

## Towards an Understanding of Accommodation Transfer: Disabled Students' Strategies for Navigating Classroom Accommodations



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**Abstract:** This article offers the term “accommodation transfer” as a way to understand the rhetorical skills disabled students transfer alongside writing knowledge as they access college writing assignments and writing classrooms. This study is based on five qualitative interviews with disabled college students and draws upon both writing transfer research and disability studies. The author explores how participants adapted writing process knowledge and learned how to negotiate their accommodation needs with instructors across their academic careers. Specifically, these negotiations include assessing instructors’ stances towards disability and testing effective genres and vocabulary to communicate about disability with instructors. The article concludes with two suggestions for crippling teaching for transfer: embracing and teaching crip time for writing, and highlighting the relationship between mentorship and interdependence.

When Abigail began experiencing symptoms related to autonomic dysfunction, her understanding of her body shifted in relation to both health and writing. Abigail’s chronic illness emerged as she started college, and she measured the impact of her chronic illness against her completion of academic writing tasks. As she describes, “There were a lot of times where I was like, ‘I can’t write this right now. Maybe it’s because of the antidepressant I’m on, which I may or may not need because they’re trying to figure out what’s wrong with me. But also I’m not sleeping right now, so I can’t turn this in.’” For Abigail, the bodily experience of figuring out her chronic illness merged with her experience of navigating college writing. As she learned how to write in academic contexts, she also learned what writing process worked best with her disabled body and how to ask for the accommodations she needed to complete academic writing tasks.

Abigail’s intertwined experience illustrates how disabled college students negotiate both having a disability and writing in college.<sup>[1]</sup> In the interviews with disabled college writers collected in my research, participants discussed the challenge of this negotiation, revealing that having a disability in college requires learning specific rhetorical skills connected to broader transferable writing and rhetorical knowledge. I call this *accommodation transfer*—the process of learning to transfer the rhetorical skills and knowledge needed to receive disability accommodations for writing in academic settings.

In composition and rhetoric, studies of writing transfer explore, question, and describe how students transfer knowledge about writing across contexts and develop a relationship to writing. The consideration of accommodation transfer offered here details how disabled students transfer the knowledge about accommodations needed to access college writing tasks, using key writing and rhetorical skills gained across interactions with instructors; this transfer of knowledge affects how students relate to both writing and accommodation. Influenced by experiences across classrooms, disabled students learn how to ask for accommodations while also adapting writing skills across academic contexts. Accommodations are rhetorical, meaning they depend on personal and institutional values and communication. Moreover, because of the structured inaccessibility of higher education, students have to argue for accommodations in higher education classrooms. In this article, I will explore how disabled students learn how to adapt their writing processes and argue for their accessibility needs around writing through a process of transferring rhetorical knowledge across contexts. To conclude, I will turn to the concept of “cripping” from disability studies—decentering normative relationships between bodies and institutions. Crippling as a practice can help composition instructors teach both accommodation transfer and transfer of writing knowledge more effectively and ethically to disabled college students. I’ll focus on two key suggestions: embracing and teaching crip time for writing, and highlighting the relationship between mentorship and interdependence.

## Defining the Relationship between Transfer and Accommodation

This article uses interview data from conversations with five college students with disabilities to explore their experiences transferring knowledge about accommodating their writing process. To begin this inquiry, I will ground this project in current research about transfer in writing studies and interrogate the concept of accommodation. Pairing “accommodation” with transfer as a term has a similar purpose to how “writing” is paired with transfer in our field. Across different studies of writing transfer, putting “writing” and “transfer” together allowed for scholars to explore how writing knowledge or skills move between contexts, how that movement occurs, and how to teach to facilitate this transfer. For accommodation transfer, my focus is identifying the skills needed to access classrooms across contexts for disabled college students as well as examining how students claimed they learned those skills.

Drawn from education psychology, transfer in its simplest definition is the process by which students use and apply knowledge across different contexts, for either positive or negative gain of knowledge in a new context (Perkins and Salomon 22). Initially, writing studies scholars sought to understand whether writing skills could be transferred from composition classrooms to other academic contexts. Studies of the application of transfer to writing instruction have laid the groundwork for exploring what types of curricula, genres, and modes of instruction support students’ transfer of writing knowledge across contexts (Moore). Conversations about transfer in composition have broadened to consider how student identity, social contexts, and extracurricular experiences shape writing transfer. For instance, key pieces in transfer research explore how transfer employs the remix of new and old knowledge to approach new tasks (Yancey et. al), how transfer is shaped by social contexts (Reiff and Bawarshi), and how knowledge built outside of the classroom plays an important role in writing transfer (Clark and Hernandez). Writing transfer scholarship has also sought to understand how students’ identities and experiences shape their ability to transfer writing knowledge. For example, Corinne Hinton shows how veterans transfer the embodied institutional knowledge of their military experience into their college writing contexts, which “complicate[s] the novice-to-expert paradigm as an approach to writer development in first-year composition.” Dana Driscoll and Jennifer Wells have also explored how student dispositions, such as self-efficacy, help or hinder writing transfer.

