CHALLENGES TO LEARNING

You may have a disability that affects how you learn. Having a disability does not have to prevent you from going to college. This page includes information about your rights, ways to study, and services available to you.

What are the laws that protect students with disabilities who want a college education?

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
This law protects the civil rights of students with disabilities. Schools may not discriminate against students solely because of their disability. This means that students with disabilities cannot be denied financial assistance or benefits, and they cannot be excluded from participating in activities because of their disability. Examples of qualified disabilities include AIDS, arthritis, cancer, deafness, mental retardation, speech disorders, and more.

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
Title II protects the rights of people with disabilities to make sure they can benefit from all state and federal government programs and services, including public education.

Common Questions about Disabilities and College

The Department of Education Office of Civil Rights website has answers to common questions college students have about disabilities, like these:

May a college deny my admission because I have a disability?
No. If you meet the essential requirements for admission, a college may not deny your admission simply because you have a disability.

Do I have to tell a postsecondary school that I have a disability?
No. It’s your decision to tell the school about your disability. However, if you want the school to provide you with services related to your disability, you must identify yourself as having a disability.

If I want services related to my disability, what must I do?
You must inform the school that you have a disability and need services. Unlike your local school district, your postsecondary school is not required to identify you as having a disability or assess your needs.

Do I have to prove that I have a disability to get services?
Generally, yes. Your school probably will require you to provide documentation that shows you have a current disability and need services.
What documentation should I provide?
Schools may require you to provide documentation from a medical doctor, psychologist or other qualified diagnostician. The documentation may include a diagnosis of your current disability; the date of the diagnosis; how the diagnosis was reached; the credentials of the professional; how your disability affects a major life activity; and how the disability affects your academic performance. The documentation should provide enough information for you and your school to decide which services are best.

Visit the Office of Civil Rights website to find out more. Scroll down to read more questions and answers. [www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html)

Strategies to Prepare for Classes

- Participate in orientation programs. These programs provide opportunities to become familiar with campus life and to ask questions of continuing students and advisors about classes, faculty, resources, and services.
- Don't procrastinate. Do not wait until the last minute to begin gathering information about courses and professors. Most Offices for Disability Support Services will allow students with disabilities to begin registering a few days before other students.
- Talk to other students. They can be an excellent source of information about classes and professors.
- Audit (visit) classes. It is possible to observe a class for a limited period of time to determine whether this is the right class for you. Students who audit a course are not responsible for exams or assignments.
- Check the internet. Most colleges and universities offer course information online, including the syllabus (outline of the course), objectives, textbook, readings, and assignments.
- Meet the professor. Professors have office hours to answer questions about the course. Getting the textbooks and reading list ahead of time also allows students an opportunity to get a head start on the course.

-Taken from ERIC EC Digest #E620 by: Juliana M. Taymans and Lynda L. West, Dec. 2001.

Online Resources for Students with Disabilities

State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies
These agencies provide counseling, evaluation, and job placement services for people with disabilities. Scroll down to find your state to find contact information. [wdcrobpcolp01.ed.gov/Programs/EROD/org_list.cfm?category_cd=SVR#M](http://wdcrobpcolp01.ed.gov/Programs/EROD/org_list.cfm?category_cd=SVR#M)

Disability.gov
From the home page, click on “Education,” then click on “Higher Education.” Click on a topic to learn about financial aid, programs for students with disabilities, and more. [www.disability.gov](http://www.disability.gov)
Information and Resources for Students with Specific Disabilities

Here is information about specific disabilities, suggestions for study, and services your college may provide to help you do your best at school.

Students with Learning Disabilities

*What is a learning disability (LD)?*
Learning disabilities are neurological disorders. Having LD makes it difficult for a person to understand what they see or hear or to connect information they get. People with LD may have problems understanding what they read or what others say. They may find it hard to pay attention. All these factors can make it difficult for a student to learn in school. Learning disabilities are life-long.

*LD Online*
From the home page, click on the links to find out about LD, read questions and answers, find resources, and more. To visit the section especially for college students, click on “LD Topics,” then click on “College and College Prep.” To find out about getting evaluated, click on “Questions + Answers” and then click on “Evaluation/LD Testing.”
[www.ldonline.org](http://www.ldonline.org)

Students with Dyslexia

*What is dyslexia?*
This type of LD makes it difficult to read and write words and usually also numbers. People with dyslexia are usually creative, empathic, and have good physical coordination.

