

# **Towards Success in Tertiary Study with Vision Impairment**

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The **Towards Success in Tertiary Study** series web address is at:  
<http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/towardssuccess/>

Contact your Disability Liaison Officer at your institution for information on alternative formats.

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## **WHY READ THIS BOOKLET**

This booklet has been written for students who are studying or intend studying at tertiary level who are blind or vision impaired. The strategies included here bring together the experiences of many students, staff and support organisations. The booklet also builds on existing resources, both print and electronic media.

### **Studying with Vision Impairment**

Studying with vision impairment can indeed be challenging, but students who are blind or vision impaired generally have determination, adaptability and assertiveness skills enhanced by their life experiences. A major difference between school and tertiary institutions, however, is that at tertiary institutions support is available whereas in a tertiary learning environment the responsibility for accessing that support is yours.

At tertiary level **you** are responsible for learning material, submitting assignments on time and approaching lecturers and tutors if you do not understand a topic. By adopting a range of independent study strategies, and by using the various services available at universities, students with vision impairment can maximise their chances of success.

## **HOW DOES VISION IMPAIRMENT AFFECT STUDY?**

You might find it useful to explain to friends and lecturers that vision impairment and blindness may consist of partial central/peripheral vision loss or complete vision loss. About 75% of people with vision impairment have some useable vision. However, the needs of each student with vision impairment will vary according to the nature of the eye condition and its fluctuations due to lighting conditions, fatigue or degree of degeneration. Hence it is important for you to explain **your** individual needs to university staff. A vision information sheet from the blindness agency in your state may be of some assistance

Vision impairment can impact on learning in a number of ways. Students will need more time to complete tasks as it can take them three to four times longer to complete assignments than an average student. This is not because of any cognitive aspects but simply because of the practicalities of the tasks requiring many more intermediary steps and much more reliance on adaptive

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technology and external agencies such as **Talking Book** and **Braille** libraries. It is also important for students with vision impairment to prepare and network early and become involved in tertiary activities.

**“...I was really excited about getting into uni that I wanted to live up to the challenge and was determined to study full-time. After I realised how different the learning process is at uni compared to school, and also because of the time lag involved in getting books and resources in alternative formats, I decided to go part-time. It was the best thing for me so that I could really achieve better marks and also enjoy the social side of university...”**

Vision impairment effects vary widely from student to student and can affect study in different ways. Some of the possible effects include:

- the development of effective time management and organisational skills to allow independent study
- the need for longer time to complete tasks
- the need to access information through sound, touch or reduced vision
- the recording of information through sound, computer or braille
- alternative notification arrangements of information on notice boards
- reliance on readers for more immediate text readings
- greater need to sustain concentration and motivation due to the lack of visual stimuli and the greater time required to access information and produce assignments
- the need to have appropriate breaks to reduce eye strain and fatigue
- the need to develop advanced auditory memory and listening skills
- the need to develop assertiveness and self-advocacy skills
- the need to rely on and invest in adaptive technology equipment and software such as closed circuit television, other magnification equipment and scanners
- mobility training for the tertiary campus.

**“...I found one of the most interesting aspects of study was that people didn't remember that I was vision impaired because I didn't use a cane or have a guide dog. The lecturer kept saying: 'But you can get around uni, so I keep forgetting you need the overheads blown up'. I experienced a range of lecturers at uni from those who knew very little about how to deal with vision impairment to those who were fantastic...”**

You might also find it useful to refer lecturers to information on **Reasonable Accommodations: Strategies for Teaching University Students with Disabilities** at:  
<http://www.anu.edu.au/secretary/disabilities/book4.html>

and Understanding Blindness at:  
<http://www.rvib.org.au/undrblnd.htm>

## STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL STUDY

Employing study strategies that suit your vision condition, as well as developing your own study strengths, can help you achieve the results you want while optimising your use of time. In addition, knowing your preferred learning style, and therefore what works, is an excellent start to successful study.

Ask your DLO (Disability Liaison Officer) for the booklet: **Discovering Your Learning Style** in the **Towards Success in Tertiary Study** series to learn more about adapting study techniques to your particular learning style.

Here are some strategies that have worked for other students with vision impairment.

### Explore Your Options

- Start thinking about courses and career options **EARLY**.
- Investigate any tertiary bridging courses to prepare you for study, and explore computer and adaptive technology courses that may assist you with study. You may decide to spend time becoming familiar and confident with these skills before starting tertiary study.
- Explore the range of subjects that are already available in alternative formats as this may save waiting time for you later on. However, do **NOT** limit yourself by this! (Be the first person with a vision impairment to do that subject!)
- Listen to first hand accounts of student experiences on the audio tape **Flat Batteries and Shoe Boxes** where students with vision impairment discuss their experiences of university (see **Resources** section).
- Talk to other students who have completed or are studying tertiary courses. Contact the alumni **Association for Graduate Students who have a Disability** (see **Resources** section).
- Focus on the strengths you have. Remind yourself of your successes and achievements. You've already made it to uni successfully.

**“... after seven years of not feeling confident that I could cope at uni, I was talked into going to uni by my family. I found out that I in fact did quite well at uni and was in the top group of students in some of my subjects...”**

- Do not accept stereotypes and limitations which others may impose on you

**“A course co-ordinator discouraged me from doing an electronics course because of my deteriorating eye condition. I really wanted to complete the qualification and had to cram additional laboratory subjects into my semester and managed to complete the course. My view is if you have a dream go for it! You can overcome any obstacle with patience, perseverance and people who believe in you.”**

- Investigate any orientation courses and advice available through relevant blindness agencies. Contact the educational consultants to find out more or visit their websites (see **Resources** section).
- Investigate adaptive technology that is available and discuss software and hardware options with other students who have used the products.
- Investigate any scholarships that might exist at tertiary institutions, community organisations such as **The Lions Club** or **Rotary International**, and blindness agencies for study and adaptive equipment.
- Explore student exchange options if you want to study at an overseas university where there may be more advanced equipment or specialised courses that interest you.

