

Intentional by Design: Building a Lab Where Everyone Thrives

Fostering Talent with Thoughtful Design

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An intentional lab is designed for people. It recognizes that a **one-size-fits-all approach** limits potential and that **brilliance comes in many forms**. Sometimes, the conditions, environments, or processes that we traditionally use stifle creativity, productivity, and ultimately success. However, an intentionally designed lab considers the various needs of individual lab members, makes adjustments, and optimizes for collective success.

This proactive approach, often called **accommodations** or **adjustments**, involves tailoring tools, methods, or expectations to enable each team member to contribute their best work. Accommodations **remove preventable barriers to excellence** so that individuals and teams reach their full potential.



What are Accommodations?

An **accommodation** refers to adjustments or modifications made to enable individuals to perform tasks or activities effectively, which can account for any disabilities, limitations, or specific needs they may have.

Why Accommodations Matter?

An intentionally designed lab is more effective. By proactively creating an environment where every researcher can thrive, we directly invest in our lab's highest-value outcomes. Here are core reasons why they matter:

- **Human reality:** We all have fluctuating capacities at some point in life, whether temporary (like an injury), long-term (such as chronic conditions), or situational (like pregnancy or stress). Proactive design and accommodations recognize this reality and make work possible for everyone.
- **Access to and retention of talent:** By creating environments that meet people's needs, we allow employees to focus on their strengths and contributions, enabling them to thrive in their roles while increasing the likelihood of retention.
- **Employee satisfaction & productivity:** When the work environment doesn't align with people's needs, it creates frustration and inefficiency. Accommodations reduce that friction, so employees can spend their time and energy moving goals forward instead of being drained by preventable obstacles.
- **Equity:** Accommodations help ensure that employees have a fair opportunity to succeed, regardless of individual circumstances.
- **Innovation and collaboration:** Diverse experiences and perspectives are most valuable when everyone has the tools to participate fully, sparking creativity and stronger teamwork.
- **Organizational/lab resilience:** A workplace that adapts to the needs of its people is more flexible, sustainable, and prepared to handle change.

What are accommodations that may help my lab:

Use the following lists to **explore possible accommodations** that you or others may need inside of your workspace/lab. While this is written for PIs/mentors or lab managers, these lists can help anyone identify helpful accommodations:

Communication

1. **Clear and Direct Instructions:** Use straightforward language when explaining experiments, protocols, or expectations. Avoid metaphors or idioms that may confuse.
2. **Written Instructions:** Provide lab protocols, meeting notes, and key information in writing. Consider accessible formats (large print, digital copies compatible with screen readers).
3. **Regular Check-Ins:** Schedule brief one-on-one meetings to discuss progress, questions, or concerns.
4. **Allow Time for Processing:** Give lab members time to process complex instructions before expecting a response.
5. **Alternative Communication:** Use email or lab messaging platforms for follow-ups or clarification, especially for those who find verbal communication challenging.



Environment

1. **Quiet Workspaces:** Identify areas of the lab or office where focused work can happen without distraction.
Adjustable Lighting: Where possible, allow control over task lighting to reduce eye strain or sensory discomfort.
2. **Accessible Workstations:** Ensure benches, microscopes, and equipment can be reached and used by people with different physical needs.
3. **Physical Accessibility:** Confirm paths, ramps, and lab layouts are navigable by individuals using mobility aids.

Tasks and Responsibilities



1. **Clearly Defined and Rolling Roles:** Outline each lab member's responsibilities, including both ongoing lab chores and experimental goals. Update these expectations regularly (weekly or as experiments change) so everyone knows priorities and can plan accordingly.
2. **Task Chunking:** Break complex experiments or projects into smaller, manageable steps with clear milestones.
3. **Visual Aids and Tracking:** Use checklists, timelines, or charts to map out tasks and goals, making it easier to follow weekly priorities.
4. **Prioritization Support:** Communicate the relative importance of tasks, especially if new work is added mid-week, to prevent confusion or overload.
5. **Flexible Task Adjustments:** When unexpected tasks arise, discuss adjustments or trade-offs with the lab member to avoid overwork and maintain productivity.

Flexibility and Support

1. **Flexible Scheduling:** Accommodate lab members' peak productivity times or personal needs when possible.
2. **Remote Work Options:** For computational or writing tasks, allow work from home if it reduces stress or increases productivity.
3. **Extended or Flexible Breaks:** Allow additional short breaks when tasks are mentally or physically demanding.
4. **Open-Door Policy:** Encourage lab members to discuss accessibility needs or challenges without hesitation.



Technology and Tools



1. **Assistive Technology:** Offer tools like speech-to-text software, magnification software, or task management apps.
2. **Ergonomic Equipment:** Provide adjustable chairs, stools, or lab benches to prevent strain.
3. **Screen Reader and Digital Accessibility:** Ensure shared lab documents and software are compatible with accessibility tools.

Policies and Procedures

1. **Personalized Accommodations:** Be open to discussing individual needs and finding practical solutions within the lab context.
2. **Institutional and Union Policies:** Be aware that some accommodations may be governed by institutional, departmental, or union policies. Contact your institution's accommodation or disability services office for guidance when needed.
3. **Clear Emergency Procedures:** Ensure emergency exits, alarms, and safety protocols are accessible and understandable for all.



Training and Education

1. **Lab Awareness:** Brief lab members on inclusive practices and accessibility considerations relevant to lab work.
2. **Resource Sharing:** Provide information about tools, techniques, and campus resources that support accessibility.
3. **Feedback Mechanisms:** Encourage lab members to suggest accommodations or improvements in workflow.

Statement of Attribution & Transparency

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- **Brainstorming and Ideation:** Generating initial options for taglines, titles, and structural frameworks.
- **Language and Framing:** Refining definitions and explanatory text to establish a consistent framework focused on proactive, intentional lab design.
- **Tone and Audience Alignment:** Tailoring language to be effective and relevant for a dual audience within the research community, including both lab leaders and members.
- **Editing and Concision:** Assisting in paraphrasing and condensing content for clarity and impact while preserving the authors' intended meaning and values.

The final content reflects the authors' goals, expertise, and editorial decisions. The AI acted as a tool to explore a wider range of linguistic possibilities and accelerate the drafting process.