

## Equality vs. Equity

Students have come to understand “fairness” as simply equal treatment. You’re familiar with this playground mentality of fairness: “I get two crackers, and you two crackers” or “I play with the ball for twenty minutes, and then you play with it for twenty minutes.”...Treating everyone exactly the same actually is not fair. Equal treatment erases our differences and promotes privilege.

**Equity and equality are two strategies we can use in an effort to produce fairness.**

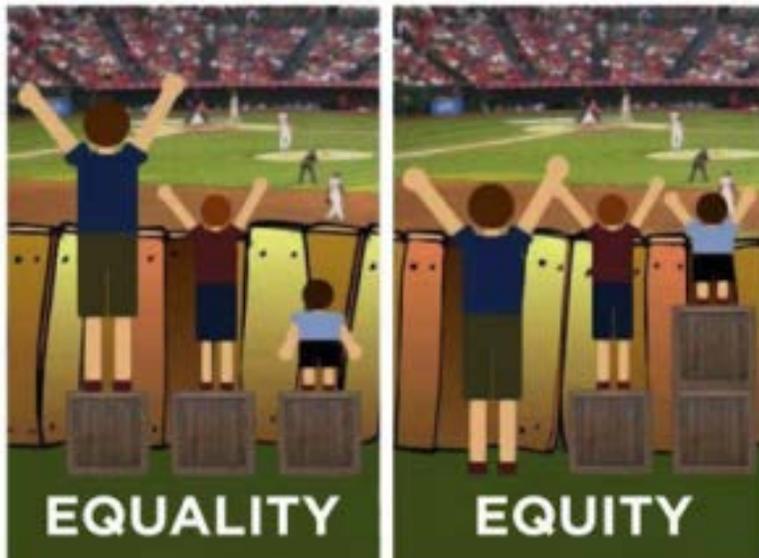
**Equity** is giving everyone what they need to be successful.

**Equality** is treating everyone the same.

**Equality** aims to promote fairness, but it can only work if everyone starts from the same place and needs the same help. **Equity** appears unfair, but it actively moves everyone closer to success by “leveling the playing field.”

But not everyone starts at the same place, and not everyone has the same needs...some people will need a language translator when speaking to a government agency and others will not. And it wouldn’t be fair to just provide Spanish translators just because it is the language most people speak. A Spanish translator would not allow a Korean speaker the same access to opportunities.

Take a look at this famous cartoon regarding equity and equality. Each child is of a different height. We can’t change that. In order to insure that every child has access to the baseball game, we can provide them with boxes to stand on.



But we can’t just bring one-sized boxes to lift everyone up. **That’s equality, and equality does not always elicit true fairness.** We need to put in the extra work and give everyone what they need.

Source: Out Front Minnesota

Fixing the systematic obstacles (rather than fixing individual differences) requires us to be more intentional.



Source: Peytral Publications

Often times, decisions are made to benefit the *majority* of people without paying attention to individual needs and nuances. Instead of gender-specific restrooms, we could offer gender-neutral restrooms to allow everyone access to restrooms – not just those who fit within the men or women boxes.

...the system is flawed when it does not meet everyone's needs. Can we change the whole system? Rarely. What we *can* do is advocate for equitable practices in order to promote fairness. This requires extra work. The extra work is worth it because the key is to allow everyone to succeed.

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What appears above is a modified excerpt from: *Equality Is Not Enough: What the Classroom Has Taught Me About Justice*, by [Amy Sun](#):

<https://everydayfeminism.com/2014/09/equality-is-not-enough/>

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## Activity: Equity or equality?

Read each of the following statements and decide if they represent equity, equality, both or neither.

1. Research has found that drugs such as antihistamines and antibiotics may cause different reactions and side effects in females and males. In order to ensure that drugs do not cause harm to either sex, new guidelines recommend that all clinical trials of medications involve both women and men.

**Answer:** This statement is about both equality and equity. Including both women and men in clinical trials of drugs means that we are treating males and females the same – equality. But assessing the effects of medications on males and females involves an appreciation that differences are important and may require different responses. For instance, low-dose aspirin has been routinely recommended for women and men at risk of heart disease, even though the treatment was only tested on men. Subsequent trials with females and males found that low-dose aspirin is generally more effective for men than for women.

2. A local hockey camp for children is held in the summertime to teach skating and stick-handling skills before the hockey season begins. In the past, only boys have attended the camp, but organizers are taking steps to encourage girls to attend because they realize that more girls are becoming involved in hockey.

**Answer:** This statement represents both equality and equity. By opening the camp to girls, organizers are trying to ensure that girls and boys have the same opportunities to learn and play hockey. By reaching out to girls specifically, they are also promoting equity because historically females have been excluded from hockey and additional effort is needed to open this door for girls.

3. A city council creates a policy requiring that all new housing developments include recreation centers. The policy is designed to increase opportunities for physical activity, which may contribute to...better health in general for members of these communities.

**Answer:** This statement represents equality. Every development is treated the same, regardless of its purpose or location. If the policy also stipulated that residents must be able to use the recreation facilities at no cost, it could contribute to equity by ensuring that everyone has access.

4. A community decides to open a library in a low-income neighborhood.

**Answer:** This statement represents equity. The new library is a deliberate attempt to make sure that the neighborhood residents can enjoy the resources and meeting space in the library without having to spend the time and money involved in travelling to a library outside of their community. The new library is also a way of making sure that families can enjoy reading without having to pay for books that they might not be able to afford

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<http://sgba-resource.ca/en/concepts/equity/distinguish-between-equity-and-equality/activity-equity-or-equality/>