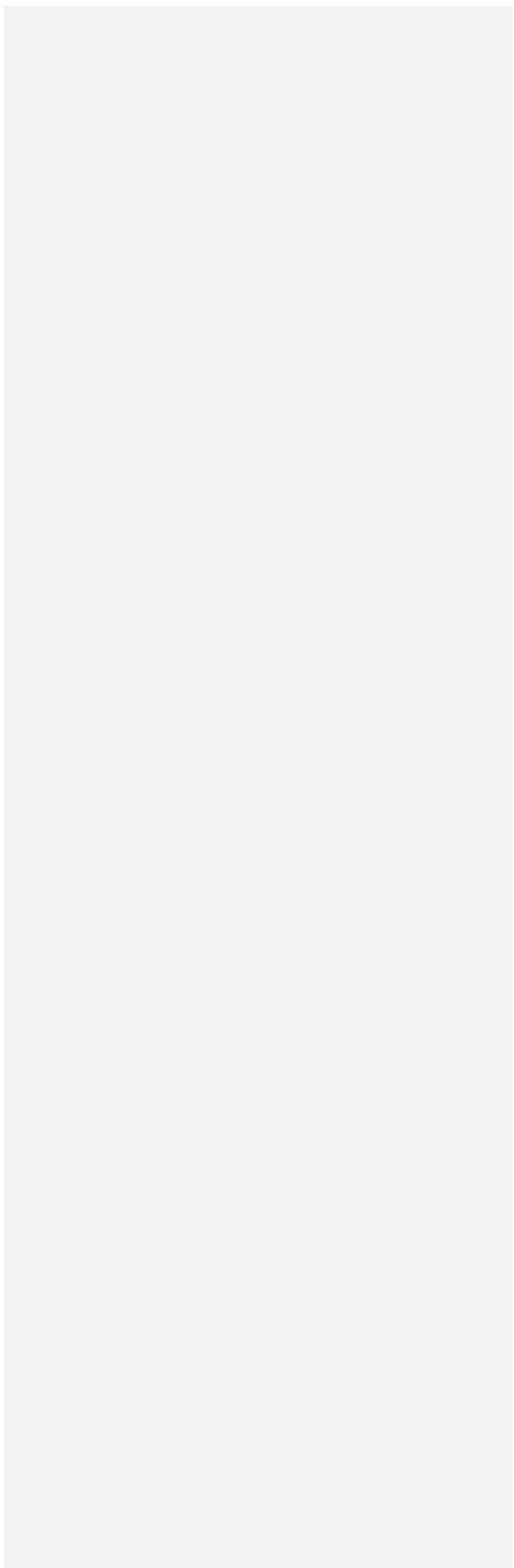


IOWA DEPARTMENT FOR THE BLIND (IDB)  
DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION  
COLLEGE STUDENT MANUAL



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## **IDB Mission, Vision, Values and Culture**

IDB Mission Statement: Empower blind lowans to be gainfully employed and live independently.

IDB Vision Statement: To be the world's leader in blind rehabilitation services.

IDB Value Statements:

We value blind lowans therefore:

We believe in each individual's ability to be independent

We act with a sense of urgency and responsiveness in serving every individual

We support each individual's right to informed choices

We value engagement and independence for individuals of all ages

We promote a positive attitude toward blindness

We expect blind persons to achieve their full potential

We provide opportunities for blind persons to be fully contributing members of their communities

All staff are valued and expected to demonstrate:

Passion for what we do everyday

Commitment to make positive differences in the lives of blind lowans

Respect for the contributions of each staff member

Ethical behavior, honesty, integrity and trustworthiness

Innovative and proactive approaches in serving each client

Progressive and professional leadership

Collaboration and teamwork that benefits each individual we serve

Collaboration with community, local, state and federal partners

IDB Culture Statement: We use a client-centric approach to empower clients to achieve successful outcomes.

## INTRODUCTION

The reason you have chosen to continue your education is to prepare yourself for employment and independence. The contacts you make, the references you earn, and the skills and knowledge you acquire in school will all be essential to getting the job you want. Therefore, the decisions you make now and your performance throughout the time that you are a student will directly and profoundly affect your ability to meet your goals of employment and independence. You must take responsibility for your decisions and your performance because it is your life, your career, and your independence.

Throughout this manual we will be referring to you as a person who is blind. We use this definition because, regardless of how much vision you have, you recognize the need to use alternative techniques to do efficiently the things persons with ordinary vision do with sight. The key word here is "efficiently." If you are a person who is able to read some information in print, in many instances you may find it faster, and ultimately easier, to use alternative techniques for reading. As a client of the Iowa Department for the Blind you have already recognized this reality. However, if you have not yet learned alternative techniques such as travel, Braille, computer skills, and daily living skills, you should consider the training available through the Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center. Remember--the key is efficiency. Learning and using proven alternative techniques, and learning to devise your own techniques for specific situations, will be the keys to your efficiency, and to your ability to succeed.

You will be competing with sighted people for grades in school and for jobs when you have graduated. You will need to learn and use skills and alternative techniques which allow you to complete your assignments on time and in the formats and manner specified. You should expect to be evaluated on the same basis as your sighted peers. When you get a job after graduation, you will be expected to perform that job as well as a sighted person. It is up to you to learn what is necessary to be competitive in school and on the job.

You are not alone in your efforts to get an education and a good job. Thousands of other people who are blind have successfully completed courses of study in a wide variety of fields. Many of these people are available to you as resources to help you answer the specific questions that will arise as you continue your studies.

You have chosen to work in partnership with the Iowa Department for the Blind to achieve your educational and vocational goals. Both you and the Department have specific responsibilities in this partnership. If these responsibilities are not met, your educational and vocational prospects will be hampered.

Your responsibilities include the following:

1. Apply for and accept financial aid from sources other than the Department and use that aid specifically to advance your education.
2. Send copy of award letter each year (proof of FAFSA application)
3. Review and sign the IDB college sponsorship agreement each year and submit to your counselor.
4. On a Grade Point Average (GPA) scale of 4.0, you must maintain a 2.5 or higher each semester or term.
5. If you choose to use a reader, you will hire the reader, supervise the reader, and complete the Monthly Reader Service Report forms.
6. Send a copy of your grades/transcript to your vocational rehabilitation counselor each time grades are issued. This must include your name, name of school, and date of term.
7. Inform your vocational rehabilitation counselor of any major changes in your plans; for example, if you add or drop classes, change your address, drop out of school, transfer, or graduate.
8. Be proactive and inform your vocational rehabilitation counselor as soon as possible about any serious problems you are encountering.
9. Make arrangements to learn any new skills or techniques which you need to complete your studies.
10. Take charge of the process of obtaining your textbooks in the format you prefer.

The vocational rehabilitation counselor also has specific responsibilities in this partnership. These include:

1. Counseling you about educational and vocational training options.
2. Counseling you about services available through the Department. Examples of these services are library services (including finding and transcribing textbooks); Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center (including training in cane travel, Braille, typing, computers, and

personal living skills); funding; and technical support.

3. Providing financial assistance according to the terms agreed upon when completing your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).
4. Arranging training in the special skills and techniques that your blindness requires you to learn.
5. Providing you access to a network of people who can help you solve the problems that arise as a result of your blindness.
6. Counseling you on job-seeking skills and techniques.
7. Assisting with the job search when necessary.

When this partnership works smoothly, you will have the assistance you need to complete your education and begin looking for employment. Your vocational rehabilitation counselor's ability to provide you with quality counseling and guidance is dependent on your providing the information requested. It is important to comply with your responsibilities in this partnership because you are the key to your own success.

## **THE MANUAL**

This manual is designed to help you answer the questions that will arise as you go through your training. It was written and reviewed by successful college students who are blind, in conjunction with the staff at IDB.

The information it contains--including the suggested approaches to various training situations--has been gathered from experienced students who are blind.

Read the manual through now for an overview. Then keep it handy and refer to it as you face specific situations in your training. The detailed Table of Contents will help you find information about the topics you need.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **GETTING READY FOR COLLEGE**

#### *YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES*

1. Choose a course of study that will lead to employment.
2. Thoroughly acquaint yourself with the college's policies, services, and programs, including the Office for Disability Services.
3. Learn the layout of the campus.

Before classes begin, you have several important decisions to make and things to do. These include choosing your courses, attending freshman orientation, learning the campus, determining where to purchase books, decide living arrangements, figure out transportation to and from school, researching online or in-person courses etc.

#### *Choosing Your Course of Study*

Before you graduate from high school, you will review your Individualized Plan for Employment, which includes your career goal, with your vocational rehabilitation counselor. This career goal should be determined by your interests, skills, and abilities. By learning how to use adaptive techniques and technology your blindness will not limit your ability to succeed in your career goal.

As you research and develop your course of study regarding your career goal, keep these points in mind:

1. Choose a course of study that reflects your interests, abilities, and skills, and will lead to a job. Find out about the labor market in your field and what training is required to get the job you want.
2. Choose courses which will enhance your employability. Projects, practicums, and internships all enhance a résumé and provide references and practical experience, which will increase your chances of successful employment.
3. Never use your blindness to get out of taking required courses. If you are having difficulty with a course or are not sure how to handle situations such as physical education and lab classes, talk to your vocational rehabilitation counselor immediately. Other people who are blind have taken similar courses and your vocational rehabilitation counselor can help you find solutions or put you in touch with other students who are blind



whom you can ask for suggestions.