### **Getting Organised**

- Be realistic about your time schedules and workload and start organising as early as possible. You need to achieve a balance in the workload you select as you **will** need additional time to prepare for classes and assignments and receive materials in alternative formats.
- Contact the Disability Liaison (DLO) at your institution as early as possible before you start your course to arrange alternative print formats, as well as readers through the university and also through blindness agencies.
- Arrange for the following information in your preferred format early:
  - course guides, outlines, book lists for each subject, and any handbooks for students with disabilities
  - the campus diary, maps
  - general orientation week time table and orientation activities for students with disabilities timetable

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- literature regarding **Student Services** such as the Disability Liaison Unit, Equal Opportunity Office, Libraries, Learning/Study Skills Centres, Student Health Services, Student Housing, Student Finance, Chaplaincy, Sport and Recreation, Careers and Employment, and Counselling.
- Arrange mobility instruction to familiarise yourself with the campus.
- Establish meeting times with your readers and decide how you will interact with them (in person or e-mail) and your needs. Remember, whole books should be sent through your DLO to blindness organisations in your State for alternative formats.
- Meet the library support person who is responsible for students with disabilities and explore the adaptive technology room. You may also wish to investigate the catalogue or **Internet** resources for electronic books.
- Arrange your library study room or carrel so you can store your equipment and do your recording.
- Organise a quiet study area at home, with plenty of space for equipment and materials.
- Establish a system for storing your tapes, disks and large print. Ensure that you have appropriate labelling too, **Dymo** labels are useful.
- Get to know your adaptive technology equipment. Arrange to have manuals in alternative formats for any troubleshooting.

**“...I used to have all my tapes spread over the floor and could never find what I wanted, I finally started to use shoe boxes to store cassettes. It was terrific to gain a sense of order...”**

## Ideas for Getting Started and Keeping Going

### Getting started

- Utilise the acronym ‘**SMART**’ goals to plan your course, study and career.
  - **Specific**– complete an essay introduction rather than work on the whole essay.
  - **Measurable**– have a checklist of smaller tasks that you can tick off.
  - **Assignable**– determine how much you can do and delegate if possible.
  - **Realistic**– focus on a section rather than revising all of Physics 101.
  - **Time frame**–set a realistic time frame within the hour, end of the day/week.
- Use a year planner to map out important dates, assessment tasks and exams. A talking electronic diary may be useful for this.

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- Use a weekly timetable to outline study, personal and other commitments.
- Use a prioritised daily 'To Do' list.
- Break tasks into smaller manageable segments (a 2000 word assignment can be broken into stages of question analysis, brainstorming, planning, reading and research, writing first draft in one paragraph steps, editing for structure, editing for style and grammar, writing the bibliography, recording and proofreading or proof-listening). Spread these tasks over several weeks.
- **Prioritise!** Avoid just reacting to things as they occur by prioritising.

**Remember that assignment preparation may mean more intensive use of your readers and you will require more time to synthesise material. Preparation for assignments should start at least 5 to 6 weeks before the due date.**

### Keeping going

- Schedule difficult and more demanding tasks for when you're at your greatest concentration span.
- Multi-task. Some ideas: listen to your taped lecture notes while you're exercising; summarise your ideas on to tape while you wash the dishes; or practise your oral presentation skills in the shower.
- There will be times when you may feel frustrated because of delays and dependency on others, but it's best to keep a balance in your life by participating in social, recreational and sporting activities.

**"...I was really nervous about asking for what I needed, I'd be pretending that things were ok and that I was coping, even when the lecturer would forget the enlarged handouts. Finally, I decided that it wasn't worth it and I had to keep reminding him until it became part of his routine..."**

- Set regular times to meet with readers and other students in study groups. Use small blocks of free time between lectures to summarise notes or prepare for lectures.
- Focus on what you have achieved (not what you have been unable to do).
- **REWARD** yourself for completed goals (watch your favourite TV show, arrange to meet a friend for dinner, surf the net, or splurge on your favourite food).
- Develop a sense of your own identity and self-worth; you are a person with talent and creativity independent of your uni assignments.

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- Keep balance in your life between body, mind and spirit. It's ok to talk on the phone for an hour, or go to that play. It's important that you have days when you don't even **think** about study.

### Dealing with Stress

Almost all students have times when they may feel overwhelmed by their workload. A little stress will help you to perform at your optimal level; the key is to feel in **control**.

- Pace yourself– some tasks may take longer but there is no prize for finishing first.
- Ask for help with mundane chores so you can focus your energies on study.
- Take up meditation, yoga, or listen to relaxing music.
- Take time out if necessary (deferral, part-time study, online delivery courses, open learning, distance education).
- Have a repertoire of breathing exercises for dealing with stressful moments.

### Where to Look for Help and Advice

There are many staff in tertiary institutions who provide support for students with disabilities. Here is a list of staff you should know about.

- Disability Liaison Officers (DLOs) can act on your behalf and arrange accommodations and equipment to suit your needs.
- Learning/ Study Skills Advisers offer support in developing independent and effective study skills, such as reading, writing and exam preparation, and any other aspects of learning.
- Library Staff offer introductory sessions on using the library efficiently and assistance in accessing information and using library adaptive technology.
- University Health Personnel are familiar with university procedures, and may be able to provide supporting documentation for your condition.
- Counsellors can help you with personal problems and other difficulties such as exam anxiety and motivation.
- Chaplains offer pastoral care and other personal and spiritual support.
- Student Union Welfare/Education Officers can answer questions about a range of academic rights and campus matters.
- Career and Employment Advisers can tell you about the career outcomes of various courses, give information and advice on job seeking and can help link you to part-time jobs. They also assist new graduates find employment.