Defining accommodation transfer follows the path of this research by investigating the institutional constraints that affect the transfer of writing knowledge for disabled students. What drew me in particular to the concept of accommodation transfer was how it functioned as a form of writing and rhetorical education learned outside of the formal structure of the classroom—and frequently without aid from any mentor. While disabled students are given tools from disability services, they often still learn the most rhetorically effective ways to get accommodations for their writing assignments on their own, through trial and error.

Many disabled students develop and apply transferable rhetorical knowledge to access college writing tasks through interactions with instructors, disability documentation, and the connection between disability and identity. Disabled students transfer accommodation knowledge in two key ways: learning how to meet the needs of their bodyminds<sup>(2)</sup> while writing, and learning rhetorical knowledge for getting accommodations for writing assignments. The transfer of accommodation knowledge helps us understand how complex rhetorical knowledge not directly related to writing tasks is part of the larger project of transferring writing knowledge across contexts.

Because disabled students must create compelling arguments for their accommodations, this project draws on transfer research that explores how transfer functions rhetorically. Rebecca Nowacek describes the transfer of writing knowledge as a rhetorical act of recontextualization (19). Understanding transfer rhetorically helps us see how transfer involves reconstructing knowledge in different environments and through different affective attunements (Nowacek 25, 26). For accommodation transfer, disabled students break apart different skills they have learned in their approaches to writing, and they negotiate their instructors’ affective relationships with disability when requesting accommodations. Explorations of how students transfer genre-related knowledge help us see how students use prior genre knowledge across different contexts (Reiff and Bawarshi 313). Disabled students test and take up many different genres when asking for accommodations, such as writing emails and communicating verbally with instructors.

Accommodation transfer also draws upon transfer research exploring the different domains of knowledge writers develop as they become skilled writers. In Anne Beaufort’s model of the knowledge that expert writers draw upon as they compose, five overlapping domains of knowledge interact: writing process knowledge, subject matter knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, genre knowledge, and discourse community knowledge (45). Disabled students’ experience with these knowledge paradigms often requires rhetorical intervention within the discourse community of the university. Disabled students adjust normative forms of these knowledges by using embodied knowledge they gain to negotiate with academic audiences for their writing. To return to the example at the start of this essay, Abigail had to quickly test and acquire new knowledge about the writing process, rhetorical knowledge, and discourse

community norms as her chronic illness emerged. She had learned about the “right” process—drafting, revising, and finalizing a draft—but couldn’t anticipate when she might need more time with one of those steps. As such, she squared her old knowledge about the “right” writing process with new strategies she developed for completing academic writing tasks. Because the needs of her personal process changed to one that did not fit the norms of an academic discourse community, she had to learn rhetorical knowledge to communicate her accessibility needs with instructors. These rhetorical skills had to be sensitive not only to her needs, which would change over time, but to the different rhetorical contexts of classes across the curriculum.

With these concepts in mind, we can understand two phases that constitute accommodation transfer. Disabled students learn what writing processes work best for them, often in contrast to the common narrative of various “correct” writing processes taught across curricular contexts. In particular, learning their own writing process involves repurposing skills learned from past writing instruction and explorations of spaces and technologies for writing. After learning what writing process works best for them, many disabled students learn rhetorical skills for communicating their needs with instructors—often in terms of accommodations sanctioned by the university. These two phases of accommodation transfer occur non-linearly. In other words, disabled students engage with the transfer of accommodation knowledge related to writing by moving between testing and exploring the writing process knowledge and rhetorical knowledge to access writing in college classrooms. Because institutionally-sanctioned accommodations rarely address the nature of writing assignments, even students with documented disabilities must learn how to argue for accommodations in classrooms where writing is the primary means of assessment (Wood, “Crippling Time”; Dolmage, “Mapping Composition”). Even with the guidance of disability services, it takes experimentation and time to know what type and degree of modification one needs to write.