4. During your college education, you must be a full-time student. You need to demonstrate to prospective employers that you can compete successfully with your sighted peers. If your transcripts indicate that you did not take full course loads, prospective employers will wonder whether you can handle the work on the job within their time limits. People who are blind have routinely and successfully carried 12 or more college credit hours at one time so you can do the same.

#### *Office for Disability Services*

Most colleges and universities have a special office designed to address services for students with disabilities. The staff in this office can help you arrange accommodations to take tests and acquire some materials in alternative media.

This office may have assistive technology for use by students who are blind. They may have areas available for you to use your assistive technology or work with your reader. Find out what is available.

If you recruit readers through this office, be sure that you personally interview them and make your own hiring decisions. (See CHAPTER 4, READER SERVICE, for more information.)

#### *Freshman Orientation*

Most colleges and universities offer orientation sessions for incoming freshmen and transfer students. You can learn a lot during these sessions about the nonacademic services available on campus such as health care, dormitory life, intramural sports, and campus organizations so be prepared to take notes.

Although academics are important, being active in extracurricular activities is also key to success in your future. These can include study groups, dormitory events, clubs specific to majors, sororities, fraternities, student government, etc. Participating in these activities beneficial in several ways such as forming deep and lasting relationships, developing good study habits, minimizing stress, and leading to employment opportunities.

Orientation sessions may also include placement tests for math and English. Before you attend orientation, find out whether placement tests are part of the agenda. If they are, you will need to make arrangements in advance with the admissions office to take the tests. The Office for Disability Services will help you arrange the needed accommodations.

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### *Learning the Campus*

Regardless of whether you attend a small college or a large university, you should familiarize yourself with the campus before school starts. Once you have done this, the first few weeks of classes will go more smoothly for you, and you will have laid the foundation for independence throughout your training.

Visit the campus and learn its layout. Find out where your classes will meet and learn how to get to your classrooms on your own. Go inside each building and find out how the rooms are numbered and where your classrooms will be. Figure out the best route between your residence and your classroom buildings. Learn where the bookstore is and something about the neighborhoods and businesses that surround the campus.

Spend time familiarizing yourself with the library. Locate the information desk, reference desk, and check-out desk.

Because your ability to navigate the campus on your own is important to your independence and to other people's perceptions of you, you will want to take as much time as you need to learn your way around. Practice your routes and find out as much as you can about your surroundings. You may need to spend a day or two on the campus for this orientation but take as much time as you need. It will be time well spent.

You may need some assistance getting oriented to your campus. Explain to a family member or a friend how important your independence is and ask them to help you. If this is not practical, talk to your vocational rehabilitation counselor about making arrangements to have someone assist you in learning the campus.

Remember, your teachers, fellow students, and future employers will respect you and take you much more seriously if you do not have to rely on someone to take you everywhere you want to go. If you need assistance, reach out to your vocational rehabilitation counselor for training available through IDB.

### *Textbooks and Supplies*

You will need to purchase books and supplies for your classes. If your grants and scholarships are not adequate to cover these expenses IDB may be able to assist you.

After you have registered for your classes, research the costs of the textbooks you need for your classes. If IDB has agreed to help you with this expense, your vocational rehabilitation counselor will write a letter of authorization to the

bookstore/vendor specifying a maximum dollar amount you can charge on your bookstore account. An itemized list of your purchases will be sent to IDB prior to the authorization. If your professors add more textbooks for use in your classes, contact your vocational rehabilitation counselor and discuss the situation.

Often, bookstores sell recreational supplies, clothing, and other items not directly related to training. The IDB cannot pay for this type of purchase.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **APPLYING FOR FINANCIAL AID**

#### ***YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES***

1. Apply for all appropriate financial aid as early as possible.
2. Provide your vocational rehabilitation counselor with documentation of your financial aid applications and all the aid you are awarded.

Discuss how all financial aid should be utilized with your vocational rehabilitation counselor.

One of the first things you should do when you decide to go to school is apply for financial aid. All students apply for financial aid and, because of the time limits on many of the financial aid programs; you may need to apply even before you choose your school.

Financial aid is generally awarded on a yearly basis. Therefore, you must reapply for financial aid each year you will be in school.

#### *Why Apply?*

In your partnership with IDB, you are required by law (The Rehabilitation Act, as amended) to apply for and accept as much financial aid as you can from sources other than the IDB. This financial aid can be in the form of grants or scholarships. If you do not apply for financial aid, IDB will not be able to help you with your expenses.

In addition to meeting this requirement, receiving financial aid from sources other than the IDB has its own advantages. Many scholarships are earmarked for "educational expenses" and not specifically for "tuition and books." This means that you may be able to use some of these funds for school-related living or technology expenses.

An even more important and long-term advantage to being awarded scholarships and grants is that you can list them on your résumé. When you are applying for a job, prospective employers are often impressed with the fact that you were

awarded scholarships.

#### *Where To Get Financial Aid*

Thousands of financial aid opportunities are available in the form of grants or scholarships. Some are provided by state government, some by the federal government, some by the school you will be attending, and some by private organizations.

There are three ways to apply for financial aid:

1. Fill out a Free Application For Student Aid (FAFSA),
2. Complete a campus-based scholarship application, and
3. Apply for private scholarships and grants.

#### *The FAFSA*

FAFSA application is a federal requirement and is available October 1-June 30.

The first step you should take to apply for financial aid is to fill out a Free Application For Student Aid (FAFSA). The form is available online at [www.FAFSA.ed.gov](http://www.FAFSA.ed.gov). Fill out the form accurately, make copies for yourself and your vocational rehabilitation counselor, and submit it online.

Filling out the FAFSA will take some time and research. Until the age of 24, if you are single and have no children, you will need to include your parents' income and some information about their assets. You will also need to include your own income and assets. The income figures you need for the FAFSA are those from the previous year.

Filling out the FAFSA allows you to be considered for a variety of grants and loans. You will be notified by each school where you have applied about the financial aid you can receive. This will be made available to you electronically through the school's website. IDB expects you to accept all grants and scholarships and apply them to your school expenses.

#### *Campus-Based Aid*

To apply for scholarships and grants that are available only at the college or university you plan to attend, you should request a scholarship application form from that school's financial aid office. Staff at the financial aid office will be able to help you discover other scholarship opportunities.

### *Private Scholarships*

Scholarships are available from many organizations. Here are three steps you can take to find the most likely prospects:

1. As you approach the end of the first semester of your senior year of high school, contact your local high school guidance counselor and ask for scholarship information. Your high school guidance counselor will have applications for most local scholarships. Many communities have an organization which helps administer scholarships for local students (such as Dollars for Scholars). If your community has such an organization, you can often apply for several scholarships by filling out one application. Even if you have been out of school for some time, your high school's guidance counselor can still be a valuable resource to you. Some scholarships are not restricted to graduating high school seniors.
2. Find out whether any local organizations offer scholarships. Often churches, employers, and fraternal organizations provide scholarships to members.
3. Check with your vocational rehabilitation counselor about scholarship opportunities for IDB clients seeking a college education. A number of organizations offer scholarships to students who are blind or visually impaired. Your vocational rehabilitation counselor can provide you with contact information for these organizations.

### *Providing Information To Your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor*

You must provide documentation of financial aid applications to your vocational rehabilitation counselor. A copy of your completed FAFSA is the most convenient way to provide this documentation. Your vocational rehabilitation counselor needs this documentation to satisfy federal regulations. Without it, arrangements for funding through the IDB cannot be completed.

You must also inform your vocational rehabilitation counselor of all financial aid you receive. You will receive a Student Aid Report after you have filed your Free Application For Student Aid (FAFSA). Be sure to review this report in its entirety to make sure FAFSA has recorded correct information about you. FAFSA will then submit this information to the schools you chose when completing the online application. Once you have applied and been accepted, the school will provide you with a Financial Aid Award. This will be made available to you electronically through the school's website. Your vocational rehabilitation counselor needs a

copy of this award to continue planning for your financial support. You must provide a copy of the award to your vocational rehabilitation counselor along with any other notification of scholarships and grants you have been awarded. A copy of the FAFSA is helpful, but a copy of the award letter is critical because it proves that you applied and indicates the amount of financial aid awarded from the school. Funding for tuition and fees will be negotiated with the vocational rehabilitation counselor based on this information.

#### *Using Financial Aid*

Federal laws require you to use grant and scholarship funds to pay costs directly related to your schooling, such as tuition, fees, books, college supplies, and room and board.

#### *Student Loans*

Student loans are available, and you automatically apply for them when you complete your FAFSA. In addition, you can apply for work-study programs which can provide you with valuable work experience that will enhance both your résumé and your chances for future employment.

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## **CHAPTER 3**

### **HANDLING PRINTED MATERIAL**

#### *YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES*

1. Choose the reading options which allow you to comprehend the material and use your time most efficiently.
2. Make all necessary arrangements to get your textbooks located and/or transcribed as early as possible.
3. Use all your school's resources to get the most out of your classes.
4. Find the most efficient way for you to handle nonstandard text.
5. Arrange with your instructors to take tests.

When you need assistance in solving a problem, call your vocational rehabilitation counselor.

One of the greatest challenges you face as a student who is blind is reading the large amounts of material you will be assigned. You will usually have textbooks to read for all of your classes. Your instructors will hand out material throughout the term which you will be expected to read. You will be required to go to the library and read articles and books on reserve. You will have research projects which require you to find and read materials in the library. In addition, your instructors will often use PowerPoint presentations or write on the whiteboard, and you will need to read this information as well. You will be expected to take tests, turn in homework assignments, and understand graphic material.