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Other suggestions for maintaining momentum.

- Network early and outline your needs to staff , family and friends.

**“...My family and friends were terrific. I wouldn't have made it through uni without their support and encouragement; all the reading they did for me was invaluable in helping me keep up with my studies. It was a real bonus having them as additional volunteer readers...”**

- Surround yourself with positive and supportive people.
- Cultivate friendships- virtual and real (on electronic discussion lists and in support groups if you wish- see if your university has these).

**Check out e-mail discussion lists/groups resources at:  
<http://www.webcom.com/impulse/list.html>  
and  
<http://tile.net/>**

**“...At the beginning, I used advice given to me by friends who had been students. They reminded me that in first year, everyone else is feeling alone and is keen to make friends so I initiated a lot of conversations and friendships. This made it easier to get assistance in the time following...”**

- Join a study group- this also helps with maintaining friendships and enables you to explore different study patterns and adaptive technology.

**“...I find the Internet to be a great resource. It decreases the isolation of being vision impaired because I miss out on so much of the visual world. I can talk to other students who have used special software and a range of adaptive technology through a whole range of mailing lists. Being able to find information online for assignments can be much less difficult for people who are vision impaired compared to having to go out to libraries and rely on research assistants...”**

- Investigate any faculty, departmental or Student Union Mentor, Buddy or Host schemes. These can often be great ways to link socially and academically with students or staff.
- Investigate any student exchange programs and scholarships that may exist.

**“...During my course, I completed one semester in the USA on an exchange program. I have noticed that not many students with a disability are taking advantage of student exchange programs. This may be due to the real or**

perceived lack of support both in the home country and abroad. However, I feel that I was able to benefit from an overseas study just as much as other students who do not have a disability. However, the whole process was very difficult and required a lot of planning and independence...

”

- Don't quit just because you're overwhelmed; talk to a staff member first.
- Peak organisations in your State and **Blind Citizens Australia** (see **Resources**) will also have useful ideas and suggestions.

## Experiment with Different Study Techniques

### Lectures, seminars and tutes

Large group lectures can take a bit of getting used to. Many university classes can have 400 students with a different lecturer every week. This is in stark contrast to most year 12 classes which rarely have more than 25 students and are with students and teachers you have come to know very well, and possibly a specialist visiting teacher. Here are some suggestions for getting the most from lectures.

- Arrange for reading materials and handouts to be available in alternative formats **early**.
- **Always** attend the first tutorial or lecture because that is when most of the important information is given about the structure of a course. It is also a chance to get to know other students.
- It's useful to introduce yourself to your lecturers and tutors before the first lecture and explain your needs.
- Discuss with the lecturer/tutor the nature of the course and the reading requirements.
- Establish an order of importance for your reading materials and start from there; this also helps with prioritising and receiving important parts in alternative formats earlier.
- Establish with your reader scanning and skimming requirements by utilising the title and any other information such as chapter headings and sections to gain an idea about the content.
- Establish the required lighting and your seating preferences. You may need access to a power point. Some presentations are given in a slide show format which dims the lighting in the lecture.
- Lecturers may have their notes available on the web (see the unit outline) or on disk. This may simplify access to alternative formats.
- Ask the lecturer for permission to tape lectures. (You can do this through the DLO if you prefer.)

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- Do some pre-reading/listening before a lecture. This will enable you to have some idea of the key words, ideas and know what to expect.

### Participating in tutorials and seminars

- The group dynamic will depend on the size of the group, the nature of the subject and the students; you may find that you have some preferred tute groups.
- For most students participating in a group tutorial or seminar can be a little scary at first. Remember that everyone probably feels a little shy and apprehensive. You may wish to introduce yourself to your group leader before the class and explain your needs.
- Become familiar with the room. However, in some cases the room arrangement may change on a weekly basis depending on the class.
- Because you may miss out on the body language cues of turn taking, listen to the voice intonations to add comments or have a turn. You may also ask the tutor to get students to mention their names in the first few sessions until everyone becomes familiar with each other.
- Remind the group leader to use your name when asking questions.
- Become acquainted with as many people as possible in your class and exchange phone numbers so that you can contact another student for any missed classes.
- Prepare any reading for your classes and request any handouts in alternative formats prior to the class. To start with, you can formulate a particular comment that you can contribute to the class discussion.
- Check with the tutor, but it may be possible for you to work with another student on a task in the class even if the task is meant to be performed solo.
- Always say something in your first session. You can ask questions such as : “Do you mean that..?”, “Why do you think..?”; paraphrase what someone has said; or agree or disagree with someone, explaining why.
- Remember that it may be hard at first to talk amongst strangers but you’ll need to find a balance between contributing and listening to others.