Instead of another term like “access,” my choice to use the term “accommodation” in this article is intentional. First, my participants used the term “accommodation” to describe their needs and their interactions with their professors. Not all participants did this consistently, though some did use it very consistently in surprising ways. Jen, who was the most critical of the institutional structure of accommodations at the university, spoke almost exclusively of her negotiations with professors as “accommodations.” I changed my protocol after a few interviews because I thought that my use of the term encouraged interviewees to respond in kind. However, participants still tended to talk about their experiences in terms of “accommodation” unless they had been exposed to conversations about access or universal design in education.

When working with the category that would become “accommodation transfer,” I considered using the term “access transfer” because I initially felt that access captured the embodied and spatial elements of the rhetorical skills that disabled students learn. In disability studies, there are important differences between the terms “accommodation” and “access,” and these differences also played into my choice to use the term “accommodation” for this concept. As Tanya Titchosky explains in her foundational book *A Question of Access: Disability, Space, Meaning*, access is “a complex form of perception that organizes socio-political relations between people in social space” (131). Access is a phenomenological orientation, exploring how bodies interact in spaces that are not built for them physically, socially, or intellectually. However, as I grappled with naming the category that arose from my rounds of coding, I realized that my participants were describing the rhetorical knowledge they needed to navigate the structured relationship to classroom access formed by institutional literacies surrounding disability.

Specifically, they were talking about “accommodations,” which picks up on interpretations of access that dominate higher education. At the large Midwestern university where I collected my interviews, the disability services office approves students to receive institutional accommodations through a document-driven process of providing evidence of a disability via letters and assessments from medical professionals. Institutional accommodations include working with advisors sensitive to particular experiences with disability, referrals to campus services, and a laminated letter to share with instructors providing accommodation guidance.<sup>{3}</sup> The laminated letter, called a VISA or Verified Individualized Services and Accommodation form, provides a checklist of accommodations that the student can request from instructors. This letter had an intense rhetorical impact on how students described their needs, whether or not they had formal accommodations from the university. Indeed, while few students discussed how VISAs related to their identity as students in the body of interviews analyzed for this article, the rhetorical force behind framing accommodations as a visa into the classroom struck me with its metaphorical connection to immigration. In short, the writers I interviewed frequently framed their language in response to the institutional system for providing classroom accommodations, even if they themselves did not use that system. Such a framing is consistent with other studies that explore the impact of documentation on rhetorical and literacy-based self-expression, such as Kate Vieira’s work on the impact of documentation on immigrants in the United States (Vieira, *American by Paper*, “Undocumented in a Documentary Society”).

Accommodations, as other scholars such as Jay Dolmage have described, function as an addition or modification of a broader course design rather than a transformation of the educational environment (Dolmage, “Mapping

Composition”). Disabled college writers are forced to learn rhetorical skills to manage accommodations because they will experience many writing-focused classrooms not designed for disabled experiences. As Kimber Barber-Fendley and Chris Hamel describe, writing teachers should be concerned with how the current systems of accommodations at most institutions of higher education are

- “Product-oriented,” meaning that they are “designed to modify the final outcome” of a project rather than to reconceptualize the project (526)
- “Top-down,” or designated by federal mandate with less attention to individual needs (526)
- Not oriented towards writing because they do not “explicitly accommodate for the writing process” necessary to complete college writing tasks (526)
- “Student-initiated,” meaning that they require the student to describe their needs in terms of federal mandates rather than impacting overall course or program design (527).

Current structures of accommodations in higher education require that students learn rhetorical skills to address the gap between their experiences and needs to flourish as writers within the structures of both the writing classroom and institutional accommodations. Describing the knowledge disabled students learn and transfer as “accommodation knowledge” thus felt most appropriate.

## Methods

The data for this article are part of a research project consisting of 19 interviews exploring how disabled students experience college writing. Given that there has been an expanding body of work in composition and rhetoric about disability, I began my study with the aim of learning how disabled students experience college classes with writing. I discovered through my first few interviews that my participants had a complex and frequently negative relationship with the word “disability,” and few openly identified themselves as disabled. As scholars such as Sami Schalk and Nirmala Erelles have explored, having access to disability as an identity is often only available to white middle class disabled people. Drawing my participants from a university with a reputation for not supporting students of color further complicated the racial dynamics of identifying as disabled. At the university in question, as well as at many others, disabled students of color face comparably higher barriers of access to higher education to white disabled students and non-disabled students of color. I chose to invite students “who have a disability” to broaden the experience with and relationship to disability among my participants, compared to using phrasing such as “disabled students.” I did not require that participants be registered with the disability resource center, both to get a broader perspective and to learn how disabled students who don’t interact with campus disability services view those services.