This chapter discusses proven methods that people who are blind have used to handle material of various types. However, it cannot cover every method. Therefore, you are urged to experiment until you find the quickest, most efficient way to learn the material.

Reading the material is your responsibility. You should not expect your instructors or your vocational rehabilitation counselor to handle the details for you. Remember that you are training for a job and, when you get one, you will probably have to handle printed material as part of your job. The skills and techniques you develop as a student will be crucial to your performance on the job. Use your time as a student to experiment with different reading options and choose the options that work best for you. Later, when you interview for a job, you will have ready and proven answers to the questions interviewers ask about



how you will handle printed material. More importantly, you can explain how you can do this without being asked.

### *Reading Options*

Remember that the goal of reading is to understand the content of the material. The method you use is far less important than your efficiency and comprehension. The following options for reading are available to you: audio books, readers, Braille, computer-based text, and print.

### *Audio Books*

Most of your textbooks can be made available to you in audio, either on digital cartridge or in a downloadable format. Volunteer readers who work for the IDB Library or other recording agencies, such as Learning Ally can record textbooks in human voice in a navigable DAISY format. Other online sources, such as Bookshare, offer downloadable DAISY files that can be read by synthetic voice through a speech engine on a computer or other device. You will need to plan in advance to have books recorded in time for your classes.

Using recorded material gives you the freedom to read whenever and wherever you choose. Audio books allow you to reread any or all of the material at will and to stop and start as often as you wish. Some audio formats like MP3's cannot be navigated, so locating specific information or passages is more difficult with these than with other formats. However, you can compensate for this by taking notes as you go. Books recorded in DAISY format are usually marked up by chapters, sections, pages, and so forth. In addition, you can often bookmark specific places in a text to which you can quickly return. The advanced model of the Digital Talking Book Machine (DTBM), available from the IDB Library, is equipped to locate navigation marks and to place bookmarks.

Both Learning Ally and Bookshare are membership organizations. Under some circumstances, memberships are free for students. Check their websites at: <https://www.learningally.org/adult-learners/> and <https://www.bookshare.org/>.

### *Readers*

In many situations, using a reader is the fastest, most timely, and most practical way to access material. You should not use readers for textbooks if the material is available in alternative media elsewhere or can be produced by the IDB Library. But you will want to use readers for handouts, reserve material at the library, and research. (See CHAPTER 4 for more information about readers.)

### *Braille*

For many people who are blind, Braille is the ideal medium for reading because Braille material offers most of the advantages of print, including searching, skimming, rereading, and portability. Unfortunately, because of production restrictions, fewer textbooks are available in Braille than in audio formats, and those that are may take longer to produce. You can request books in Braille, but you may have to allow a longer lead time for producing them, especially if the material is highly technical or contains graphics. Materials requested in literary or textbook Braille can often be produced in electronic Braille format (.brf) for a notetaker or other Braille-aware device. Costs for Braille acquisition or production may be covered by your vocational rehabilitation plan.

### *Computer-Based Text*

Textbooks are commonly available in computer formats. If you have the equipment AND the skills, computer-based text has many advantages over other formats. You can search, skim, and easily read material at your leisure. The Office for Disability Services at your school may be able to assist you in obtaining publisher files or digital versions of your textbooks. You are still responsible for determining what materials will be required for your classes.

Keep in mind that just because a file is digital does not mean it is accessible. Therefore, be sure to test any files you receive with your assistive device or computer.

### *Reader Applications*

There are several low cost reader applications available to download on your smartphone or tablet. Some examples are Learning Ally, Dream Reader, Vital Source, and Bookshare.

### *Scanned Text*

Scanning textbooks or handouts has become a common reading method for students who have the right combination of hardware and software--that is, a scanner, a computer, and an optical character recognition program. Scanned material needs to be properly formatted and corrected for scanning errors, but once this is done, scanned text can be just as useful as computer-based text. The scanning process can be tedious and time-consuming; however, you can have your reader scan and correct materials to save you time. Your Office for Disability Services may offer to scan text materials for you. Be aware that not all books or

handouts will scan well--or at all. While scanned text can be useful, it should never take the place of any of the other reading options described here.

#### *Print*

If reading print is an option for you, carefully consider these points before you commit to reading large amounts of text in print.

1. Can you realistically read the volume of material presented without undue stress or eye strain?
2. Can you read fast enough, and fluently enough, to make reading print the most time-efficient choice? (Note: A person reading aloud on a recording at regular speed reads approximately 180 to 200 words per minute.)
3. Does your vision fluctuate so that you can only read at certain times or under limited conditions?

Even though you can read print, it may not be the most effective way to read the bulk of your material. You may find that a combination of techniques including readers, audio, and Braille, when used along with print, will be far more efficient than using print alone. The key is ease and efficiency. Most people who are blind use different techniques in different situations. You might, for example, want to read one-page handouts in print but read your textbooks in an audio format. When you go to the library where the lighting may not be ideal, you may decide to take your reader along. Explore all the possibilities before you settle on what works for you.

#### *Textbooks*

The Instructional Materials Center (IMC) in the IDB Library has one primary purpose: to provide textbooks and related instructional materials to students. The IMC provides material in accessible formats for all students who need it. You will be responsible for working with the IMC to make all necessary arrangements for your textbooks. You will need to provide the information the IMC requires to locate or produce your books, and you will need to make your own decisions about several IMC-related issues. For the best results in acquiring your textbooks, you should know what information the IMC requires and provide it as early as possible.

Before you begin ordering textbooks, make sure you are a registered library user. If not, you can find the application for services at:

<https://stateofiowa.seamlessdocs.com/f/LibraryAppIDB>. See also: <https://blind.iowa.gov/library/student-resources#PostSecond> to find the College Student Textbook/Educational Materials Request Form for Braille, audio, or electronic college textbooks.

You will also need to register with Learning Ally. Learning Ally of Princeton, New Jersey, is an organization that transcribes textbooks and other educational materials into audio format. Learning Ally is the IMC's primary source of educational and professional material.

Through a Learning Ally membership, you will have access to over 75,000 titles recorded by volunteer narrators, including the world's largest library of audio textbooks. Simply select the book you need, then listen to it on the PC, Mac, or Apple iOS device of your choice.

To play Learning Ally audiobooks on Apple iOS devices, such as the iPad or iPod Touch, you will need to download the free Learning Ally iOS Audio app. To use a PC or Mac, you will need to download the free Learning Ally ReadHear by gh software. Learning Ally audiobooks can also be played on DAISY (Digital Accessible Information SYstem) Devices – players designed especially for audiobooks. DAISY format offers enhanced navigation and bookmarking and is navigable often down to the page level.

Once you are registered with Learning Ally, you will be assigned a personal identification number that is used for all transactions. A one-time registration fee and an annual fee are charged for using the materials. These fees are usually covered by vocational or educational programs. Ask the IMC librarian about the application process.

The IMC can help you search for books through Learning Ally, or you can search yourself at the following address: <https://learningally.org/>. Learning Ally staff can generate subject or author bibliographies, which are useful for research purposes. They can also search their catalog for specific titles. Learning Ally maintains a toll-free customer service line at 800-221-4792. You can also fax your request to 609-987-8116.

After you have registered with Learning Ally and verified your status as a library user, you can begin ordering your books.

### *Find Out What Books You Need*

As soon as you have registered for classes, find out what books your instructors plan to use. Ask about textbooks, workbooks, manuals, and anything else they assign ahead of time. You can try several approaches to get this information.

1. Talk to the instructor personally. Explain why you need the information, and ask for it.
2. Talk to the department secretary and ask if the instructor has turned in the information. (The secretary may be responsible for forwarding the information to the bookstores).
3. Go to the bookstore and ask the textbook department to give you the titles and other bibliographic information you need for the books your instructors have ordered. (If you are registering in the spring for fall classes, the bookstore may not have this information yet.)

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### *The Information You Need On Each Book*

The IMC needs to have your textbook order a minimum of three to four months before your class starts and longer, a full semester, if at all possible, for math or music requests. This will give staff time to search for the book and to have the first part of it transcribed, if it is not already available. The IMC needs the following information, which is usually found on the title and copyright pages of the book:

- Title--Be sure it is complete.
- Subtitle--Be sure it is complete.
- Author or editor--First name, middle initial, and last name.
- Series--If appropriate. Be sure the series name is complete.
- Grade Level--If appropriate.
- Publisher--Company name and location.
- Copyright date.
- Edition--Name or number, if appropriate, and publication date.
- Translation--If appropriate.
- ISBN (International Standard Book Number) of the student copy.

Using the College Student Textbook/Educational Materials Request online order form is the most efficient method of supplying the IMC with your textbook information.

After IMC staff have conducted a search for your book, your IMC librarian will contact you with the results. You may be asked whether a different edition would be satisfactory. Your instructor can assist you with this decision.

If you are interested in receiving your textbooks in an electronic format other than .brf, the Office for Disability Services at your school can request other formats from the publisher. The Office for Disability Services needs to complete an e-text permissions form and send it to the publisher. Publisher files are usually provided in MS Word, ASCII, PDF, or other agreed upon format.

#### *Transcribing A Textbook*

If the book you need is not already available somewhere else, the IMC will arrange to have it transcribed.