**“...I decided that if I wanted to have a voice in the class that I’d better start from day one. There I was in the tute thinking that I couldn’t say anything and suddenly realised that everyone was just as nervous as I was. I initiated a question and it was plain sailing from there on. I realised that I could only get back what I put in...”**

### Tips for oral presentations

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- Prepare your presentation in a way that suits you. Some students find that they prefer to record notes onto tape, then type these into their computer and edit it through a voice synthesiser and then produce a written text version for the class and a recording. Some students then memorise a brief introduction and then proceed to play the recording to the class. Other students prefer to memorise the whole talk.
- If you have useable sight then you may wish to use **PowerPoint** software which can produce slides/overheads and handouts for you. You can alter the font size to suit your requirements.
- Rehearse the presentation with a friend and time it. This will help allay nervousness. Try to visit the room beforehand so you know what to expect and can check that any equipment is fully operational.
- Dress in appropriate clothing for the talk. For example, if you want to appear confident then dark colours are more powerful. Wear what you look good in.
- Incorporate animated body language into your delivery with the help of a friend for feedback. For example, raise your eyebrows, smile, use your hands . Above all be natural.
- Remember to use linking words such as: “First I’d like to talk about...”, “The most important factor...”. “Let me illustrate this with an example...”, “Finally, I’d like to mention...”.
- Have some questions prepared to stimulate discussion.
- Some students have found that preparing their recording onto tape and then listening to a small walkman in one ear while delivering the presentation can actually help with memory cues. Of course you’d have to practise this and use the pause button. This may seem a little strange but it’s often what television presenters do.
- Get feedback on your practice presentations from family and friends.
- Join a public speaking organisation such as the **Debating** society on campus or **Toastmasters**.

**“...I used to dread having to give a presentation as I couldn’t tell what the audience thought of the content as I was speaking. It was great that our tutor used feedback sheets from students to comments on our talks. I found that these were really useful. They also helped provide a supportive learning process...”**

**See the Virtual Presentation Assistant at:  
<http://www.ukans.edu/cwis/units/coms2/vpa/vpa.htm>**

### Notetaking in lectures

- Label your tapes with the date, subject, lecturer and lecture title. Do the same orally for audio recordings. If you use braille, develop a shorthand system of subject abbreviations so that you can fit them onto the cassette.
- Some students with partial vision will prefer to take notes using dark lined paper or buff matt and black fibre pens. Other students may prefer to type their notes into a laptop computer or braille device or word processor with voice output. This will depend on the nature of your vision impairment and your preferences.
- Obtain any overheads in enlarged format prior to a lecture and use a magnifier or a monocular.

**“...Contrary to what people would expect, that I would prefer everything enlarged, I preferred to have text reduced to the smallest size that I could read so that I could have the text compacted into my field of vision as I have Retinitis Pigmentosa. I also used yellow acetate on any handouts to enhance contrast...”**

- If you are notetaking in a lecture, sit in the front to help maximise concentration and visibility.
- You can also increase your concentration by focusing on the content or by asking questions. This will be easier when you've done the pre-reading.  
Keep in mind:
  - What is the purpose of this lecture?
  - How does it link to last week's lecture?
  - What are the main points?
  - How does the topic relate to the overall course?
  - What does the lecturer want me to understand from the lecture?
  - What are the lecturers views on the topic?
  - What further references or reading has the lecturer suggested?
- Listen for transition signal words which give you the direction of the lecture: for example, “I'd like to start by...., The most important point is...., To illustrate this...., Second...., Finally...., Let me digress...., In conclusion....., To sum up....”.
- Always be willing to ask lecturers and tutors questions for clarification of points and the spelling of words, especially foreign words and unusual names of authors and any problematic jargon.
- Ask for any written information on the board to be read out to you.
- Summarise your notes within 24 hours if possible by rewording your summaries into your own words, either into your dictaphone, word processor, audio tape or into braille.

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- If any videos are used, ask to have an explanation of the content earlier prior to the session or have another student describe it.
- Arrange to get notes or tape record lectures/tutes you can't attend (check with your lecturers, some will tape lectures routinely).
- Provide feedback to your lecturer and tutors on what is working for you and what isn't.

**“...I used a braille notetaker and found it really useful. I also used a Kurzweil reading machine for when I was taking notes from readings...”**

### Reading

The average print reader processes print reading aloud at about 120 words per minute but a listener can process speech at a much faster rate approaching or exceeding 250 words per minute (this is equivalent to the silent print reading rate). Most vision impaired students who use audio materials can have listening speed accelerated to 275 words per minute without losing comprehension (although it is best to use a pitch control if you have one on your cassette player to control the pitch). In contrast, braille is a much slower medium because the fingers can only interpret one cell at a time and some symbols may have more than one meaning. However, it can be an effective graphic communication system for students who are blind or vision impaired.

### Tips for general reading

- Read selectively; ask lecturers to indicate important texts. The nature of your reading and subject may determine the format that you need. Some subjects may be more accessible in braille while others would be easier in audio format.
- Utilise a research/library assistant or your readers to help you with your search for texts related to assignments.
- Using efficient reading techniques will reduce your reading time. Most advice on reading aims to promote **active** (rather than passive) reading.
- Decide on the type of information you require, for example, a statistic, a relevant quote, or an overall summary. Decide also if you need to:
  - remember detailed information for exams or part of an essay
  - recognise stated or inferred cause and effects
  - distinguish between factual information and the author's
  - evaluate the text or information sources
  - make value judgments.

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- Take notes from your reading/listening directly onto computer (libraries have the facilities for this too).
- Some students also prefer to note their texts by recording the points directly onto another tape. You can have two recorders next to you. Make sure that you mention the bibliographic detail and page numbers, otherwise you can waste valuable time at the end looking for the correct bibliography. Distinguish between your own comments and quotations and paraphrasing from the author.
- It's a great idea to discuss your readings with other students and to brainstorm ideas. Sharing a reading list between friends can be a good way to cut down on reading, and the resulting discussion can be useful as a background to essay preparation too.

**“...One of the best time savers is to scan my reading material directly into my computer and have it read it out. It's great! I must say though that one of the best things to do is to have a reader who is available on the spot to read out material on request...”**

### Tips for audio reading

- Listen to an audio tape all the way through on fast speed first and then go back and listen to any relevant sections.
- You can develop fast listening skills and increase your audio listening speed considerably. You can then go back and listen to the appropriate sections more slowly later on. Remember to skip irrelevant sections and too much detail.
- Maintain concentration by listening in an upright position.