In the context of the larger project, I started with questions about students’ experiences asking for accommodations from professors for writing assignments and for accessing their classrooms. I revised my interview protocol to include questions directly about the writing process, as my first interviewees extensively explored their writing process in relationship to these first questions. As I collected and analyzed data, three research questions arose:

- What kinds of rhetorical knowledge do disabled students learn that helps them access writing classrooms?
- How do disabled students identify with or against disability as an identity, and how do they use that identity in their writing?
- How do disabled students experience the embodiment of writing, and how do the particular contexts of college writing effect that experience?

Conceptually, transfer became a particularly salient way to frame common findings from my first and third research questions, as my participants described in detail their application of this knowledge across the many contexts where they experienced academic writing.

In terms of coding, I used a combination of open, in-vivo, and versus coding to tease out meaning from the data in my first round (Saldaña 70, 74, 93). My use of versus coding helped me understand the rhetorical dynamics at play, as it revealed and clarified tensions. I then used focused coding to build categories and understand what concepts, experiences, and argument my participants presented across their interviews. Though this is not a grounded theory study, I am influenced by a constructivist approach that builds codes and categories from the data rather than an

approach that applies theory to data (Charmaz; Saldaña). This approach helped me to articulate findings in relation to research in composition studies, such as transfer, while supporting those findings with multiple examples across my data. As you will read in the next two sections, these methods helped me understand that disabled college writers had to learn specific rhetorical skills across courses, stages, and even institutions in order to write effectively, which I read as related to the field's conversation about transfer. But transferring accommodation knowledge was unique to their experience as disabled college writers.

For this article, I am analyzing a core set of five interviews from students who were advanced undergraduates or graduate students. The five students represented in this article self-identified as:

- Kirill, a white, queer, genderqueer graduate student with autism, chronic depression, and PTSD in Slavic Studies with institutional accommodations;
- Abigail, a white Jewish queer undergraduate student majoring in Gender and Women's Studies with an autonomic dysfunction with institutional accommodations;
- Franco, an Asian-American undergraduate English major with ADHD and an anxiety disorder who did not use institutional accommodations;
- Jen, a white queer student with an anxiety disorder in her first year of a Masters of Social Work after graduating with a Bachelors in the same field the previous year who did not use institutional accommodations;
- Ana, a Puerto Rican graduate student in History of Science with Type 1 Diabetes and depression who also did not use institutional accommodations.

These interviews represent a slice of the broader range of experiences I collected to analyze common rhetorical tools, constraints, or needs across different student experiences with disability. I also selected these participants as they were some of the more experienced writers in my data collection, and they spoke most directly about how they formed and transferred accommodation knowledge about writing. Future research, such as a longitudinal study tracing students as they go through college, should supplement the claims presented here.

## Learning What You Need: Embodiment and the Writing Process

The students I interviewed described an important developmental step for learning how to write in college: *adapting the writing process* to their needs. This concept, which represents one of the categories that arose from my data analysis, entails the task of learning what kind of writing process suits a disabled writer's needs. As Beaufort highlights, writing process knowledge is one of the important domains students must master to become expert writers. For disabled students, learning a writing process that works often requires going against typical narratives of a successful process. Some of my participants needed to use different tools to write across various stages to complete assignments; some would write on whiteboards, compose by hand, or write in programs like Scrivener in order to break up the different cognitive tasks writing draws upon. For others, learning a writing process required negotiating the pain caused by writing or letting go of work that feels incomplete. Adapting a writing process is imbricated with transfer, as my participants described how they learned skills across different contexts that made their way into their writing processes. In other words, disabled students described needing to learn over time the best writing process for themselves in order to describe what they need to instructors. The interview data illustrates these concepts.

The writers I interviewed learned how to modify their bodies and the relationship between their bodies and environments in order to write productively in ways that directly related to their disabilities. Similarly to Stacey Pigg's findings that "public social places like coffeehouses and social learning spaces offer a temporary place to dwell and locate writing, which is a need experienced by composers who work and learn with smartphones, laptops, and tablets," disabled writers shape and create spaces that reflect the adaptations of their bodyminds and writing technologies (251-252). While this modification is similar to how many writers come to find a process that works well for them, disabled writers often have to negotiate specifically with the needs of their disabled bodyminds. Franco described the need to find noise that would help facilitate her thinking that could keep her engaged but also not distract her—the perfect noise for her was her partner playing video games. Ana described how diabetes interrupted her writing process, requiring her to switch between bodily maintenance and the "flow" of writing: "[D]iabetes interrupts a lot of things. It interrupts the writing process because I have to be eating or insulating, which is what I call it...Giving myself insulin. So, that's something interrupts--if what I'm doing that day is writing, that will interrupt the writing because I have to be monitoring it." In addition to dealing with interruptions, writers often needed to chemically