You will need to send a print copy of the book to the IMC to get it transcribed. Go to your school's bookstore and buy a copy. Used copies are acceptable if they are in excellent shape and not marked up. If your bookstore does not have the book in yet (and there is a very good chance they will not) ask them to special order you a copy. When it comes in, send it immediately to the IMC so they can begin transcribing it for you. Be sure to include your name, choice of media (Braille, audio, electronic), transcription instructions, and shipping information with the print copy.

If class hand-outs or exam materials are available in advance in electronic form, they can be uploaded as an attachment on the IMC order form. Exams can be returned to the department chairperson rather than directly to the student to ensure exam confidentiality.

Ideally, you should get your book to the IMC at least three months before classes start. If you are not able to make this deadline, the IMC will still work with you, but they may not have your book completed by the time classes begin. If the IMC is unable to finish your book before classes start, they will send you installments of the book as they complete them. If you can provide a pacing guide showing when you will need particular sections of the book, the IMC and its volunteers can help make sure you have the material you need at the right time.

### *Transcription Instructions*

You can send instructions with your books if you know you will need certain items. For example, you should indicate whether or not you need detailed descriptions of photos, drawings, graphs, charts, and other visual aids. You should also indicate whether you will need appendices, glossaries, bibliographies, and similar material. If you experience any problems with recorded material, you should notify the IMC immediately. If the book is not finished yet, you can ask for adjustments in pronunciation, spelling, and the handling of visuals.

### *Thank Your Transcribers*

The volunteers who transcribe books for you spend a lot of time and energy on your behalf. As a courtesy, you should write to express your appreciation to the individuals who did your transcription. You can find their names at the beginning of the books, and you can send your "thank you" in care of the IMC.

### *Non-Textbook Material*

In addition to the textbooks, which you will get through the IMC, you will be expected to read material handed out in class, assigned at the library, and related to research projects. You will also have to read PowerPoint presentations, whiteboards, in-class assignments, and tests.

### *Get To Know Your Instructor*

At the beginning of each course, take a few minutes after class or during your instructor's office hours to introduce yourself. Explain briefly how you plan to handle PowerPoint presentations, whiteboards, and in-class assignments. This is a good time to ask your instructor to verbalize everything he or she puts on the whiteboard and as much as possible of the material on PowerPoint. You may want to ask your instructor for a printout of the PowerPoint presentation so that you can scan it or go over it with a reader outside of class. You should also explain that you may need to ask the person next to you to help you get the information and that this may entail talking quietly during a lecture. Explain to your instructor how you want to handle tests.

Remember, you should take the initiative in this conversation, telling your instructor what you need and how you prefer to proceed. DO NOT ASK HOW YOUR INSTRUCTOR WANTS YOU TO TAKE A TEST. EXPLAIN HOW YOU WANT TO DO IT. This approach generally gets you exactly what you want and demonstrates to your instructor that you are competent and resourceful.

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Throughout the course, feel free to utilize the resources your instructor offers, including office hours, study groups, and help from teaching assistants. Your goal is to master the material, and in order to meet that goal you should not hesitate to use all the resources available.

#### *Handouts*

Most instructors will hand out printed material periodically throughout the course. You may not be able to get this material in advance and will need to deal with it on a short-term basis. For this type of material readers are usually the best solution. Label each handout when you get it from your instructor. One easy way to do this is to Braille on the bottom of the paper with either your slate or your Braille, writing the date, the course, and any pertinent instructions. Braille on the paper will not interfere with your reader's ability to read it, and you will be able to keep track of your handouts and assign them to your reader as you need them.

#### *On Reserve*

Many instructors put books and articles on reserve at the library. This generally means that you have to go to the library and either photocopy the material or read it there. Photocopying the material will give you the flexibility to read it at your convenience. However, if your library has a place where you can work with your reader, you may choose to read it there. (Note: Whenever you photocopy a journal article, or a chapter from a book, make sure you include the title page of the book, magazine, or journal you copied because that page contains all the information you will need if you have to cite the article in a paper and you will not have to search for it again.)

#### *Library Research*

You may need to use a reader to help you with library research. A reader can help you read the card catalog, access the library's computer systems, locate books and magazines, photocopy, and read the information. Remember to stay in charge of your own research. Do not let your reader decide what books or articles you need.

You can also request assistance from the Instructional Materials Center (IMC) at the IDB Library to search for books or articles on specific topics. If you are working on a long-term project and have enough lead time, you may be able to get a lot of useful resource material this way.



### *PowerPoint and Whiteboards*

PowerPoint presentations and whiteboards are common teaching tools you will encounter in school. You have several options for getting the information you need. If you can see the board when you sit close to it, ask your instructor to allow you to do that.

Ask your instructor to verbalize everything he or she writes on the board. Generally, instructors will be happy to do this if you bring it to their attention at the beginning of the course. However, instructors are only human and they may forget. You can remind them by simply raising your hand and asking them to explain. You may also find it helpful to obtain a printed copy of your instructor's PowerPoint presentation for each lecture. In this way you can review the information later so that you do not have to talk during class.

Ask a fellow student. You may find it more convenient or appropriate to ask the person sitting next to you to tell you what is on the board or PowerPoint. If you choose this approach, make sure that you do not disrupt the class.

Arrange with another student to copy their notes. You can ask them to e-mail the notes to you, or you can photocopy the notes after class. If you choose this approach, make sure you choose a student who takes good notes and whose notes make sense to you later. You should not use this approach to get out of taking your own notes, but, if other students copy information from the board or draw diagrams or structures, this approach can be very helpful.

Some instructors will be willing to give you copies of their PowerPoint presentations or notes. You can ask them to do that if you need them. Finally, if you do not understand the material presented in class, or if you think you missed key points because they were presented using whiteboards, PowerPoint presentations, or for some other reason, ask your instructor about it after class if time allows. If not, make an appointment to talk to your instructor during office hours. Remember that your instructor's job is to teach you, and yours is to learn. Take advantage of office hours, study sessions, teaching assistants, and all the other services provided to you and all other students. One important way to maintain control over your life and your situation is to know what resources are available and to use them well.

### *Graphic Material*

You will probably encounter material throughout your studies which does not lend itself to simple, straightforward reading. Diagrams, graphs, tables, drawings,

maps, photos, and even cartoons may be part of your required reading. You have several options for dealing with this material.

If you can read print, graphic material may be an excellent use of that ability and you may also want to review the material with your reader after you have looked at it to ensure you noticed all parts of the material.

If print is not an option for you, you can have such material described to you by your reader or you can have it produced in tactile form. If the drawings are part of your text material, and if you allow enough lead time, the IMC may be able to arrange to have raised-line drawings produced. Limitations based on the complexity of the material need to be considered and this process requires specially-skilled braille transcribers. Such transcribers are usually in short supply, so you should give them as much time as possible to get it done.

If your reader is skilled in drawing, you can ask him or her to draw the figures for you on a raised-line drawing kit. (This kit is no longer sold by IDB but it is available through other sources.) Some students have found this particularly useful for chemical structures and similar models.

Most graphic material, including line and bar graphs, pie charts, flow charts, and tables, are designed to present information in visually accessible formats. You can glean the pertinent information from these graphics by understanding their formats well enough to ask your reader appropriate questions.

### *Math, Scientific Notation, Music, Foreign Languages, Linguistic Symbols, Computer Languages, And Other Nonstandard Text*

Many students who are blind have found that the most effective way to deal with nonstandard text is to have it transcribed into Braille. If your Braille reading skills are limited, or if you do not know the specialized codes for math, music, computer Braille, or other non-literary systems, you should consider studying Braille before you start your training. Ask your vocational rehabilitation counselor about options for Braille training.

Unfortunately, because of the shortage of Braillists qualified in specialized Braille codes such as math and music, you may have a longer turnaround time for these items. You may receive some of them in audio format, and other material you will have to read with a reader. Your success in dealing with this type of material will depend heavily on your ability to direct and supervise a reader. You may find it necessary to transcribe some of this material yourself. In this case, you will need to know the standardized codes or devise something of your own. You will

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also need to be able to instruct your reader thoroughly on how to present the material to you. We do not suggest that you spend your valuable time transcribing everything. However for critical pieces, you may find transcription is the only answer. Be careful to weigh the benefits against the time investment and Braille only those items which are critical to your success. (See CHAPTER 4 for more information about managing readers.)

### *Taking Tests*

You will need to make special arrangements to take tests. Because of this, you should talk to your instructor early in the course (preferably within the first week) to discuss how you will take tests and what other assistance you will need. Tell your instructor how you want to take tests. You have several options:

- Take the test orally from the instructor. Most students who are blind prefer not to do this, but occasionally this is the best solution.
- Take a reader with you to the test site, and have your reader read you the test and record your answers. Multiple-choice tests and short essay tests are easy to handle this way. Be sure that your reader can read the test accurately and will record your answers exactly. You will need a separate room to take a test with a reader, and you may also need to clear your choice of reader with your instructor in advance.
- Ask your instructor to record the test questions to a sound file. The file can be e-mailed or given to you on a flash drive. Then go to the computer lab or another supervised location and transcribe your responses. This approach is often best for a test with several essay questions requiring long answers.

You should be prepared to take your test at the same time and within the same time limits as your classmates.

### *Homework*

Type your homework assignments whenever possible. If your typing skills need improvement, talk to your vocational rehabilitation counselor about additional training in typing and/or computer use.

For some classes, such as math, you may have to dictate your work to your reader. Be sure that your reader understands the subject well enough to transcribe accurately.