### Tips for braille reading

Here are some suggestions for reading braille which have been adapted from Mason et al (1997, pp 154-155).

- Work on a flat and firm surface which is just below your elbow. Allow your arms to move freely.
- Place the braille material square-on or at a slight angle; this makes it easier to re-locate your position.
- Sit upright but be comfortable.
- Arch your hands at an angle of 30 degrees so you can maintain maximum finger pad contact with the surface.

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- To allow smooth scanning let your forearm take the weight of your arms rather than your fingers.
- Some students have preferred reading hands; the most efficient touch readers use both hands simultaneously and additional fingers apart from the index or middle finger to read through the text. For example, the left hand can start the first line while the right hand finds the start of the next line, ready to start instantly
- It's usually much harder to apply scanning techniques to braille as it takes longer than listening or print reading, however, it's useful to be aware of signpost words and to have decided on the purpose of your reading before starting.

### Preparing Assignments

- Negotiate any extensions **early** with your lecturer.
- Allow yourself plenty of time, at least 6 weeks, to work on assignments as there are many more time consuming intermediary steps required. However, check the availability of materials in alternative formats as early as possible.
- Use your research/library assistant and reader to determine the sources that may be relevant, based on first analysing the question and brainstorming the topic. Discuss this with another student if you can.
- Divide the assignment into stages as follows:
  - Stage 1** Analyse topic, note preliminary ideas, brainstorm, select texts, start reading/listening.
  - Stage 2** Reading and note-making, and make essay plan
  - Stage 3** Write/ record first draft, then edit
  - Stage 4** Write/record second and further drafts, then edit.
- To generate ideas, brainstorm in the manner of Kipling: "I have six friends that serve me true, **what, when and where, why, how and who.**"
- Learn how to use a word processor effectively; this will reduce time in redrafting and editing since it allows you to move sentences and whole paragraphs in order to improve the logical sequencing of work and make the meaning clearer. As well, it will make your work look professional and be much easier to read.
- The use of a spell check facility will be vital if you find that spelling is a problem. Remember though that it will not suggest all necessary changes, (cheque/check, their/there, Lea/Lee; will sand/wills and). Hence, it will also be necessary to get someone to help you edit your work.
- Ask to have a copy of a model subject assignment (from your lecturer) to read.
- Get a study skills adviser or a friend to read your paper critically before you hand it in.

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- If you are unsure about lecturers' comments on assessed essays, ask for further feedback. Also remember to negotiate your preferred feedback, oral, large text written responses, or e-mail.

### **Methodology and practicalities of assignment synthesis**

If possible, use your ideas or a rough plan as a starting point to further refine your plan. You can either record this on audio or type it into a computer directly.

The methodology you adopt will depend on your adaptive technology and the format of your presentations. There are many techniques that you can choose from below to suit your preferences.

#### **Audio/braille use only**

Have two tape recorders available. Listen to the material on fast speed first all the way through without taking notes; then go back to the relevant sections and record this onto your second recorder. Or read the text or section in braille all the way through first. Always record all the bibliographic information and the page numbers. Later spend time adding to your draft recording. (Remember to label your tapes with the appropriate draft number, subject and assignment title too!) If you are presenting your assignment in audio format then see **Tips for audio presentations** later in this booklet. For all of these methods, you may find it useful to label or tag each segment with a heading for the relevant section. This will help you later when restructuring the material for the assignment.

#### **Audio/braille and computer use**

Here you type the important segments from your reading/listening directly into your computer, and always record/list the contents of the book at the start of the document. Again, remember to state all the bibliographic detail and page numbers. You can then order these notes directly onto your computer. You can then edit this from your talking computer or braille output computer.

#### **Computer use only**

Some students prefer to synthesise directly from their computer summary notes onto computer. This process may take considerably longer than the other two methods but you need to use a method with which you feel comfortable.

### Editing tips

- Edit only once you have taken a break from the assignment. Edit on a range of levels, first on an ideas and organisational level, and then on a grammatical and sentence level.
- Check that you have used appropriate linkers and sign post words such as, “however”, “firstly”, “because”, and so on.
- You’ll also need to write in the academic style that is required by your discipline.
- Each of your subjects may require a particular referencing system. Be consistent within the assignment and use only one. Check your course outline for this.
- Have someone else proof read your final copy. The Study/Learning Skills advisers can assist you too.

### Concentration and Memory

Most vision impaired students have excellent auditory memory skills because that is the primary medium of accessing information. Here are some suggestions for increasing concentration.

- To avoid noise overload in a busy campus, you can explore some of the quieter places for study in the library. Investing in some earplugs can also be useful to reduce noise interruptions when you need to concentrate.
- Posture and seating can affect concentration. Lying down can send your thoughts in a range of directions including sleep.
- Study difficult subjects when you are most alert. Try working and brainstorming with another student too.

Here are some simple memory techniques to which study material can be adapted.

#### Review

One of the best ways to improve memory is to review material often.

#### Association

Incorporate information into melodies and favourite tunes for memory, and recite these as often as possible. The trick is to know your songs really well and to be creative. Another useful memory exercise, if you have some sight, is to recall all the lasting visual images that you have seen in the day.

### Auditory memory enhancement

A useful strategy to improve memory is to record the radio news and then make a summary of it in your head. Plan how you would present this and then record it onto tape. Later, compare your version with the news version. This is a useful strategy to help improve your presentation skills too.

