



Indiana University of Pennsylvania

DEPARTMENT FOR DISABILITY ACCESS AND ADVISING (D²A²)

Teaching Students who are Blind and Visually Impaired

A person with a visual disability has an impairment in vision ranging from wearing correcting lenses to total blindness. Between 70-80 percent of all legally blind persons in the United States have measurable vision. The partially blind student meets the challenge of disability in much the same way as the blind student. Even with partial sight, a student with vision loss may experience eye strain while reading, inability to read certain print, font size or colors, and may be sensitive to light. For students who are blind, the age of onset may affect mobility, spelling, and written communication.

Some examples of possible accommodations that a student with visual disabilities may require include (but are not limited to):

- “Dear Professor Memos” verifying the need for accommodations
- Priority/early course registration
- Accommodated testing for in-class and online exams and quizzes
- Alternate format texts and handouts, including audio and electronic format and in braille
- Access to a screen reader or screen magnification
- Note-taking services and/or the use of an audio recorder for class lectures
- Allowance of laptops, tablets, or assistive technology in the classroom
- Regular advising meetings with an assigned D²A² advisor

When interacting with individuals with visual disabilities, follow these guidelines:

- When walking with, or guiding, a student who is blind, let the student take your arm just above the elbow; do not grab the student’s arm.
- Do not interrupt a person’s cane travelling, grab or lead a person with vision loss without their permission, or assume that the individual needs help.
- Ask the person with vision loss if they need assistance with printed materials.
- When conversing in a group, give a vocal cue by announcing the name of the person to whom you are speaking. Indicate when the conversation is at an end.
- Do not leave a student who is blind in an open area; describe the area and help them to get oriented to a landmark.
- Don’t shout at a person who is blind or who has vision loss – they are not deaf.

The following are some considerations to keep in mind when working with students with visual disabilities in the classroom:

- Let students know course materials as soon as they inquire so that they may arrange for alternate formats. Use the student’s prior alternate text formats as guides for modifications.

- Be aware that students may be using recorded or scanned texts or may need materials enlarged. Work with the student and the Department for Disability Access and Advising (D²A²) to ensure that the student has appropriately modified materials.
- Allow students with guide dogs to sit where appropriate to accommodate the dog. Advise other students to not pet or distract the dog without permission from the owner.
- Provide an auditory and visual teaching approach; do the same in meetings or other encounters. Read aloud anything that is written on the board or presented on handouts, PowerPoint slides, or any other visual aids. Create text-based descriptions of materials that are primarily visual or graphical in nature.
- Attempt to be specific when describing visuals (e.g., avoid “this” and “that”)
- For fieldwork or field trips, assess the need for safety and transportation accommodations.
- Physical education and recreation classes can be adapted so that the student can participate.
- Classes taught in laboratory settings will usually require workstation modification. However, students may not be able to participate fully in a laboratory class without the help of an assistant.
- Provide clear pathways and directions for the student who is cane traveling.
- If moving a class, be sure to have someone remain behind to let the student know (a note on the door will not suffice).
- If the classroom or office arrangement has changed, let the student know.

Additional Resources:

Teaching Strategies for Vision Impaired Students (Ferris State University)	https://ferris.edu/htmls/colleges/university/disability/faculty-staff/classroom-issues/vision/vision-strategy.htm
Students who are Blind or have a Visual Impairment (Allegheny College)	https://sites.allegheny.edu/disabilityservices/students-who-are-blind-or-have-a-visual-impairment/
A Guide to Visual Disabilities: How Colleges Help Visually Impaired Students Succeed (Affordable Colleges Online)	https://www.affordablecollegesonline.org/colleges-helping-visually-impaired-students/
Blindness (DO-IT, University of Washington)	https://www.washington.edu/doi/blindness-0
Low Vision (DO-IT, University of Washington)	https://www.washington.edu/doi/low-vision
Guidelines for Collegiate Faculty to Teach Mathematics to Blind or Visually Impaired Students (National Federation of the Blind)	https://nfb.org/images/nfb/publications/fr/fr36/3/fr360307.htm