



Teaching Students Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision

Implications of Blindness and Vision Loss in the Postsecondary Education Setting

Vision loss may be described in various ways. Here are the most common terms used to refer to a person with vision loss.

- “Blindness” – the term “blind” is usually used to describe a person who is more likely to rely on auditory or tactile means of accessing information such as audio tapes or braille.
- “Low vision” – the term “low vision” is usually used to describe a level of vision loss in which the person can use residual sight and to benefit from large print and closer proximity.
- “Legally blind” – A person is said to be “legally blind” if his or her corrected vision is no better than 20/200.

Of primary concern to students with vision loss is access to information. The methods that students use to access written materials will vary depending on their type of vision loss, personal preferences, and educational background. Students with low vision will likely prefer large print and magnification devices whereas students who are blind may prefer to access information through auditory means and or braille.

Tips for Teaching Students Who Are Blind or Who Have Low Vision

Initial Preparations for the Semester

Be ready to provide reading lists, syllabi or assignments in advance. This will allow the student time to have the materials translated into braille, read on tape, or printed in large print.

The student may need information about the physical layout of the classroom. This is especially important if there are any changes from one class period to the next.

Be prepared to change seating arrangements if necessary to improve the students' ability to see you or others. If the student has low vision, a seat in the front of the room may greatly improve his or her ability to participate effectively.

Consider the impact of the lighting on the student's ability to see. Avoid standing in front of a light source as this may cause a glare and make seeing you more difficult.

If a class is moved or cancelled, remember that a note on the board or door may not be sufficient notification for a student with vision loss. Make sure that the message is delivered effectively to the student.

Keep in mind that students may be oriented to take a specific route to class each time. If unexpected barriers occur (such as construction on a sidewalk), the student may have to seek assistance from someone to find an alternate route.

Considerations for Instruction During the Semester

Allow students to record lectures on tape or to use other note-taking devices. Some of these devices may include a braille-writer, a laptop computer, or a slate and stylus.

When providing handouts, make sure the copies are legible. Black print on white paper provides the best contrast for most students. Be prepared to make large print copies or provide handouts on a computer diskette if requested.

If you are using the blackboard or other visual aids, describe verbally what you are showing to the class. Be specific in your descriptions. It is ideal to provide the information included on your visual aids or overheads in an accessible format before the class period. When pointing to an object of discussion, use the name of the object instead of "this" or "that."

If you are reading from a textbook in class, remember that the page numbers in your copy may not correspond to large print or braille versions. In addition to giving the page number, also provide descriptive information about the section you are reading, such as "the fourth paragraph in Chapter 6."

Inform students of field trips or laboratory activities well in advance. Remember that students may need to make arrangements for a sighted guide or may need to become familiar with the new setting.

Guidelines for Preparing and Administering Exams

Discuss plans for modifying testing procedures prior to the first exam. Consider factors such as extended time, availability of adaptive equipment, and a location for taking the exam.

Remember that the use of adaptive equipment or alternate formats such as audiotape or braille take extra time. Be prepared to provide up to double the time for taking the exam.

Determine which format will work best for your student. The student may choose to get the exam in braille, in regular print (and use a magnification device), in large print, or on a computer diskette. Some students may prefer having the test read onto an audiotape or by a live reader.

Consider how students will record their answers to the exam as well. They may write their answers on an answer sheet or directly on the test, record their answers on an audiotape, type them on a computer, or type them in braille and have translated into print. Recognize that it may take time to get the information transferred into a format that you can grade.