# Accessing Digital and Physical Spaces at Your College/University: Questions and considerations when meeting with a blind/visually impaired student

## Important things to keep in mind:

No blind/bisually impaired student is the same, and that is just one aspect of their identity. . In addition to external barriers that already exist for B/VI students to accessing and navigating digital and physical spaces in higher education, other factors can have varying degrees of impact:

* Geographic location/physical environment, intersectional minority status, and systemic inequity which can limit a B/VI student's access to services, technology, and training.
* Other disabilities that impact their functioning in such areas as information processing, focus, mobility, and mental health.
* When and how their vision loss occurred

**Access is more than being able to interact with a website using a screen reader or having a clear path of travel throughout campus.**

## Digital Access

### Accommodation History

How did the student access/participate in academics in the past? What worked and what didn't, and why?

Examples:

* Accessing a Learning management system such as Canvas or Blackboard
* Accessing textbooks and other reading materials
* Accessing visual content during classes and online lectures
* Taking notes in class
* Class participation, including completing in-class assignments, in-class quizzes, and in-class group activities
* Accessing and participating in labs
* Completing assignments outside of class, including accessing journal articles, and math and science homework
* Testing, including testing in a lab setting
* How has the student communicated and advocated for themselves with instructors in the past? How does the student plan to do this in the future?
* What about communicating and advocating for their needs regarding accommodations? Unlike K-12, the student will need to be proactive in seeking accommodations and working with disability services staff.

### Technology:

What operating systems is the student most familiar with and comfortable using? Examples:

* Windows PC
* Mac
* iOS / iPad OS
* Android phone or tablet
* Chromebook

what assistive technology have they used in the past and/or are currently using? Examples:

* Screenreader software, magnification software, or a combination
* Electronic and/or handheld magnifiers
* Braille display or braille notetaker
* Any specific mobile apps

Besides assistive technology, what additional supports have they used in an academic setting? Examples:

* In-class assistant
* Reader/scribe for tests
* Audio description for in-class or assigned videos
* Use of a visual interpreting service such as Aira

### Other questions and considerations

* Do they mainly use typing or dictation to input text? This will impact the way they complete assignments, take notes, and take tests.
* Inquire about accommodations the student might need that require advanced planning, such as hard copy braille and/or tactile drawings for math and science classes.
* Discuss with the student the file format that works best for them if they need digital textbooks and reading material. Does the student need these to also include image descriptions?
* Identify situations where an in-class assistant might be needed, such as in a lab setting.
* Consider situations where an Aira subscription might be a reasonable accommodation, such as providing the student with descriptions of visual content in the moment.

### Further Considerations:

* Many B/VI students graduate high school with inadequate computer skills, including typing. It is not uncommon for a BVI student to have only used an iPad in K-12, and this typically will not be sufficient for college.
* Is the student receiving services from VR? Do they have access to technology and tech training? Many B/VI students had technology provided to them through their school district and may not have their own without support from VR.
* If the student is receiving services from VR, does a partnership exist between the DS office and VR on providing accommodations? For instance, some college DS offices provide readers for tests, but VR pays for readers for homework.
* Are there options through the university for the student to access assistive technology; e.g., library computers and/or loaner laptops with screen reader software? If so, does the university provide any assistive technology training?
* Did the student encounter any barriers in filling out the application for services with your office?

## Physical Access

### Getting Around Campus

Examples of possible questions to ask:

* how did the student navigate their academic environment in the past?
* How comfortable does the student feel about navigating campus;e.g., finding buildings and classrooms, and navigating campus housing, dining halls, and getting to other services such as the campus health center?
* Did the student encounter any barriers in finding your office?
* Is the student connected with services that provide orientation and mobility instruction?
* Does the student have other strategies for learning the campus if necessary?
* If they have a guide dog, do they have any questions; e.g., places to take the dog out and/or location of outdoor trash cans?
* Do they have any questions about the local public transit system, including bus stops on or near campus?
* Did they have difficulties in finding your office?

### Considerations:

* Although it is not reasonable to provide an accommodation to the student for someone to walk them wherever they need to go on campus, it can be helpful to give specific directions that are not contingent on visual information; e.g., "take the second sidewalk on your left" rather than "turn when you see the blue building."
* If an Aira subscription has been determined to be a reasonable accommodation for the student, or if your campus is part of the higher education Aira network, the student can also use Aira for assistance in navigating campus.