

Tips for Teachers and Education Assistants

Adapted from Statewide Vision Resource Centre - J. Northcott

Strategies for the Classroom

Please note the following is a guide only and not all of these recommendations will apply to all students.

* Strategies/modifications/adaptations should always be done in consultation with the Teacher of the Visually Impaired.

Teaching Strategies

- use white or yellow chalk on a clean chalkboard
- use black felt pens on whiteboards
- avoid glare on whiteboards
- consider using a contrast background colour on SmartBoards
- read out loud as you write
- reduce visual clutter
 - reduce unnecessary detail on worksheets and on the chalkboard
- each student will have his/her own distance for reading
 - Don't be concerned if this distance is very short. Young students are able to focus at short distances.
- using reading stands may help avoid back and neck pain for the student
- watch for signs of vision fatigue such as red or watering eyes, rubbing eyes and/or headaches
 - Allow for rest breaks and use non visual activities such as listening to taped materials from time to time.



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- alleviate visual fatigue by modifying the number of exercises a student has to complete
 - e.g. in mathematics the student could do every second question
 - **be mindful of reducing exercises and/or questions – students need to have a good foundation of the concept being taught**
- verbalize activities using directional language e.g. today's math is on the second section of the blackboard nearest to the door
- allow time for the student to explore materials at a close distance
 - e.g. ask the student if he/she would like to help demonstrate an activity or have a model available so the student can examine close at hand.
- allow the student to hand out materials, this will help him/her to know where the other students in the class are
- avoid standing with the window behind you
- provide verbal cues e.g. say the student's name and verbalise what is about to happen
- use verbal feedback as the student may not see a smile or nod of the head
- ensure all relevant staff are aware of the student's vision impairment and the related implications
- leave an information sheet so substitute teachers are aware of the student's requirements

Environmental Considerations - Contrast

- contrast work areas by using contrasting coloured cloth, a coloured tray or a place mat to define work areas
- make objects more visible
 - e.g. by putting stripes on a drinking cup with coloured

tape

- consider areas in the school environment which need to be made more visible
 - e.g. edge of steps, outlining a light switch, defining doorways
 - a painted strip (usually yellow or white) can be used to provide greater contrast in these areas
- a class teacher wearing bright clothes is easy to find, particularly when on field trips, sporting events etc.
- when producing materials for a student, consider contrast
 - Does the student require bold lines around pictures or diagrams?
 - Is colour appropriate to use to highlight?
- bold line paper and black felt tipped pens increase contrast for a student when printing/writing

Environmental Considerations - Lighting

- ensure lighting conditions are appropriate to the student's vision impairment
 - i.e. Does the student require high or low levels of illumination?
- additional lighting may be required
 - e.g. use of a desk lamp to increase the contrast on the work surface
- a small flashlight or battery operated light can be useful for a student experiencing difficulties in areas of low illumination e.g. school locker, school bag and dark corners of a room
- consider lighting conditions in all areas of the school environment (inside and outside) in which the student will be operating
 - e.g. stairs, covered walkways, locker areas and washrooms

Environmental Considerations - Glare

- Is the student sensitive to glare e.g. photophobia?
- avoid positions where the student is facing a light source (natural or artificial)
- teach from a position without a light source coming from behind you
- consider sunglasses and a hat for the student, even when working inside but particularly when outside in the playground
- reduce glare in the classroom
 - e.g. use blinds, curtains, posters to cover windows producing glare
- reduce glare on tasks, work surfaces etc. e.g. avoid using glossy paper
- some students find white paper gives off too much glare, try pale coloured paper or a coloured overlay
- place computer screens to minimize glare
 - Try using a black background on the screen.
 - A three sided shield around the monitor may reduce glare.
- allow time for the student to adjust to different lighting levels when moving from outside to inside or vice versa

Environmental Considerations - Seating

- discuss seating with the teacher of the visually impaired, physiotherapist and/or occupational therapist
- consider vision impairment –
 - Where is the student's best field of view for presenting work? (including null position for students with nystagmus)
- consider low vision aids
 - If the student is using a telescopic aid, they may need to sit towards the back of the room.

Environmental Considerations - Organization

- keep classroom environment static, this helps the student with orientation to the classroom
- alert student to any changes in the room layout
- a student may need extra storage room for equipment

Time

- a student with a vision impairment may require additional time to investigate a visual information
- a student may require additional time to complete set work
- allow the student additional organizational time e.g. when asked to pack up and collect school bag, coat and homework

Visual Responses

- for a student with additional disabilities the responses to a visual stimulus may be subtle
 - e.g. turning head to avoid stimulus, turning head to look, body startling, widening of eyes, blinking, increase or decrease of body activity, a change in breathing patterns and/or smiling
- record the responses the student uses (including the stimulus responded to) for future reference
- make use of checklists
- share the information with others involved in the student's program
- work with a partner when observing visual responses
- learning may be subtle and occur slowly over time
 - 'Effective' evaluation requires careful programming and assessment.

Size

- consider the size used
 - e.g. toys, object
 - Do diagrams need enlarging or reducing?
- record student responses to different sizes
- consider the size of print the student requires to access information

Remember:

Students who are blind or visually impaired deserve “the opportunity to be equal and the right to be different.”

Dr. Phil Hatlen,

Stepping Back

19 Ways to Step Back

An Excerpt from Classroom Collaboration by Laurel J Hudson (Ph.D)

We should, of course, be available to our students when they need us. To avoid teaching them to be overly dependent, though, keep in mind:

1. Acknowledge your impulse to make student's days go smoothly. There's a reason you chose the helping profession.
2. Pause before answering or helping.
3. Sit on your hands for a whole task while you practice giving verbal instead of touch cues.
4. The handicap associated with vision loss only stems from lack of information. Pat yourself on the back every time you help with seeing but resist helping with thinking.
5. Schedule in advance a brief task or time period when you commit to no intervention ... no matter what (unless safety is compromised). See what happens. Reintroduce assistance only as needed.
6. Sit further away. If you have been within arm's reach, sit just within earshot. If you have been sitting within earshot, sit across the room.
7. Take data instead. Keep a tally of the number of times in a lesson students appropriately go to their classroom teachers instead of other adults.
8. Call on students' learning partners or sighted guides.
9. Unless you are the classroom teacher, catch yourself before you correct students' work. Remember, this is about students' skills ... not yours.



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10. Teach students to decline assistance: "Thanks, but please let me try it by myself."
11. Phase out cues.
12. Have students discreetly ask their classmates for information (what page they are on, what is the school lunch, who the teacher is talking to, etc.). Coach them to do this on the telephone in the evening as well as during school hours.
13. Remind yourself that you're stepping back so that students can become independent. It's harmful when you cover for them. Don't be responsible for holding them back in this area.
14. Make sure that team members (especially the principal) know your reasons for stepping back so it doesn't seem like you are shirking your responsibilities.
15. Clock how long it takes for students to do things independently. The extra time to start zippers, pick up dropped papers, or find page numbers may seem eternal but actually last only a few seconds.
16. Tell other adults in the classroom that you're going to step back and ask them to remind you when you should do this.
17. Let classroom teachers serve as clearinghouse for questions or needs. Students ask their classroom teachers. The classroom teachers then decide to (a) respond themselves, (b) delegate to other adults or students to help, or (c) ask the students to try to work it out alone.
18. Let your students make mistakes and get into trouble. It's part of the human experience!
19. Post a sign, "Could I be doing less?"

It is important for us all to remember that from time to time we need to step back.