

UNDERSTANDING VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

OVERVIEW

The term “visual impairments” reflects the notion that students may have varying levels of impairment – from low vision to blindness. Faculty can make a big difference in students’ success by ensuring that they provide materials in an appropriate format and in a timely fashion.

Possible Student Characteristics

- Struggle with glare or reduced lighting.
- Difficulty learning visual concepts.
- Difficulty getting to class because of transportation problems.
- May depend on a service animal to get to class.
- Frustrated by visual demands of the classroom.

Possible Accommodations:

Decisions as to appropriate accommodations should be made on a case-by-case basis. No particular accommodations are appropriate for all students, but below are some common ones offered students with visual impairments.

- Alternate text
- Brailled text
- Text to Speech technology (such as Kurzweil, JAWS)
- Extended time
- Preferred seating
- Readers and Scribes
- Enlarged print
- Distraction-reduced testing environment
- Note-takers or tape recorders
- 20/20 Pens
- Portable CCTVs
- Talking calculators

TEACHING TIPS

- **Let DSPS Alternate Media know what course material you are using.** Create a list of books and tools you use over a semester. Share it with your Alternate Media Specialist so that they can get the material into Alternate formats for blind students. Don’t wait until the last minute, as sometimes it takes months to get material into an adaptive format.
- **Do not assume that a blind student knows Braille.** Only a small percentage of students with visual impairments know and use Braille.

- **Do not assume that blind students have great technological skills.** A student who has been blind since birth probably has a better knowledge of Alternate format technology than someone who recently lost his/her sight. Also, the level of technology instruction in K-12 varies widely, so some students may come to college better prepared than others. Knowing their skills helps you to better help them.
- **When writing on the black board, be sure to read out loud what you are writing.**
- **When using a whiteboard, use high contrast pens such as black or blue, other colors may not be visible to the visually impaired student.**
- **Use concrete objects to teach abstract ideas.**
- **Have an outline of lecture on Blackboard or provide outlines and powerpoints to student prior to class.**
- **Consider the student with a visual impairment when you're showing a film in class.** If it's available, get a copy of the film in audio-described format. This allows the student to hear descriptions of important scenes. Or you can have other students explain what is being shown on the screen. With both these accommodations, you'll need to have the student view the film in another room so other students will not be disturbed.
- **When having classroom discussions, encourage all students to say their names before they talk.** This can help the student with a visual impairment keep up with the conversations.

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