Try out some memory techniques websites at:

<http://stad.dsl.nl/~coach/memory.html>

<http://www.mindtools.com/memory.html>

### Exams and Assessment

- Negotiate assessment tasks to suit your needs with your lecturers early.
- Arrange for flexible exams and assignments (check with the DLO, preferably at least 5 weeks before the exam). You are usually entitled up to double time for each exam. Also ensure that you get some rest breaks to avoid eye strain.
- You'll need to arrange to have the exams in alternative formats through your DLO at least 5 weeks before the exam.

**"...For some of my exams I managed to negotiate breaking the exam into two parts as I required so much time to answer questions in alternative formats. It was really good to have a 3 hours exam broken into two 1.5 hour exams as I had double time for an exam. This meant that I'd have to sit for three hours for each rather than 6 hours in one stretch..."**

- If you need alternative seating or frequent breaks, ask to do your exam in an alternative environment (check with the DLO and/or the Health Service).
- Arrange for appropriate adaptive technology and computer software for the exam such as **voice synthesisers, voice recognition software, screen magnification** and so on.
- If you have an open book exam then ensure that all your notes are filed appropriately in your computer and also that you have given the documents appropriate titles that enables easy and quick access. Then you can use the search facility on your computer to open the documents.
- If you have an **oral exam**, find out who your examiners are, and the format of questions and answers. For example, will you be given an uninterrupted monologue or will the examiners ask you questions? Also find out how they will tell you about time left to respond.
- If you have **oral exams**, try to relax by taking deep, slow breaths. Practise attentive listening, and if you don't understand a question ask for it to be repeated or clarified. Don't pretend you understand it when you don't!

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Show enthusiasm and confidence in your responses, even though you may be really nervous.

Refer to:  
**Managing Oral Exams at:**  
<http://www.anu.edu.au/secretary/disabilities/book3.html>

- Avoid exam postmortems ("...you mean there was a question 6?").
- Reward yourself after each exam (VERY important when exams are time-tabled close together).
- If you are disappointed by your results then you can request to see your exam paper with your lecturer and use it as a learning process to improve your performance for later exams.

### Tips for Audio Format Presentations

You may be able to arrange to submit your assignments in audio formats. Some more formal pieces of writing such as scientific reports and formal essays may be best submitted typed. However, you may be able to negotiate other alternatives. It's important to remember that your lecturers may not be familiar with assessing an audio assignment. You can refer them to **Guidelines for Academic Staff on Alternative Study Strategies for Students with Writing or Typing Disabilities** by the Vera White Disability Resource Centre (see **Resources**) through your DLO. It is therefore important to follow some guidelines that will facilitate your audio formats. The following points are summarised from: **Word for Word: How to Assist a Student with a Print Disability and Manual for the Preparation of Assignments on Audio Cassette** (see **Resources**).

- Choose a quiet environment and avoid background such as trams, people talking.
- Relax your voice by doing some voice exercises and stretching your jaw.
- Recording can be fairly demanding on your voice so have a glass of water accessible. Take frequent breaks and walk around the room rather than recording the assignment to the end without a break.
- Use colour and animation in your voice to interest the listener and avoid hesitancy (uhhhhmmms.....).
- Have two cassettes recorders set up, and know how to use all the features.
- Use the microphone appropriately. If you're using an internal microphone, test record the distance required for your voice to be clear. If you're using an external microphone, place this at about 10-15 cm away from you.
- Allow a lead time at the beginning of each tape of about 30 seconds.

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- Number and label all tapes, for example, tape 1 side A. Announce your name and date of recording, title, subject, tutor's name and date at the start of the cassette.
- Decide how footnotes are going to be read, for example, directly after the footnote number or at the end of the document as endnotes.
- Summarise the structure of your assignment before launching into your introduction by listing your main headings.
- Aspects of good dictation include clarity, punctuation and paragraphing.
- Always announce the end of the reading; for example, "This is the end of the recording on side A, please turn to side B for a continuation of Music History in Australia".
- Record the table of contents if it is a long document or report.
- Be aware of the natural rhythm and flow of a sentence and stress key words for emphasis.
- Read at a normal pace and use gap or tone indexing to identify pages or sections. The conventions are one beep for a new page, two for a new section and two beeps followed by three seconds and then a spoken word to indicate the content of an important section.
- Remember to edit out mistakes.
- Finally practise recording.

### **Using your Readers and Scribes Effectively**

- Establish your meeting arrangement clearly.
- You may wish to distinguish between academic readers and personal readers as well as student volunteer readers and set different reading material for each.
- It's useful to get student volunteer readers doing the same subject to read materials such as handouts, or the reading material for that week's class so that they are also learning for their subject too, and to incorporate this on a regular basis.
- Provide the reader with details of what you would like read and what can be omitted; for example, you may only need part of a table rather than the whole information.
- Discuss your needs clearly and provide feedback.
- Scribes are required to write down exactly what you say and can be used in exam and test situations.
- Scribes are also expected to have good stamina and be able to write quickly for long periods of time with only short breaks.
- You may also need to get your scribe to use a calculator so be clear with any instructions for calculations.

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- You are also entitled to choose a different reader or scribe or request a particular scribe if available.

**“...I had some great readers who were also doing the same subjects. This meant that they were also benefiting as they were reading material that they had to read anyway. It also meant that we could discuss the topics and it was great. It also meant that it was easier to meet in the library at uni. I also tried to vary the intensity of material for the readers so that they didn't get too drained by the technical jargon...”**

### Using Adaptive Technology

Adaptive technology can be used to assist with correspondence, assignment writing, accessing books, library catalogues or the Internet.

