

Fact Sheet

Developed by The Center for Disability Studies and Universal Access

Visual Disability

Quick Facts

A major challenge facing blind students at universities is the overwhelming mass of written material with which they are confronted - syllabi, books, time schedules, bibliographies, campus newspapers, posters, tests, etc. The increasing use of films, videotapes, overhead projectors, and closed-circuit television adds to the volume of visual material they must access in an alternative way. Therefore, students with visual impairments must plan their schedules well in advance of each term to assure that accessible learning modalities are in place when classes begin. Such modalities may include textbooks converted to audiotope or electronic format, special equipment, or readers.



Helen Keller shortly after graduation from Radcliffe University, B.A., 1904 Cum Laude.

Types of Impairments

There are two main categories of visual impairments: Low Vision and Blind. Low vision students usually are print users, but may require equipment and materials. The definition of legal blindness covers a broad spectrum of visual impairments. The degree of visual impairment depends upon the degree of physical sensory impairment of the student's eyes, the age of the student at the onset of vision impairment, and the way in which that impairment occurred.

Successful Classroom Strategies

- Describe, in detail pertinent visual occurrences of the learning activities.
- Describe and tactually familiarize students to classroom, laboratory, equipment, supplies, materials, field sites, etc (Consult with your school's Disability Support Office for assistance.)
- Give verbal notice of room changes, special meetings, or assignments.
- Offer to read written information for a person with a visual impairment, when appropriate.
- Identify yourself by name, don't assume that the student who is visually impaired will recognize you by your voice even though you have met before.
- If you are asked to guide a student with a visual impairment, identify yourself, offer your services and, if accepted, offer your arm to the student's hand. Let them know if they have to step up or step down, let them know if the door is to their left or right, and warn them of possible hazards.
- Orally, let the student know if you need to move or need to end a conversation.
- If a visually impaired student is in class, routinely check the instructional environment to be sure it is adequate and ready for use.

Guide dog etiquette

In most people's experience, a dog is a pet. But in the life of a blind student, a dog performs an essential role — i.e. like guard dogs, tracker dogs or sniffer dogs, they are working animals first and foremost. This means that students may need to be alerted to the fact that the VI student's guide dog should not be treated as a pet. Rather, the following rules of engagement might be more appropriate:

Don't

- Pet or stroke the dog without asking
- Feed the dog
- Attempt to distract the dog's attention — this could be extremely dangerous.

Do

- Talk to the blind student normally, face to face if possible, in an appropriate manner, rather than to their canine helper
- Remember when helping a user to cross roads or negotiate other obstacles to ask first — the dog may already have been trained for just that eventuality.

History of Braille

Braille has been an effective means of communication for blind persons since 1829 when it was invented in Paris, France by Louis Braille. Louis Braille lost his sight at the age of three as a result of an eye injury. As a young boy at school, he became frustrated with the large and bulky raised letter alphabet used to learn reading and writing skills. Later in his life, a French artillery officer, Charles Barbier de la Serre, gave him the idea of reading by a tactile code. After many years of experimenting, Louis Braille developed a successful reading and writing system that today is used around the world.

The basis of the Braille system is known as a Braille cell. The cell is comprised of six dots numbered in a specific order. Each dot or combination of dots represents a letter of the alphabet. For example, by checking in the Braille alphabet, you will see that dot 1 is the letter "a" and dots 1 and 2 the letter "b".

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m
•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z
•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

Resources and Further Information



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About Us...

Our Office was developed with the support of a Department of Education Grant, *Supporting Students with Disabilities through Professional Faculty Development and Student Curriculum*. We are committed to improving the educational environment for students with disabilities and believe that an effective way to reach our goals is to promote an environment of **Universal Education Access (UEA)** to all people regardless of background or characteristics.

