and peer reviews

If possible, provide opportunities for one or more individuals from department leadership to review the material. These individuals should be pre-determined well in advance to allow for an appropriate review time. Anyone on the review team should have the skillset to review materials from a culturally relevant, strength-based, and race-conscious perspective. Material reviews should focus on strengthening the material. Reviewers should be encouraged to identify language that perpetuates harmful stereotypes, identify jargon that is difficult to decipher, and policies that may widen the equity gap for marginalized students.

### Step 8: Collect feedback from students

When the materials are in use in the course, educators can use various methods to understand if they meet the students' goals and identify opportunities to build on their cultural wealth. Educators can create multiple avenues for students to provide feedback. Methods can include soliciting anonymous or open input through surveys and classroom discussions, conducting focus groups, or creating reflective assignments. For an example see [Equity-minded inquiry series: Conducting student interviews and focus group](#) (Ching & Roberts, 2020).



#### Application Strategies

1. **Disaggregate feedback data.** Avoid treating the experiences of minoritized students based on their individual and intersectional identities as a monolithic experience.
2. **Recognize intersectional identities such as gender, sexuality, religion, and language and how those identities intersect with the discipline and materials.**
3. **Address microaggressions that students may encounter in the materials or classroom discussions (in-person or virtually).**

 Resource: [Microaggressions in the classroom](#), Portman et al., n.d.; [Laying the groundwork: Concepts and activities for racial equity work \[pp.11-14\]](#), Center for Urban Education, 2020; [Addressing microaggressions in the classroom](#), University of Washington, Center for Teaching and Learning, n.d.

4. **Schedule a visit with your campus Office of Equity or Center for Teaching and Learning** to help understand the student feedback and make valuable and actionable changes to the material.

## Chapter 3: Review and continuously improve your materials



### CHAPTER 3

#### Reflection Questions

- Do the reviewers have experience and expertise in culturally relevant/sustaining pedagogies? Are the reviewers of this material committed to closing the equity gap?
- Is this material or resource a product of predominantly white educators? If yes, is it clear that they worked to center the lived experience of minoritized students in co-creating it? If not, iteration needs to take place to center the voices of minoritized communities.
- How can I create authentic moments to garner feedback on my materials and instruction from students?
- Are there opportunities for students to co-design future iterations of this material?
- What kind of data is most reflective and encapsulating of the full experiences of students?



### CHAPTER 3

#### Additional Reading

[Improving Teaching With Expert Feedback—From Students](#) (Minero, 2016)

[“Gathering Feedback From Students”](#) (Vanderbilt University, n.d.)

[Student course-level equity assessment](#) (Every Learner Everywhere, 2022)

# About the Supporting Organizations



**Every Learner Everywhere** is a network of twelve partner organizations with expertise in evaluating, implementing, scaling, and measuring the efficacy of education technologies, curriculum and course design strategies, teaching practices, and support services that personalize instruction for students in blended and online learning environments. Our mission is to help institutions use new technology to innovate teaching and learning, with the ultimate goal of improving student outcomes for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students, poverty-affected students, and first-generation students. Our collaborative work to advance equity in higher education centers on the transformation of postsecondary teaching and learning. We build capacity in colleges and universities to improve student outcomes with digital learning through direct technical assistance, timely resources and toolkits, and ongoing analysis of institution practices and market trends. For more information about Every Learner Everywhere and its collaborative approach to equitize higher education through digital learning, visit [everylearnereverywhere.org](http://everylearnereverywhere.org).



**Achieving the Dream (ATD)** leads a growing network of more than 300 community colleges committed to helping their students, particularly low-income students and students of color, achieve their goals for academic success, personal growth, and economic opportunity. ATD is making progress in closing equity gaps and accelerating student success through a unique change process that builds each college's institutional capacities in seven essential areas. ATD, along with nearly 75 experienced coaches and advisors, works closely with Network colleges in 45 states and the District of Columbia to reach more than 4 million community college students. Learn more at [achievingthedream.org](http://achievingthedream.org) and follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [LinkedIn](#).



**Intentional Futures** is a Seattle-based design and strategy studio. We work closely with clients across the public and private sectors to solve hard problems that matter and make big, ambitious ideas come to life. Our core offerings include human-centered strategy, data-driven storytelling, intentional, collective learning, and product design and prototyping. To learn more about iF or see our past work, visit [intentionalfutures.com](http://intentionalfutures.com).

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