- Investigate the resources and courses that exist at blindness agencies in your state for developing: typing and keyboard skills, computers with braille and speech access systems, large print programs, scanning and reading machines, book and information use and so on.
- Your DLO may be able to help with the purchase of some hardware and software. Find out what is available in your library, Study Skills Unit and Disability Liaison Unit.
- Check out the Adaptive Technology websites in the **Resources** section. Some students find that it's valuable to investigate the products directly from the supplier and see if they offer e-mail help support. This can be particularly useful for 'cutting edge' technological equipment that may not have reached Australia yet.
- Are you really using all the advantages your computer can give you? Completing an Information Technology/Computer Centre course or keyboard skills at your blindness agencies may be really valuable and may prove a time-saving investment.
- Think about how you can use files and folders on the computer to help sort ideas for an essay.
- A notepad computer may be useful for you and help with arranging your notes.
- Other software such as **Endnote**, particularly for postgraduate students, can simplify potentially time consuming tasks like referencing for thesis writing.
- **Did you know** that the latest versions of **Zoom Text** have built in voice, and that **Windows 98** already has magnification capacities?
- Investigate voice activated technology such as **Dragon Dictate** and voice synthesisers.
- Remember to clean and maintain your audio equipment regularly.

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- Talk to other students (in e-mail discussion lists too) about adaptive technology that they have found useful.

**“...I found that I used a combination of equipment to suit different subjects from 4-track recorders, voice synthesisers such as Eureka, a Kurzweil talking computer, zoom text software, closed circuit televisions to talking calculators. It was also important to get software help and support, often from other friends who could give me very quick answers and also from Adaptive Technology e-mail discussion lists...”**

## HOW CAN YOUR UNIVERSITY HELP?

### Accommodations

You have a right to ask for accommodations which will make it easier for you to study with vision impairment. Contact your DLO, lecturers and tutors early to ensure your needs are met. Some of the adjustments or accommodations which might be useful include:

- alternative formats for lecture notes such as large print, audio, computer disk, braille
- alternative exam questioning formats with the use of braille examination papers (with tactile diagrams, maps), personal computer with voice synthesiser, reader, oral exam with the examiner, large print, personal computer with large print
- alternative exam answering formats such as personal computer with voice synthesiser, or large print, closed circuit television, heavy lined paper, special writing implements, oral responses to the examiner, audio-tape or dictaphone, scribe
- access to power points in exams, lectures and tutorials
- access to secure storage space for personal equipment
- separate examination venue
- longer time to complete tasks (up to double time for examinations or assignments)
- appropriate rest breaks during exams to avoid fatigue and eye strain
- lighting alterations and glare minimisation
- alternative course tasks or assessments
- lockers for storing heavy items
- research library assistance and assistance in using the library
- adaptive technology equipment and computer hardware and software such

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as braille embossers, scanners and so on.

Think about how **YOU** are affected by your condition and be creative in the solutions (not all solutions are complex or expensive!).

### **Do I have to Disclose my Condition to Receive Help?**

Your faculty or department will need to understand the nature of your vision impairment and how it affects your study if they are to provide accommodations. You can always do this by talking to your DLO who can then facilitate **special consideration or accommodations** on your behalf. Some students like to make arrangements themselves whereas others prefer to have the DLO do this. Most lecturers and support staff are understanding and want you to succeed.

### **KNOW YOUR RIGHTS**

If you have a disability or ongoing medical condition, you have **rights** under the **Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act** and **State Equal Opportunity** legislation. This means that you are entitled to ask for accommodations to be made for you so that you can participate in your chosen course.

Make sure that you provide feedback to your lecturers or to the DLO if you feel that your needs are not being met. If you are still not satisfied with what is being provided, you should inquire about how you can make a complaint through your institution's internal procedures. Use an advocate if you are feeling weak or too vulnerable to assert your rights effectively yourself.

If you have gone through this process and are still not satisfied, you can take the matter to the **Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC)**.

**HREOC** has a web page at:

<http://www.hreoc.gov.au/>

and you can go straight to the **Disability Rights** section at:

[http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability\\_rights/index.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/index.html)

The **Disability Law Advocacy Service** can assist you with this Ph: 03-9602 4877, in Victoria. The publication: **A User Guide to the Disability Discrimination Act** can be obtained from Villamanta Publishing Service on 03-5229 2029 (in Victoria), and information on disability rights can be viewed at the above websites.

## RESOURCES

A list of peak bodies and peer support groups that provide support and advice can be found in the White Pages under Disability Services and Support Organisations or via the Internet at <http://www.whitepages.com.au/>

You can also link up directly by phone to a peak organisation on **Call Connect** on 12456 (this avoids you having to remember or record the required phone number).

Many students have found online resources very useful and easy to access. This list should help you get started in using electronic and print resources to achieve your study goals. Ask your librarian for assistance too.

To help you get started using the Internet, you may wish to try out:

**Surfing the Net Tutorial** at

<http://www.macarthur.uws.edu.au/ssd/ldc/Nettute.html>

and check out **Some Hot Links for Online Research** at

<http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/lisu/researchonline.html>

## Electronic Resources and Support Organisations

**AccessAbility: Online Access for People with Disabilities (Australian)**

<http://accessability.noie.gov.au/>

**Action on Disability within Ethnic Communities (ADEC)**

Provides advocacy, education, training, and information for people with disabilities from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Ph: 03-9388 1613

Fax: 03-9380 1857

### Adaptive Technology Websites

- **American Adaptive Technology Websites**  
<http://www.seidata.com/~marriage/rbadapt.html>
- **Australian Adaptive Technology Equipment and Technology**  
<http://www.nfbca.asn.au/ausequip.htm>