modify their bodies in order to write. For example, Abigail learned over time to eat foods that would raise her blood pressure to help her write: “I used to do shots of soy sauce [before writing] because when I was first diagnosed and it was really bad, I was told that sodium would be really good for me. It still is--if I'm feeling really awful and I need to wake up, then eating something salty works.” These different examples of bodily and spatial modification to prepare for writing reveal how learning about the embodiment of writing is crucial to developing a successful writing process for disabled college students.

Kirill's interview, in particular, illustrated how disabled students develop a writing process, and how developing that process helps them bridge emergent understandings of the embodiment of both disability and writing. Bridging these is crucial, given how disability is rhetorically and conceptually framed as a barrier to being an effective writer and rhetor (Yergeau, Prendergast). Kirill shared how not knowing that ze<sup>(4)</sup> was disabled shaped the first semesters of college:

I spent the first two years there totally undiagnosed and totally unmedicated for anything. And like I did well in school, but I think part of that is because of the way that my brain is structured different from neurotypical folks. Like writing is one of the best ways for me to process, like input material and output something that can be graded. So that worked for me. But I also was struggling with time management, depression and anxiety ... that distracted me from being able to focus on the writing I was doing.

Kirill's upbringing in a Southern conservative Christian family had emphasized self-reliance, and not until college did Kirill begin to understand himself as autistic. Additionally, as described in another part of the interview, Kirill's emergent queer and transgender identity complicated how ze understood himself in relation to other students. As Kirill grew as a writer, ze learned vocabulary for both writing tasks and disability which helped hir articulate learning goals as a writer:

I was doing that intensive writing seminar in my first year of undergrad, I would schedule out in detail a calendar of what I was going to do on what day to make the deadline. And I would start on the first day and read the assignment. Like day one, read the assignment... . So I would schedule it down to a lot of detail and at that point, I didn't know that was diagnosed for anything. So I didn't know that that was interacting with how I do executive function. That's what that was.

As Kirill learned through trial and error the skills ze would need to excel at college writing tasks, ze also learned vocabularies to describe hir relationship to hir bodymind and learned how to talk about the effect autism had on hir writing process. Coming to understand yourself as disabled while learning how to write in college influences transferring writing skills into a useful writing process.

Kirill also transferred a specific writing skill from high school into hir process--the practice of using different colors to organize sentences in a paragraph. However, ze repurposed this practice to negotiate hir emotional relationship with writing rather than an organizational skill. As Kirill described:

My teacher taught us to use colors to structure a paragraph, so like topic sentence would be green. The first point in the paragraph would be black ... And I adapted that because it didn't help me very much to my editing process. Which is, I have a draft. And drafting is the hardest part for me. And I want to, I change things but I want to keep track of what I've changed. So I will write the new material that I'm adding to the paper in a different color. I'll read through the whole thing, change what I want to change, and this time typing in like green ... When I can see with the colors what I've done with the paper, I feel like it has advanced in time. So that's a strategy that I use. And it's really more emotional than anything else—I have made progress.

While the contexts were different, Kirill took a tool meant to teach a writing skill and applied it to help address emotional needs. Writing in different colors becomes a way to visualize progress with longer texts written in graduate school, and provides a way to emotionally connect with writing. This practice highlights how disabled writers often adapt multiple strategies to address the difficulties they may face with writing, strategies that challenge us to rethink the purpose of teaching and learning different writing skills.

## **Learning Keywords: The Rhetorical Skills Disabled Students Develop Across Writing Contexts**

Alongside adapting their writing process, disabled college writers draw upon two key rhetorical skills to argue for the accommodations they need for writing. These rhetorical skills reflect Dolmage's concept of *métis*—a “cunning and adaptive intelligence...characterized by sideways and backwards movement,” a stance disabled rhetors must so frequently take (*Disability Rhetoric* 5). By this I mean disabled students frequently have to adapt to the perspectives of each individual instructor's perception—or lack thereof—of disability. This work is similar to the task disabled student writers experience when applying for college when writing admissions essays, as Amy Vidali discusses; the decision to disclose in those essays is “influenced by the larger cultural and discursive imperatives that surround both admissions essays and disability” (616). To do this work, disabled students first learn how to *assess their instructor's relationship to accommodations*. My participants described a wide range of instructor responses to their needs, from positive to very negative. Some instructors mentored students through their first efforts to articulate their access needs for writing assignments; others saw requests for accommodations as a burden or even a power play. As such, disabled students use a variety of means to anticipate how their instructors will respond to their requests. This rhetorical knowledge is developed over time and through experience with many different writing contexts. Second, disabled students *test genres and formats* for their accommodation requests, learning which formats (e.g., email, speaking in person), which kinds of voice, and which kinds of vocabulary result in the most success when asking for accommodations.