Take charge of your reading, testing, and homework assignments. You are responsible for knowing how you can take a test, do in-class assignments, and handle homework. You are also responsible for explaining your techniques to your instructor well enough for the instructor to understand and be comfortable with your approach. Later, when you interview and get a job, you will be equally responsible for knowing and explaining to your employer how you will accomplish your work. Develop and practice your techniques now while you are in training.

If you have any questions or problems contact your vocational rehabilitation counselor. Your counselor can put you in touch with other students who are blind and have dealt with the same issues. Your counselor can also help you work through individual situations.

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## **CHAPTER 4**

### **READER SERVICE**

#### ***YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES***

1. Select a reader.
2. Train and supervise the reader.
3. Complete and mail all Monthly Reader Service Report forms on time.
4. Use your reader services wisely.

Develop techniques that allow you to get your reading done as efficiently as possible.

In order to succeed in college and on the job, you may need to use reader services. While you are in training, IDB may be able to provide funding to pay for reader services. Since, the contract will be between you and the reader you will select, train, supervise, arrange payment, and, if necessary, terminate the reader. This may be your first experience as a supervisor. This chapter explains how to select, train, schedule, supervise, and pay a reader. Remember, you are in control.

#### ***Contracting a Reader***

In order to select a reader, you must locate, screen, interview, and decide which applicant will best meet your needs.

#### ***Locating Applicants***

Many students on a college campus are looking for part-time work, and you can find excellent readers among them. You can also find readers in your community.

You can advertise for readers in a variety of ways. Here are some suggestions:

- Ask around. Someone you know may be able to direct you to a friend or acquaintance looking for part-time work. Networking is very important for anyone, including college students who are blind.
- Place ads on college and community bulletin boards. Be sure to include your name, telephone number, a brief description of the work, and any qualifications you require such as the ability to read French or recognize math symbols.
- If your college has the ability to send out campus-wide e-mails, you

may wish to take advantage of this. Include the same information in the e-mail that you would post on a college or community bulletin board.

- If your college has a central listing of jobs available on campus, ask to have your reader position listed there.
- If your college has an Office for Disability Services, you can ask if they have a list of potential readers.

### *Screening Applicants*

Once you have a list of applicants, you will need to screen them. Set up interviews with the applicants you think you might be suitable and compatible with you. Ask them about their schedules, how much time they would have during a week to read for you, and whether they have expertise in particular subject areas you are studying. This expertise is not generally necessary, but if they will be reading a foreign language, math, music, computer languages, or similarly specialized material, it could become important. Ask your applicants to read typical examples of your work. Take notes during the interview so you can refer to them when you make your selection decisions.

A formal interview will set the stage for your relationship with a reader. Remember, you are in control. Starting out on a professional level will help make this fact clear to a reader.

### *Selecting A Reader*

Be sure you make the final decision. Do not let someone else make a commitment on your behalf. Select those applicants who read well enough and quickly enough for you to get the most out of the time you spend with them.

You may want to contract with two or three readers at a time so that you have the most flexibility in scheduling them and can assign work according to their strengths. Sometimes volunteers are available to do reading for you. You should interview volunteers and make your selection on the same basis as a paid reader. You may find it more difficult to maintain a professional relationship with a volunteer and for that reason you should be cautious about using such services.

Two categories of people who are ineligible to be paid by IDB as a reader are your relatives and state employees. If you select a reader with the same last name as yours who is not a relative, be sure to explain this to your IDB vocational rehabilitation counselor. If you fail to make this report, your reader may not be paid.

A reader cannot be employed by any of the Board of Regents schools as IDB cannot pay anyone who is an employee of a state agency for services this includes students who may have part-time jobs or work-study jobs on campus.

### *Training A Reader*

You will need to take some time initially to train a new reader. Remember, they do not know what you need until you tell them. If you want material read in certain ways, you will have to explain the procedures you want followed. Make a list of basic procedures and thoroughly review it with each new reader. Some items you will need to include on that list are:

- The procedures and time frames involved in paying your reader,
- The schedule you expect to follow,
- The manner in which you want your material read, and
- The words such as names and technical terms that you want spelled routinely.

Your requirements will vary for different types of material. For example, if you are studying music, you will need to train your reader extensively in dictating music to you. You may need to teach a reader to use a raised-line drawing kit or to operate your digital recorder.

The more your reader understands what you want and need, the more efficient and satisfactory the reader services will be.

### *Supervising A Reader*

Once you have trained a reader, you will need to provide supervision, which includes planning work in advance, giving specific instructions when the reader arrives, and adjusting the reading style for different types of work. Feel free to stop a reader at any time. If necessary, ask to have passages repeated or skipped.

Plan your work in advance. Know exactly what you want to accomplish during each reading session, and make sure you have everything you need before the reader arrives.

Give the reader instructions for each reading session. Explain your plan for the session and how you want things done.

Limit the time of the reading sessions to allow the reader to remain sharp and maintain vocal clarity. Three hours is a suggested maximum for a reading session.

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### *Skimming And Scanning*

You should never allow a reader to decide what material is or is not important. However, if you tell a reader what you are looking for, and then use good skimming and scanning procedures, you can find the material you need without reading every word. You might ask a reader to read only headings or the first sentence of every paragraph. When you find something interesting, stop the reader and have the entire passage read.

### *Nonstandard Text*

You can also train a reader to read nonstandard text. You will probably have to experiment to see what works best for you with each type of text. You will have better luck if you train one reader specifically to handle one type of nonstandard text and use that reader all the way through a course. For example, if you are studying French, find a reader who can read French, provide training on the specifics you require, and use that reader for all your French work. You may assign math to another reader. For example, assign math to a reader who is familiar with mathematical equations, signs, and symbols.

### *Process for paying a reader*

During the interview process, and again when you finalize your reader selection, you need to inform the reader that you are contracting for reader services. This means that the reader is responsible for reporting all earnings to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and making any appropriate Social Security contributions. IDB views the reader as an independent vendor of services, not an employee. Therefore, no W-2 is issued and no taxes are withheld. If a reader is paid \$600 or more at the end of the year, the individual will automatically receive a 1099 form from the State. If paid less than \$600, the reader will not get a 1099 form.

You and your vocational rehabilitation counselor will determine a maximum amount IDB will pay for reader services each term. You need to keep a running total of the number of hours used. If you think you may exceed the maximum amount that was authorized, contact your vocational rehabilitation counselor, and discuss increasing your reader services authorization.

IDB has set a maximum hourly rate a reader is paid. Generally you will not be allowed to exceed this maximum hourly rate although you can contract with a reader for less. You may encounter some highly-specialized circumstances where you may have to pay more than the predetermined hourly rate to get a competent reader. If this happens, you need to talk to your vocational



rehabilitation counselor and get prior approval.

You are responsible for requesting Monthly Reader Service Report forms before the beginning of the college term. If you need additional forms, you may request them from your vocational rehabilitation counselor. Each form has an original and three carbonless sheets. You should send the original and the first two carbons to IDB accounting office as specified on the front of the form. Keep the last copy for your own records.

To receive payment, the following actions must be completed:

1. A reader must submit a completed W-9 form before being paid.
2. Keep detailed records of the time you spend with a reader and when the reader is working independently on a project. You will have to fill in the number of hours spent each day on the report form, so keep your records accordingly. Be sure each form contains all pertinent information including the address where the reader wants payment to be sent.
3. You need to determine when to submit the reader form to the IDB accounting office. You may decide to pay your reader on a monthly basis or it may be several months before you send in the form depending on how often the reader works for you. The reader form should be turned in within 30 days of the last day of reading listed on the form. (Note: Due to the fiscal year June and July reading services should never be on the same invoice. Any reading done prior to June 30 needs to be documented and the form must be received by the IDB accounting department no later than July 31).

A reader should read what you need in the manner in which you need it. If a reader does not keep appointments or does not read satisfactorily, you need to terminate the reader and hire someone else. This is not always easy to do, so be careful whom you select.

When a reader does a good job for you, be sure to provide appreciative feedback because people want to know when they have done well and will work harder for you if they feel appreciated.

Your thoughtful use of reader services will be critical to success in your training program. Later, when you get a job, you may need to hire and supervise readers to get some of your work done. The techniques you develop during your training will not only serve you now but also may be crucial to your success on the job.

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## **CHAPTER 5**

### **TAKING NOTES**

#### ***YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES***

1. Find the note-taking method which allows you to take notes quickly and read them back independently.
2. Practice taking, organizing, and studying notes before you begin your classes.

Like all other students, you will need to take notes in class, at the library, from your textbooks, during your research, and while you are writing your papers. You will need to find a way to take notes that allows you to keep up during lectures and that produces notes you can use later to study independently.

#### ***Methods for Taking Notes***

You have several options for taking notes. You can Braille them, audio record them, enter them into a laptop or Braille display, notetakers, or write your notes out by hand.

#### ***Electronic Devices***

Laptops, tablets, smart phones, and notetaking devices are all examples of devices that can be used to take notes.

On a laptop, tablet, or smart phone, a student will use an application on the device to take notes and then store the notes on the device itself.

If you are unsure of what works best for you, IDB has a loaner pool with electronic devices for you to access. You can request from your VR counselor.

#### ***Audio Recorders***

Another option for taking notes is to record the lecture on your smartphone, tablet, or digital recorder for personal reference.

#### ***Braille***

Braille can be written in class fast enough to take short notes to reference and can be read back at any time without assistance.