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- **Dragon Dictate**  
<http://www.dragonsys.com/marketing/dragondictate.html>
- **Equal Access to Software and Information (EASI)**  
<http://www.rit.edu/~easi/>
- **Kurzweil Products**  
<http://www.kurzweil.com/>
- **The Independent Living Centres in Australia**  
<http://www.iinet.net.au/~ilcwa/ilc.html>
- **Overseas Adaptive Equipment & Software Suppliers**  
<http://www.nfbca.asn.au/ausequip.htm>
- **Voice Recognition software**  
<http://www.iglou.com/vrsky/index.html>

### **Alternative Assessments for Students with Disabilities**

<http://www.anu.edu.au/secretary/disabilities/book1.html>

### **Association for the Blind**

<http://www.aftb.org.au>

Ph: 03-95995000

### **Australian Blind Organisations**

<http://www.nfbca.asn.au/ausblind.htm>

### **Blind Citizens Australia**

(National Federation of Blind Citizen of Australia - NFBCA)

<http://www.nfbca.asn.au/>

Ph: 03- 9521 3433

Fax: 03- 9521 3732

Toll Free: 1800 033 660

### **Blindness Resource Centre: What's New on the Web**

<http://www.nyise.org/whatsnew.htm>

### **Braille and Talking Book Library**

Ph: 03- 9867 6022

Fax: 03-9820 1225

Toll Free: 1800 032 645

### **The Deaf Blind Association**

<http://connexus.apana.org.au/~dba/dba.htm>

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Ph: 03- 9482 1155 (voice),  
Fax: 03- 9486 2092  
TTY: 03- 9489 3091

**DIRECT The Directory of Disability Information and Resources for the Education Community - Tertiary**  
<http://direct.deakin.edu.au>

**Disability Information Network Australia (DINA)**  
<http://avoca.vicnet.net.au/~dina/>

### **OZADVOCACY**

Information dissemination and discussion list for people interested in disability rights in Australia  
to subscribe send a message to [listserv@maelstrom.stjohns.edu](mailto:listserv@maelstrom.stjohns.edu)  
and in the body write:  
subscribe OZADVOCACY your name  
if you have any problems contact Ria Strong ([strong@infoxchange.net.au](mailto:strong@infoxchange.net.au))

### **Print-Alternative Information Service of Australia (PAISA)**

#### **Reader Services, RVIB**

Ph: 03-95213400  
Fax: 03-9521 3670  
Toll Free: 1800 335 588

### **RDLU (Regional Disability Liaison Unit)**

<http://www.deakin.edu.au/extern/rdlu/>  
Ph & TTY: 03-9244 5102  
Fax: 03- 9244 5104

### **Royal National Institute for the Blind United Kingdom (RNIB)**

<http://www.rnib.org.uk/>

### **Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (RVIB)**

<http://www.rvib.org.au/>  
Ph: 03- 9522 5222  
Fax: 03- 9510 4735  
TTY: 03- 9510 9310

### **Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (RVIB)- Library and Information Services**

Ph: 03- 9521 3400  
Fax: 03- 9521 3670

### **Study Skills**

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- **Unilearning**  
<http://www.macarthur.uws.edu.au/ssd/unilearning/>
- **Owl Handouts: An outline of all the documents**  
(Excellent resource for study and writing issues)  
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/writers/by-topic.html>

**TIPD (Tertiary Initiatives for People with Disabilities)**  
<http://www.qut.edu.au/pubs/09other/tipd/tipdhome.html>

**Universal Access: Electronic Resources in Libraries**  
<http://weber.u.washington.edu/~doit/UA/>

### **Books/ Booklets/Audiotapes**

Birch, N. A., Rothery, M. & Waltrowicz, C. (eds) (1998). **Making it happen: A resource book for people who have a disability and who are considering post-school options.** Melbourne: RDLU.

Clanchy, J. & Ballard, B. (1991). **Essay writing for students: A practical Guide.** Melbourne: Longman.

Cronin, P. (n.d.) **Flat batteries and shoeboxes** (Audio tape). Melbourne: RVIB audio production.

Gale, G. (1998). **Towards excellence: Effective education for students with vision impairments.** Sydney: Renwick College.

Marshall, L. & Rowland, F. (1993). **A Guide to learning independently.** Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.

Mason, H., McCall, S., Arter, C., McLinden, M. & Stone, J (eds) (1997). **Visual impairment: Access to education for children and young people.** London: David Fulton Publishers.

McKenzie, K. (1997). **Student handbook– for Adults who are blind or vision impaired** (booklet). Melbourne: RVIB.

McKenzie, K (ed.). (1993). **Strategies for teaching adults with vision impairments** (2nd ed) (booklet). Melbourne: RVIB.

RVIB (n.d.). **Information guide for students** (booklet). Melbourne: RVIB.

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**RVIB, (1992). Practical guidelines for working with adult students with vision impairment (booklet). Melbourne: RVIB.**

**RVIB, (1995). Information for personal readers (booklet). Melbourne: RVIB.**

**Sharp, C. & Johnson, B. (1987). Guidelines for academic staff on alternative study methods for students with writing or typing disabilities (booklet). Melbourne: Vera White Disability Resource Centre, Deakin University.**

**Sharp, C. & Johnson, B. (1987). Manual for the preparation of assignments on audio cassette (booklet). Melbourne: Vera White Disability Resource Centre, Deakin University.**

**Turney, C. & Teo, R. (1994). A guide to successful transition to university: You can make it! NSW: Sydmac Academic Press.**

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**Titles in the Towards Success in Tertiary Study series**

**Towards Success Discovering your Learning Style**  
**Towards Success with Acquired Brain Injury**  
**Towards Success with Asperger's Syndrome**  
**Towards Success with Deafness**  
**Towards Success with Learning Disabilities**  
**Towards Success with Psychiatric Conditions**  
**Towards Success with Vision Impairment**

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**Website:** <http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/towardssuccess/>

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