A particularly important rhetorical skill honed over experiences with many different writing-intensive courses is learning to read the syllabus rhetorically to understand the instructor's conceptualization of disability. Two important gauges that disabled students use to assess the willingness of a professor to provide accommodations occur on the syllabus: accessibility statements and course policies. [5](#) Jen noted that “[T]he two indicators for me when the professor is like ‘I don't accept late assignment ever ever ever’ or they have a no laptop policy. Those two things are usually like we're going to have a hard time communicating with each other.” While Jen did not describe needing to have a laptop in class as a central access need for her as a writer, she viewed this particular policy as representative of a lack of openness towards accommodations due to her experiences in classrooms with strict laptop policies. Jen continued with a description of how she reads and interprets syllabi:

First, I'll get the syllabus and open it to see what's your late assignment policy and what's your policy on assistive technology. I can usually gauge from there. But then I'll also be like, Do you have the very basic copied and pasted disability statement? How do you talk about it?

Importantly, Jen reads the syllabus rhetorically to understand how the instructor conceptualizes both disability and the task of working with disabled students. She uses this to decide first whether to stay in the course and second how she will approach asking for extensions if she needs them. Such reading was particularly important for Jen as a student without formal institutional accommodations, as she needed to decide how to best tailor her requests without the supporting rhetorical force of the university disability services program.

Rhetorically reading the interactions on the first day of class was also an essential rhetorical skill that many of my interviewees described. Assessing how firmly the instructor would enforce policies provides more information for how to approach asking for accommodations—or whether to ask for them at all. Jen, for example, practiced rhetorically reading first day interactions with the same professor mentioned above:

Going through the syllabus, [the professor] was talking about assistive technology in the sense of, “I don't allow laptops. I don't allow cell phones.” And they used the phrase, “Unless you have a very compelling disability related reason.” And I was like, “Right. Right. Right. Please tell me more about what you believe compelling is.” ... [If] you don't want people to use laptops because it's distracting or something, you should still have a policy that's like, “You can use your laptop” and you set some loose parameters around like, “But only if you sit in the front or only if you sit in the back.”

Here, Jen demonstrates how the rhetorical skill of assessing classroom interactions yields important information about accommodations. First, Jen reads the professor's claim that technology use is only allowed for students with a “very compelling disability related reason” as a stance for which she will need to disclose disability when needing a different kind of accessibility request unrelated to technology. By describing technology as “assistive” and measuring the professor's response to a student about the policy, she determines the difficulty she might face when asking for extensions for her writing. Though the interaction is not related to disability, Jen extrapolates the professor's philosophy towards course modifications. Jen frames accommodations as “compromise,” and from this interaction gleans that the professor's affective stance towards accommodation is uncompromising. Jen also shows knowledge of other courses where she has done similar assessment work at the beginning of the course, citing offering “loose parameters” about technology use as inviting a more co-constructive view of the classroom.

Disabled students, particularly those at the intersections of other marginalized identities, draw upon their whole range of experiences to also assess how they fit into classrooms, and thus how they can approach teachers with their accommodations requests. Franco, for example, discussed frankly how her experiences as an Asian-American student affected her position towards her disability:

Race feels like a bigger disability to me than like my actual mental disabilities, because it's so much more obvious ... I'm not afraid to talk in class, but I'm afraid of sounding like a dumbass, or people rejecting my ideas or just blowing it off, or thinking that I'm dumb without giving it a second. I think that some of that is fueled by an element of race that's present on campus.

Though Franco is describing her experiences speaking up in class, she illustrates a stance towards race that many of my participants who were students of color described. When discussing how she asked for her accommodation needs, Franco described politely emailing instructors to ask for an extension without mentioning her disability. Being a student of color on a campus where both overt and covert racism shape uncomfortable classroom dynamics influences how and if students choose to describe their disability to instructors.