The most common method for taking Braille notes has been the Braille slate and stylus. Students have found that putting the slate on a pad of paper reduces the

noise to minimal levels. You can use whatever shorthand system you devise, and you can leave blank lines to separate sections of notes. Many students have found Grade III Braille useful for taking notes since it is an abbreviated form of Grade II and can be read back later without ambiguity. Ask your vocational rehabilitation counselor where you can learn Grade III Braille.

Taking Braille notes is a skill that you will use long after you have finished your training. On the job, and in your personal life, the ability to read and write Braille will give you untold flexibility and independence. If you need additional training in Braille, ask your vocational rehabilitation counselor to help you arrange it, preferably before school starts.

### *Long-Hand*

If you can see well enough to write notes in long-hand and then read them back, this method may be best for you. Bear in mind that if either writing or reading notes causes you eye strain, you should consider alternatives.

### *Taking Notes in Class*

No hard and fast rules exist to tell you how many notes you should take during a class. However, one thing is certain: You should never go to class unprepared to take notes.

You should note anything you think is important. Be sure to copy the information your instructor thinks is important enough to put on the white board or to have included in a PowerPoint presentation. Take as many notes as you need to recall and understand the material, but do not try to write down every word your instructor says.

Here are some additional tips for taking notes in class:

- Use abbreviations to speed up your note taking, but standardize them so they make sense later.
- Use new lines for new ideas and blank lines to divide sections.

### *Taking Notes from Text Material*

If you were a sighted student, you would probably highlight important passages in your text material to study later. You cannot do that with an electronic device. However, you can take separate notes on your text material and study them later. Here are a couple of hints students have found useful in taking notes from text material:

- Identify the source, including publication and page number, where the information can be found. This way you can go back and find the exact text if you need to do so. You may also need this information for bibliographic citations.
- Write only key phrases, headings, and ideas. Do not transcribe the book.

You will probably want to take notes while your reader is reading to you as well. Follow the same guidelines you would use with a recorded book. You can also ask your reader to highlight passages and then either tape them or reread them later.

Good notes on text material serve two purposes. First, they help you focus and understand the material you are reading. Second, they save you time. By reviewing your notes you may not need to reread the entire text before a test. In addition, good notes are essential for completing research projects. Develop the best system you can for taking and organizing notes.

In summary, you will use your note-taking system for the rest of your professional and personal life so spend as much time as necessary to develop the skills you need.

*Tips for Taking Useful Notes:*

- Use dashes for words when the speaker goes too fast. Leave space so that you can fill in details later.
- Use symbols to call attention to important words: underline, CAPS, circle, box, \*, !, ?, or › .
- When the instructor says, "This is important," get it exactly and \* (mark it). Get a reference to the text or other source if you can.
- Do not erase a mistake and do not black it out completely. Draw a single line through it. This saves time and you may discover later that you want to review the mistake.
- Abbreviate! Shortcuts like abbreviations are alternatives to writing everything longhand. Abbreviate only if you will be able to understand your own symbols when you go back to study your notes. Be constantly on the lookout for new and useful abbreviations and symbols to shorten your writing time. This will also increase your listening time.

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## **CHAPTER 6**

### **USING COMPUTERS IN COLLEGE**

#### ***YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES***

1. Identify the need for a personal computer and communicate with your vocational rehabilitation counselor.
2. If you are taking a personal computer or laptop to college, make sure it is equipped with the necessary software you will need including antivirus software, productivity software (such as Microsoft Office), and any assistive technology applications.
3. Seek out technology support staff on campus to get personal technology running on the campus network.
4. Arrange necessary training for accessing the campus network and online course materials.

If a personal computer is not working, seek out assistance from the college. Most colleges have technology support staff and may have loaner laptops available while your personal computer is being repaired

Computers are essential tools in the college environment and work setting. You may need to learn to use at least one, and possibly more, computer systems, not to mention the programs that they run. If you are not already comfortable with using a computer, you should strongly consider taking some computer training before you enroll in school.

#### ***Screen Access Options***

Generally, you have three options for accessing information on a computer screen. These screen access options include screen reading software, screen magnification programs, and refreshable Braille displays.

#### ***Screen Reading Software***

Screen reading software is generally the most efficient and versatile method for students who are blind and visually impaired to read a computer screen. There are several screen reading programs available for a Windows-based computer but the two most common screen reading programs are JAWS for Windows (developed by Vispero), NVDA (by NV Access). The screen reading program for a Mac computer (or iDevice) is Apple's own Voiceover screen reader, which is built into the device. All of these programs utilize the computer's internal sound card

to enable you to hear the speech. Additionally, all of these screen reading programs use a series of keystrokes, or gestures in the case of a touch screen device, to execute different commands. -Make sure you know how to use the screen reading program(s) for your personal needs and the technology devices you use.

### *Screen Magnification Programs*

If you have some usable vision, you may prefer to use a screen magnification program. There are several screen magnification programs available for Windows. Two of the more popular, robust options are:

ZoomText:<https://www.freedomscientific.com/products/software/zoomtext/>The Windows operating system has its own built-in screen magnification program called Magnifier: <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/use-magnifier-to-make-things-on-the-screen-easier-to-see-414948ba-8b1c-d3bd-8615-0e5e32204198>

Apple has its own screen magnification program called Zoom:  
<http://www.apple.com/accessibility/macosex/vision.html>.

A screen magnification program enlarges the image on the screen. Because of the program design, the enlarged image is usually crisper than it would be if you simply used a bigger screen. Like screen reading programs, each screen magnification program has its own set of commands for enlarging images and navigating the screen. If you choose to use such a program, learn to use it before school starts.

When deciding between a screen magnification program and a screen reading program, you should consider which one will be the most efficient for you. Screen reading technology with speech can make it possible to read text at hundreds of words per minute and it allows continuous reading of information for hours at a time. While screen magnification software does provide a mechanism for examining formatting and layout visually, it is important to evaluate whether you can use this technology to read efficiently and for long periods of time.

### *Refreshable Braille Displays*

The refreshable Braille display is a device which can be connected to your computer via the USB port or via Bluetooth connectivity. It relies on screen reading software to get its information. The term "refreshable" is used because

when you get to the end of one line, you press a key and the display is refreshed with the next line of text. Currently, there are several different types of Braille displays available, ranging from the 12-cell display all the way up to an 80-cell display.

One of the biggest advantages to having a Braille display is that it provides extremely high accuracy when reading or editing a document and can be an extremely helpful tool when reading table-oriented data such as an Excel spreadsheet. Some displays have a keyboard that allows the user to control the computer from the Braille display itself. The Braille display affords complete privacy when accessing the computer because it is very quiet, and the screen reader's speech can be turned off.

Disadvantages of Braille displays include cost, cells that can go bad, and yearly cleaning, which results in shipping and other costs to maintain the device.

### *Steps for Getting Started with Computers On Campus*

1. Find out what computer systems are available on campus, including whether any work stations are already equipped for people who are blind or visually impaired because some of the state universities and area colleges have adapted accessible work stations. Contact the admissions office, the Office for Disability Services, and the Technology Support Office to begin tracking down this information. You can also try the reference desk at the library.
2. Find out where the computers are located, what kind they are, and how they are equipped. Also find out what programs you will need to run. Ask your instructor whom you can contact to discuss any modifications you may need to make. Be sure you get specific answers to your questions.
3. Contact IDB and tell your vocational rehabilitation counselor what kind of computer you will need to use, for what you will need to use it, what programs you will need to run, and whom the IDB can contact about getting it set up for you to use.

4. Spend whatever time is necessary outside of class to learn to operate the computers you need. This will include not only the application programs, but also your screen access program.

5. Most colleges and universities have technical support personnel available to assist you with most computer problems you may encounter. However, these specialists will not have knowledge about screen access or other technologies for the blind. If you encounter problems with these specific programs, contact the manufacturer of your access technology. If you are unable to get the needed assistance from the college's technology support staff or from the vendor where the computer was purchased, you may contact a member of the Iowa Department for the Blind Information Access Services Team.

Learn to use the computer for the tasks that apply to your field of study. The computer will offer you many advantages and will be an essential tool that will help enable you to have a positive college experience. Technology will also help you after college in your career, so learn your skills well now so that you can bring them with you to an interview and to a work setting.



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## **CHAPTER 7**

### **LABS AND OTHER HANDS-ON TRAINING**

#### ***YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES***

1. Take the initiative in defining your role in lab work.
2. Learn all you can about the requirements in each lab situation.

Explain to your instructors and partners what you can do and how you plan to manage your lab experiences.

At some point during your training, you may be required to participate in a laboratory class. For the purpose of this chapter, all training situations which require hands-on participation in activities ranging from chemistry experiments to auto mechanics are included. The same general techniques apply to your current training and may be indispensable to your job performance in the future.

Lab classes and hands-on training generally have two goals. The first is to teach concepts. The second is to give students the skills necessary to actually do the work involved. When you approach a lab class for the first time, think about its goals and what you are expected to learn from that class. Will you be tested on information learned during the class? Will you be expected to perform a certain task?

You should expect to participate as fully as possible in all lab classes. At the end of the class, you should expect to know and understand the concepts taught and be able to take tests and write reports along with your classmates.

People who are blind have successfully taken everything from metalworking to microbiology. Their experiences have identified some successful approaches for gaining full participation in lab classes. Some ideas follow.