*International Dyslexia Association*
The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping individuals with dyslexia, their families and the communities that support them. Their goal is to provide the most comprehensive forum for parents, educators, and researchers to share their experiences, methods, and knowledge.
[www.interdys.org](http://www.interdys.org)

*Dyslexia at College*
This website is filled with study tips and techniques especially for college students with dyslexia.
[www.dyslexia-college.com](http://www.dyslexia-college.com)

Students with Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD)

*What is ADD/ADHD?*
ADD/ADHD is a neurological disorder. The principal characteristics of ADD/ADHD are inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.

*ADDitude: College Advice for ADHD Students*
Click the page numbers to continue reading the article. Click the links in the article for more tips.
Students who are Hard of Hearing/Deaf

Get in touch with the disability services office at your school and see what assistance they have available. One example is an assistive listening device that helps you hear the instructor in class. Or, your school may provide someone to interpret for you in classes and meetings with teachers.

Students with Visual Impairment/Blindness

Contact your school’s disability services office to find out what assistance they can provide for you, such as note takers to take class notes for you or computers that can read books out loud.

Living Blind
Living Blind offers good advice. On the home page, click on “College,” then click on the links for useful suggestions on preparing for classes, getting materials in alternative formats, and more.

www.livingblind.com

Tools and Technology to Support Learning

Reading Online

BrowseAloud
This is free software that reads web pages out loud to you. On the home page, click on “Download” and follow the instructions.

www.browsealoud.com

Read Please
This is free text-to-speech software to help you read web pages as well as documents in Windows-based operating systems such as Windows 2000 or XP.

www.readplease.com

Reading Books

If you have trouble reading books because the print is too small or you read too slowly to finish your class assignments, you have several options:

Large Print Books
Many books come in large-print format. If you are buying your school books online, type “large print” in the search bar along with the title. If you are buying your books at the school’s bookstore, ask for the large-print copy or ask the staff to order a large-print copy for you.

Classic Books Online
This website has classic novels online. This might be good for you if you take an English literature class. You can choose the font and background for easier reading. Best of all, it’s free! Type a book title in the search box or click on “Electronic Library” to search for an author. When you click on a book, you can choose the background color, font style, and more. Click in the text box and scroll down to continue to read the book.

www.classicbookshelf.com
Books on Tape or CDs

Many books come in tape or CD format. You can check if your college library or your local library has the book you are looking for and then borrow it for free.

Electronic Audio Books

**Audible.com**
This website offers popular books (fiction and nonfiction), not textbooks. You must be a member to enjoy this website. Each month the service emails you one or two books, depending on which membership plan you choose. The membership fee also entitles you to a free or discounted MP3 player. On the home page, click on “What is Audible?” to find out more.

[www.Audible.com](http://www.Audible.com)

**Audio Books For Free**
This website has about 1,500 titles. It is a good website to check out if you’re not sure you want to pay for a service like Audible. Read the home page for more information, then click on “Enter our website.”

[www.audiobooksforfree.com](http://www.audiobooksforfree.com)

**Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic**
This organization has over 95,000 recorded books in their catalog. To access the recordings, you must be a member. On the home page, click “Membership Information” for more information.

[www.rfbd.org](http://www.rfbd.org)

Note-taking Tools

**Digital Voice Recorders**
This is a great tool for class if you have trouble keeping up with the professor. A digital voice recorder is like a tape recorder without the tape. You can listen to your professor’s lecture again and fill in the blanks in your notes. These are available at office supply stores.

**AlphaSmart / Quickpad**
If you have trouble taking notes by hand, then you should consider getting an AlphaSmart or Quickpad. AlphaSmart and Quickpad are simple, less expensive versions of a laptop computer. You can type and make charts in both. You can connect it to your computer or to the school’s computer and load your files.

**Specialized Keyboards**
If you do not have the use of both hands to type, have impaired vision, or other special needs, ask your school’s computer lab assistant about special keyboards. One option is the Dvorak keyboard, which places the most-used letters near one another so that you only have to use one hand to type. If you are working on a computer that has Windows 95 or later, you can change the keyboard setting to Dvorak. (There are stickers available that you can place over your current keys to match the Dvorak layout.) Check the website below for more kinds of keyboards.

[www.hooleon.com](http://www.hooleon.com)