In addition to learning how to assess their professor's probable stance to accommodation requests, many disabled students adopt an effective tone and vocabulary for these requests over time. As Stephanie Kerschbaum has explained, written disclosures of disability require disabled writers to co-construct the meaning of disability with their audiences, performing "a negotiation in which individuals do not have full control over their own identity" (60). As such, disabled students test genres, tone, and vocabulary for their accommodation requests. Abigail described her first attempts at asking for accommodations as ineffective because they confused her instructors:

I remember there was one professor ... that I was telling, "I have this stupid chronic illness." And she was like, "Well, not stupid, inconvenient I'm sure!" Then I realized I didn't need to downplay it and kind of make a joke. My instinct is to downplay it and be like, "It's no big deal. I'm just going to miss some classes. Maybe a lot. I'll email you, whatever. I'll probably be fine. I might need extensions on everything! But I'll probably be fine, because this class seems interesting and I'm totally fine, except here's my documentation that I'm not!" And that is not really effective because then the instructor is confused and doesn't know what's going on ... Like, even when I come to class, I'm not necessarily totally present. I might be really dizzy and out of it. How would [my professor] know that?

For Abigail, part of the task of accepting what she needed went hand in hand with the tone she used to request accommodations. Downplaying the accommodations she might need— but also might not need—did not increase her access to the classroom and often confused her instructors. Over time, Abigail developed a way of talking about her needs that used a serious tone to both convince and inform her instructors of what she would need to access the classroom and writing assignments.

In addition to tone, developing an effective vocabulary to describe the experience of being disabled to an unfamiliar audience is an important rhetorical skill that disabled students learn over time. When asking for accommodations from professors, disabled students have to balance finding language that will move the instructor to act while still maintaining a sense that the student can complete the task. Abigail described this as developing "keywords" to talk about her disability, as this portion of our interview shows:

At first, I was saying, "I have a heart condition." ... [T]hen I realized I don't have to be that specific. But I was like, "Well, no one knows what autonomic dysfunction is, but if I say heart condition, then they'll know it's serious and they'll have to believe me and give me these accommodations!" ... What are the keywords that I have to say?

As Abigail went back and forth with the ways of describing her disability to her professors, she learned the costs and benefits of particular ways of framing her needs. Describing her chronic illness as a "heart condition" rather than its diagnostic name gave her requests gravity while still divulging less detail about her body. Abigail's framework of "keywords" highlights the importance of developing a vocabulary to talk about personal experiences with a relative stranger, frequently within the first few days of interacting with them, in order to get what you need to access the space.

## **Crippling Teaching for Transfer**

This research has implications for crippling how transfer scholars discuss teaching for transfer. In disability studies,

cripping is a conceptual practice of decentering normatively embodied experiences and epistemologies (McRuer; Schalk). As Victoria Lewis describes, “crip” emerged in 1970s as an in-group word to avoid the syrupy nature of alternative language like “handicapable,” and describes a “sensibility, identity, or activity in opposition to mainstream assumptions about disability” (45). Two key ways we can crip teaching for transfer include embracing the crip time of the writing process and strengthening interdependence through mentorship.

While my study explored a wide variety of experiences with disability, one central concept returned again and again for my participants regardless of their individual needs—the necessity of having flexibility with time to complete assignments. For some, negotiating more time had even become interwoven with how they identified as students; Franco described herself as “the queen of extensions,” while Ana stated jokingly that she was a “chronic abuser of the incomplete.” Whether experiences of the body were physical, such as having an out-of-control blood sugar level for several days at a time, or mental, such as having a depressive episode or anxiety attack on the eve of writing a paper, all participants identified flexibility with time as a key support for not just writing well but also learning new writing skills.

We could conceptualize this in relationship to “crip time,” which Alison Kafer describes as “flex time not just expanded but exploded; it requires reimagining our notions of what can and should happen in time, or recognizing how expectations of ‘how long things take’ are based on very particular minds and bodies...Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds” (Kafer 27). Academic time often functions as the opposite of crip time—we set deadlines for papers and journal articles; we describe our career progress in terms of conference deadlines and tenure clocks. These time practices bleed into how we treat academic writing for our students. Indeed, in my writing program administrator role, one of the biggest resistances I’ve seen in relation to offering flexible timing for assignments is that “students need to learn a lesson about timeliness.” Not only does this sentiment not reflect the myriad ways that many students will write during and after college, it also imposes our felt sense of time onto our students. In composition studies more broadly, scholars such as Tara Wood and Anne Marie-Womack have asked us to consider how we construct our classrooms in relationship to normative bodies and normative time frames. Wood extensively explores how and why we should crip time in writing classrooms, arguing that “cripping time animates how disability itself can profitably re-shape the conditions of production in our classrooms, opening up the possibilities of non-normative composing and imaginative student-instructor negotiations of writing” (280). As writing transfer studies begins to think beyond a model of linear progress for writers, teaching for transfer can embrace “crip time” by focusing on the “writing about writing” that students may need to do to square crip time and academic time. For example, we could directly teach students how to communicate about disability and time related needs such as emails that ask for extensions. Teaching students how to navigate the genres of writing (such as emailing a professor or reaching out to a campus support service) that surround academic writing can aid disabled students as they learn to crip time.