#### ***What You Can Do In A Lab***

You can, and should, participate as fully as possible in every lab situation. Never assume that just because you have not done something before that it cannot be done. If you do not know how to do something, get in touch with your vocational rehabilitation counselor, disability office, and other college students who are blind. They can share their experience with you. You will be better prepared to participate in each lab assignment if you do your homework in advance. Study and understand the background, procedures, techniques, and expected results of each lab before the class.

Examine all models, specimens, equipment, and materials that are not microscopic or dangerous to touch. Do not be afraid to get your hands dirty.

Understand each procedure thoroughly enough that you can either do it yourself or instruct your lab partner in carrying it out.

More and more measuring devices are being developed for students who are blind to use in hands-on situations. At the high-tech end is lab equipment designed to send readings to a computer. Students who are blind can interface with this equipment through computers. In the middle of the technology range are stand-alone devices such as talking thermometers and light sensors. Low-tech options include simple adaptations of such common devices as syringes, rulers, micrometers, and balances.

The key to using this technology is understanding what you need to do and then finding a resource person who can help you figure out how to do it. If you are signing up for your first physics lab, for example, contact your vocational rehabilitation counselor and ask to be put in touch with another person who is blind who has taken a physics lab. Ask for advice, techniques, successes, and information about things that did not work. Then try it yourself, using everything you have learned and your own creativity too.

#### *Finding Your Way Around Potential Obstacles*

You will probably find procedures in the lab that you will need to perform differently than your classmates. One alternative is to get the information you need by asking questions.

Learn to ask pointed questions that will elicit specific answers from your lab partners. Ask them to describe what they see in such clinical terms as colors, geometric shapes, specific or relative sizes, and proximity to other features. You can probably find the questions you need to ask in your lab manuals.

Ask to see models. If models of anatomical structures, chemical structures and other structures are available, you can learn a great deal by inspecting them closely.

Ask if you can use a larger specimen. One student, for instance, used a cow's brain instead of a rat's brain to locate and identify specific structures for the final exam.

Remember that for most procedures you can probably rely on the direct observations of your lab partner.

### *Professors, Lab Instructors, and Other "Benighted Souls"*

You may encounter some resistance from instructors when you sign up for a lab class. They may not understand how you can possibly gain anything from the class, and they will worry about everything from safety to fairness. You are responsible for guiding your instructors past the obstacles they impose.

To begin this process, contact your vocational rehabilitation counselor and ask for as much information as you can about the type of lab class you are taking. Ask to be put in touch with other people who are blind and have taken similar labs. Talk to these individuals and learn as much as you can about their experiences, their successes, and the things they have tried that did not work.

When you have done your "homework," make an appointment with your instructor. For best results talk to the instructor before classes begin. Explain to your instructor that you will be taking the lab class and that you intend to use alternative techniques wherever necessary to complete the work and gain the knowledge and experience the lab is designed to teach. Explain that you may need to work with a partner. Some labs require partner-work and this may not be an issue. Explain to your instructor how you will contribute to the partnership by studying the labs, taking notes, helping direct your partners, and performing hands-on work whenever possible. Tell your instructor that whenever you encounter something about which you are not sure, you will call on the resources you have available, including your instructor, lab assistants, experienced students, and professionals who are blind, and IDB to find a solution.

Be sure that you convey to your instructor throughout this discussion that you plan to take charge of your situation and will do everything you can to succeed.

### *Lab Partners*

You will probably be assigned to work with a lab partner. If you are not, you should request one.

You will need to explain to your lab partner what you can do to assist with each lab procedure. To do this, you will have to study your lab manual before the class and evaluate which procedures you can do independently and in which ones you will need a partner. Use this information when you and your partner divide up the work. You may, for example, volunteer to set up apparatus and record observations while your partner measures chemicals and makes the observations. Make sure your partner understands that you are a full and active participant in the lab.

### *Lab Tests and Quizzes*

You will have to take tests and quizzes in labs to demonstrate what you have learned. This may be one situation where you will prefer to take the test directly with the lab instructor or teaching assistant. Use three-dimensional models whenever possible and ask to interpret what your instructor sees under the microscope. Ask specific, clinical questions and draw your conclusions based on the information you gain.

### *Conclusion*

Lab situations provide excellent opportunities to practice your alternative techniques as well as your ingenuity and management skills. You will find numerous situations in your work place and in your community where you will need to define your role in order to participate in group activities or to get work done. Analyze the situation, evaluate your skills, and be prepared to explain to your instructor, your lab partner, or your employer how you will contribute to accomplishing the goals at hand. You know your own abilities better than most other people do, so you will have to take the initiative in showing them how you can and will participate.

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## **CHAPTER 8**

### **SOCIAL SECURITY**

***YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES*** (if you are a beneficiary)

1. Keep in touch with the Social Security Administration.
2. Report all earnings to the Social Security Administration.
3. Discuss your Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) with your vocational rehabilitation counselor or the Social Security Administration whenever you have questions.

Follow all Social Security Administration rules for reporting income and assets.

Many students who are blind are eligible for financial assistance through the Social Security Administration (SSA). You may be eligible for either Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance payments will help you pay living expenses while you are in school and afterwards they will help you get off to a good start on your job.

Both SSI and SSDI have work incentives built into the programs to help you get summer jobs, work part-time during school, and find and keep your permanent job once you have finished school. Work experience during school provides you with a major advantage when you are looking for your permanent employment. However, working may affect your eligibility for SSI or SSDI. That is why you need to know and understand the rules which govern payments to you while you are working. The following summary of SSI and SSDI work incentives and rules relates specifically to persons who are blind. Different rules may apply to people with disabilities other than blindness.

Eligibility and work incentives differ for SSI and SSDI. Talk to your vocational rehabilitation counselor about your specific circumstances. (Note: Scholarships and grants are not classified as income by the SSA as long as you apply them to educational expenses.)

#### ***Supplemental Security Income (SSI)***

If you are blind, and the value of your liquid assets (checking account, savings account, stocks, and bonds) totals less than \$2,000, or \$3,000 for an eligible couple (a married couple where both parties receive SSI), you may be eligible to receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments. These payments will be

made in full as long as you do not work and have no other source of income. However, if you do begin to work, the money you earn may affect your SSI payments.

The maximum amount you can earn and still draw SSI payments depends on your original SSI payment and how much your earnings are reduced by your work-related expenses. As long as you earn less than the maximum, you can continue to draw SSI indefinitely. This means that you could work at a part-time job throughout your training period and not lose all of your SSI.

Suppose, however, that you obtain a good-paying summer job. How will that affect your SSI payments? Two months after you begin working, if you earn more than the maximum your SSI payments allow, you will not receive any SSI. However, you will begin receiving SSI within two months after your job ends, if you have worked for less than 12 months. If you work longer than 12 months without receiving SSI payments and your job ends, you will have to reapply for SSI benefits.

You can accept summer employment and part-time work while you are in school and not have to give up your SSI payments. This makes it not only possible but actually advantageous to work because you can earn extra money and begin to build your résumé at the same time.

Remember that you will become ineligible for SSI if your liquid assets grow to more than \$2,000 (or \$3,000 for an eligible couple) unless you set up a Plan to Achieve Self Support (PASS). More information about PASS is provided later in this chapter.

### *Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)*

If you have worked in the past, you may be eligible to receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) payments. Social Security Disability Insurance's rules and payments are completely different from Supplemental Security Income.

If you are receiving SSDI payments, you can earn a certain amount of money each month without losing your SSDI payments. Unlike Supplemental Security Income, SSDI payments are not reduced according to how much you earn. You get either the full amount or nothing. You can earn up to the maximum allowable and still receive your full SSDI payment. However, if you earn anything over that amount, you will not receive any benefits for that month.

### *Social Security Disability Insurance Trial Work Period*

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) rules provide for a Trial Work Period as an incentive for you to try to get and keep a job. This trial work period lasts for nine months. If you earn more than a certain amount in a month, the Social Security Administration (SSA) counts that month toward your trial work period. You will receive your full SSDI benefits during all nine months of your trial work period, no matter how much money you earn during those months. The months in your trial work period do not have to be consecutive and can actually be spread out over five years. After you have used up your nine months of trial work period, the SSA gives you two additional months of full payments regardless of the amount you earn. After the trial work period, for any month that you earn more than the maximum allowable, you will not receive your SSDI payment for that month.

However, if at any time during the next three years you stop working, or your income falls below the maximum allowable, you can begin drawing your full SSDI payment again without a waiting period. If you work continuously for more than 36 months, and then stop working, you will have to either reapply for SSDI benefits or seek expedited reinstatement. In either case, you will not have to undergo a five-month waiting period before benefits resume.

How does this apply to part-time or summer work? You should not lose your SSDI benefits if you work part-time and earn less than the maximum allowable. The months you work may, however, be counted against your trial work period, a factor which will affect your benefits when you go to work full-time. If you get a good-paying summer or temporary job while you are still in school, and you earn more than the allowable amount, you should be aware of two possibilities:

1. If you have not used up your nine-month trial work period, then the months that you work will be counted against it.
2. If you have used up your nine-month trial work period, then while you are working and earning more than the maximum allowable, you may lose your benefits for that month. However, when the summer or temporary job is over, your SSDI payments will resume immediately.

You have two things to gain by working at part-time or full-time summer jobs while you are in school. First, you will have more money than you would have had relying only on SSDI. Second, you will be building your résumé and making it easier to get that full-time, permanent job when training is finished.

### *Keeping in Touch with the Social Security Administration*

WHENEVER YOU WORK, YOU MUST NOTIFY THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION (SSA). Keep them fully informed about your earnings at all times. It is recommended that you inform the SSA in writing of your earnings on a monthly basis. You should submit your pay stubs as well as any receipts for impairment-related work expenses. If you do not, they may send you checks you should not have received. When this happens, they will eventually figure it out and demand repayment of everything they overpaid. If you think you have received an overpayment from the SSA, put it in the bank in a separate account so that when they ask for it back, you will have it plus the interest it accrues. Save all check stubs and other documentation. You may need to send documentation to the SSA. In addition, you should save all letters from the SSA and make copies of all letters you send to them.

### *Plan To Achieve Self Support (PASS)*

The Social Security Administration (SSA) has another program designed to help you get started in your permanent career. This program, called Plan to Achieve Self Support (PASS), is intended to help you obtain the training and tools you need to get that full-time, permanent job. You can also use a PASS to update the technology (such as computer equipment) you use while you are working. Briefly, a PASS allows you to earn money and accumulate assets which are not counted against your Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance payments as long as that money or those assets are intended specifically to help you get a job. Ask your vocational rehabilitation counselor to explain the program in more detail.

Everyone's PASS is unique. Your PASS must be in writing and must be submitted to the SSA for approval. First, when you develop your own PASS, think in terms of a specific job goal because you will have to list the goal in your PASS. Next, figure out how long it will take you to achieve your goal. Do you need two years of vocational training? Will it take you 18 months to accumulate enough money to buy the equipment you need to start up a business? Unless you are in a training program, your PASS should not last more than three years.

The third step is to determine how much money you will need to set aside each month to achieve your goal. You will also have to show the SSA how you will keep this money separate from your general living expenses.

If you cannot complete your PASS within the time limits you specified, you can



submit a revised version to the SSA for approval. If you abandon your PASS or if you do not meet your goals at the end of the period you specified, the assets you have accumulated during the period of your PASS may be counted against the \$2,000 in assets you are allowed by SSI. If your assets exceed \$2,000 and you have not completed your PASS, the assets may make you ineligible for future SSI payments. Talk to your vocational rehabilitation counselor about writing a PASS. Rules for the PASS differ for SSI and SSDI and are outlined later in this chapter.

#### *Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and a PASS*

If you are receiving SSI and you set up a Plan to Achieve Self Support (PASS), the money you set aside in your PASS, even if it is money you are earning at a part-time job, will not be used when your SSI payment is figured. Therefore, if you set aside \$185 each month in your PASS toward your occupational goal, that \$185 will not reduce your SSI payments. If you earned that \$185 and did not have a PASS, the \$185 would reduce your SSI payment according to the formula outlined earlier. If you are setting aside a certain portion of your SSI payments every month, your SSI payments may increase to cover that amount.

#### *Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and a PASS*

If you receive SSDI, you can still develop a Plan to Achieve Self Support (PASS). Money you set aside in your PASS will be deducted from your income when figuring your eligibility for SSI. Therefore, you may qualify for SSI in addition to your SSDI during the period that your PASS is in effect. If you are already receiving SSI benefits, your payments may increase during this period as well. Remember, however, that if you do not complete your PASS and do not get a job or otherwise achieve self-support, you may have to pay back the amount you set aside.

The amount you set aside in your PASS will also be deducted from any earnings you have when the Social Security Administration figures your eligibility for SSDI payments.

#### *Conclusion*

The advantages of working at part-time or summer jobs during your training are two-fold. First, you can make extra money. Because of the incentives built into SSI and SSDI for you to become self-supporting, you will come out ahead financially if you work while you are in school. Second, and of equal importance, is that working will build your résumé, and that work experience will help you get a job after your training is finished.

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## **CHAPTER 9**

### **PREPARING FOR THE JOB SEARCH**

#### ***YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES***

1. Equip yourself with all the skills, both personal and professional, that you will need to perform your job.
2. Find part-time or temporary employment whenever possible.
3. Take advantage of practicums, internships, work experience opportunities, volunteer opportunities, and leadership roles.
4. Prepare a professional résumé.
5. Take the initiative to explain to a prospective employer how you will perform the job for which you are applying.

Plan, practice, critique, and follow up.

The whole reason for spending the time and effort in a training program is to get a job and begin the career of your choice. Preparing yourself personally and professionally for the job search will be as important as the search itself. Your social skills, work experience, work ethic, references, résumé, and approach to interviews will all bear directly on your ability to land the job you want. Therefore, you should begin preparing long before the time comes to actually start interviewing. Your training is a big part of your preparation, but it is not the only part.

#### ***Alternative Techniques***

Learn and practice your alternative techniques. If your travel, Braille, typing, and daily living skills do not allow you to function as independently and competently as your sighted peers, work to improve them. You cannot expect an employer to take you seriously if you are not as proficient as other potential employees. Grooming, hygiene, self-presentation, and self-confidence all play a role in the way people perceive you. Take charge of your training in these areas. Discuss ways you can practice, improve, and excel in these areas with your vocational rehabilitation counselor. Take time to get training from IDB if it will help you. The important thing is to be able to present yourself to a prospective employer as a self-confident and capable professional. Since you cannot do this overnight, start working on it now.

### *Work Experience Is Vital*

Any work experience is better than none. By taking part-time or summer jobs, even if they have nothing to do with your field, you will demonstrate to a prospective employer that you can handle employment situations and perform useful and constructive work. Your supervisors will also be able to serve as valuable references when you begin to look for that permanent job.

Working at summer and part-time jobs will give you practice in solving on-the-job challenges related to your blindness. Your ability to take charge of and deal with these challenges will be a positive asset later on. Volunteer work is also of value.

### *The Courses You Choose*

If you have latitude in choosing courses during your training, consider taking courses that will bear directly on your projected work. Choose practical, specific, hands-on courses that may result in projects completed for a portfolio or project list. Finished work can often be an excellent selling tool when you are interviewing.

### *Portfolios and Projects*

Assemble any work you have done into a portfolio or project description book. Types of projects you might include are: writing samples, lesson plans, computer programs, art projects, reports, or marketing plans. You can also include letters of reference or endorsement. Samples of your work and descriptions of completed projects may help convince an interviewer of the caliber of your work. Continue building your portfolio or project description book throughout your training. Use class projects, internship and practicum projects, and anything that you do outside of the training setting that might be relevant.

### *Practicums and Internships*

Many training programs offer practicums and internships as electives. Often these are unpaid work experiences for which you can acquire college credit. Investigate the possibility of participating in an internship or a practicum as early as possible. Such experiences are excellent opportunities for you to practice not only doing the work for which you are training, but also handling blindness-related issues which may come up when you begin interviewing for a permanent job. By working in an internship, you can find alternative techniques relevant to your particular field. You can explain these techniques later during an interview and implement them on a permanent job.

Another benefit of completing practicums and internships is that you will acquire references from people in your chosen field. These references may carry greater weight than other job-related references.

### *Your Résumé*

A résumé is a short history of your qualifications for a job. Résumés can take many forms and, in some cases, may be more than one page. Yours should contain information about you that will convince a potential employer to offer you an interview for a job. When you select the information to include, ask yourself these questions:

- Does a potential employer care about this?
- Will this information help an employer see how I can benefit their organization?

A résumé is a sales tool. Use it to highlight your strengths, skills, and characteristics.

The information your résumé contains should include demographic information, qualifications, educational background, and work experience. It may also include personal information, a career objective specific to the job, a notation about references, and honors and activities. Many resources are available to help you write your résumé.

What about blindness? You cannot and should not try to hide your blindness from a prospective employer. However, your résumé may not be the best place to disclose this information. Just as you would not include other personal characteristics on the résumé, you may choose to deal with your blindness in some other way. More information about this will be addressed later in this chapter. If, however, you are applying for a job where blindness might be an asset, then you would want to mention it on the résumé.

### *The Interview*

You will need to find the best way to handle your blindness relative to an interview. People do not like to be surprised. If you walk into an interview without the interviewer knowing in advance that you are blind, you will probably catch the interviewer off guard. If this happens, your interviewer may not be very willing to take you on your merits. If, on the other hand, you announce your blindness too early in the hiring process, you may never get an interview. One possible solution is to arrange the interview and then, after it is arranged but

before you actually arrive, let the interviewer know that you are blind. You can do this at the end of the telephone call that arranges your interview, or you can make a separate call. Do not apologize for your blindness. Experience has shown that this courtesy will advance your possibilities of a successful interview.

Take the initiative on questions about your blindness. Employers should not ask direct questions about an individual's disability; however they may internally be questioning how you will do the job. Be prepared to explain fully in matter-of-fact terms. Be careful to make your interviewer understand that you will take the responsibility for finding the alternative techniques you need to do the job.

Follow up your job interview with a thank-you note because doing so will present another opportunity for you to focus the interviewer's attention on you and provide another forum for stating your interest in the job. Do not delay, though. Write the thank-you note as soon as possible after the interview, preferably within 24 hours because hiring decisions are often made quickly.

The primary reason you are embarking on the training course you have set is so that you can get a job and begin a career in the field of your choice. Therefore, focus on that primary goal when you make each decision in the training and job search process. Continuously develop and strengthen your self-confidence, skills in alternative techniques (such as travel and Braille), contacts, and your résumé. Like the training process itself, preparing for the job search and the interview also takes time, planning, and focus. Do not leave anything to the month before graduation. Begin building now so that when the time comes for that all-important series of job interviews, you are ready. Your school's placement office and your vocational rehabilitation counselor are good resources in your job search process.