I want to end on one of the most powerful findings across experiences that I believe both teachers who want to embrace teaching for transfer and writing transfer scholars should consider: how mentorship affects not only the transfer of writing knowledge but also students’ identity formation as writers. As I’ve described, disabled students are often learning on their own both how to understand their new relationships between their bodyminds and writing and the rhetorical skills they need to ask for accommodations. Transfer research has shown that mentorship can shape student dispositions towards writing, and it can influence the success of content-to-content and procedure-to-procedure based transfer (Perkins and Solomon 28). Mentorship connects to a core concept in disability studies—moving away from a U.S. cultural obsession with independence towards a model of interdependence (Siebers 52). For many of the disabled students I interviewed, being able to identify as a writer was foreclosed by their experience with disability, often via their relationships with instructors; their ways of moving through the university and through academic writing were not valued. It was important to many of my participants that their instructors see them as a whole person, including their experience with disability. Having a mentor who could help with navigating college life, new academic demands, and an emergent understanding of disability was crucial for Kirill, who first described how a faculty mentor helped him come to terms with disability and academic life:

I'm so grateful to [my faculty mentor] who is one of the people I talked about earlier who was highly influential, is that she put in the emotional labor to sit down with me in office hours and like talk about how cultural and social structures of how we think about labor and work affect our emotional wellness and ability, which was something I had never thought about before.

Later, Kirill described how this mentor also helped with conventions of academic writing:

Well, [my faculty mentor] taught me “so what.” Like, “It’s really cool that you think this is the most interesting thing in the world.” Which, as an autistic person, I often think that whatever I’m working on is

the most interesting thing in the world, why would anyone like not care deeply about this? ... She would always push me to think, "Why are you writing this? What is the importance?" And she often phrased it like, "You, with this piece of labor you're spending hours and hours on are contributing to a conversation. What is the new perspective or information that you're adding to the scholarly conversation?" And that's usually how I'll frame the "so what" conclusion ... So that was really helpful and I still do that really consciously, not only papers but also grants.

Kirill's success in academic writing was influenced by his relationship with a mentor who could help Kirill transfer both necessary knowledge for accommodation alongside academic writing skills. Crippling teaching for transfer by teaching the writing and rhetorical skills needed to navigate accommodations for writing assignments and by offering comprehensive mentorship has the potential to increase disabled students' success in writing in college and beyond.

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## Notes

1. Deciding whether to use person-first language (e.g., students with disabilities") compared to the more politically weighted phrase "disabled students" was a tough decision. Ultimately I chose "disabled students" because I felt it reflected the language of disability studies and also the language I used in recruitment materials for this study. ([Return to text.](#))
2. I draw the term "bodymind" from Margaret Price's exploration of the term in "The Bodymind Problem". Price describes the bodymind as "the imbrication (not just the combination) of the entities usually called 'body' and 'mind'" (270). I use it here to draw attention to the "imbricated" relationship between the body and mind while writing, a relationship made particularly visible when discussing writing processes with disabled writers. ([Return to text.](#))
3. It is important to note that while all college have institutional forces that address the needs of disabled students, the way that these sites rhetorically construct disability and interface with students can be drastically different. From personal experience, I attended a tiny liberal arts college where disability services were managed by one person on a more case-by-case basis. A broader exploration of how disability services offices rhetorically construct disability, access, and accommodation would greatly benefit our field. ([Return to text.](#))
4. As part of my interview protocol, I collected students' pronouns. Kirill uses the gender neutral pronoun "ze/hir." For more information about this pronoun construction, see CityLab's article on gender neutral pronouns: <http://www.citylab.com/navigator/2015/09/ze-or-they-a-guide-to-using-gender-neutral-pronouns/407167/> ([Return to text.](#))
5. Tara Wood and Shannon Madden, in their guidance on *PraxisWiki*, have explored how syllabi "function rhetorically and have consequences in terms of how students understand the classroom atmosphere, what they expect from the teacher's relationship to students, and how they predict the semester will go for them." They offer suggestions for building inclusive syllabi for writing instructors. ([Return to text.](#))

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