

Teaching English to Visually Impaired Learners

Frequently asked questions

Session 1 – Understanding Visually Impaired Students

- 1. Can students with visual impairment understand the small nuances of pronunciation better or faster than students without visual impairment? As it is often said, other senses are enhanced. Is this really the case?***

A student with visual impairment does not have a better sense of hearing than a student without it. However, they need to use it more, so they pay more attention to it, and it gives them information that a visually impaired student extracts in other ways. So, while their sense of hearing might not be better, often, the more a person practices any skill the better they become at it.

- 2. Are other students in a class held back because of the extra attention given to a visually impaired student?***

All students have needs. A student with a visual impairment requires extra attention just like any other student for a need they may have. It is important for the other students in the group to understand the need for extra attention and it is also a valuable opportunity to develop respect, cooperation, and understanding within the group.

- 3. Can families have unrealistic expectations in terms of what the student can achieve?***

Families of a student with a visual impairment may have unrealistic expectations of what the student can accomplish, in the same way as families of any other student. It's important to talk to families to keep them informed of what their child is capable of accomplishing and how to keep expectations realistic.

- 4. With regards to deafblind students, how important is it for teachers to understand grammatical differences in sign language?***

When teaching a deafblind student, it is not essential to know exactly what the grammatical differences are, but to be aware that these differences exist. It is important to contact the mediator, who will understand the structures that the student uses to communicate.

5. *Should we exclude some "sensitive" topics? For example, the Visual Arts.*

If we exclude topics, we are depriving students of information about the world. Students with visual impairment can appreciate the visual arts through other senses such as touch. Instead of avoiding concepts and topics, we should include them in class. Students with visual impairment will understand the concept of colours and will have references that they will use to talk about them, for example, they will relate the colour blue to the sky or the colour green to grass.

6. *If a blind student joins a class in the middle of the year, what should be the approach given the other students know each other and are used to each other. How could we prepare them to accept and take an interest in the blind student?*

The most important thing is to talk to the student or their family and, if possible, their previous teacher to find out as much as possible about the student and their needs. It is also important to talk to the class and explain the needs that the new student has and help the group welcome them. Working on the acceptance of diversity in a transversal way, regardless of whether any of the students have a disability or not, will help any new student to integrate. Normalising everyone's individual needs or differences will help with the acceptance of diversity.

Session 2 – Tools and Resources

1. *How many students actually have accessibility tools at the beginning of their studies?*

Each country functions in a different way, so in some countries they are provided by the Administration, in others, by associations or even purchased individually. In Spain, when a support teacher begins to work with a visually impaired student and considers it is time for them to start using a certain tool, the student is provided with the tool on request. The tool for use at school is provided by the Administration and ONCE lends them a tool to use at home while they are in education.

2. *Are some images printed with relief so that the student can feel the image?*

Yes, many images are made in relief. Some considerations must be taken into account for them to be useful to a visually impaired person, as what is perceived with sight cannot simply be perceived with touch. The images must be simple, with few elements, clear lines and patterns and they should be explained to the student, without assuming that they will understand them intuitively. When the image is essential for the objective of the activity, the explanation should be in the student's own language. When it is complementary and

does not provide information necessary for the activity, it can be explained in the language being learned.

3. *Is there a specific recommended phone app that can perform some functions, for example, a screen reader or stylus reader?*

Each mobile device has its own accessibility tools, which can be turned on and off at any point, according to each user's needs. In this way, people with visual impairment can use smartphones, tablets, or any other device. However, like a computer, Apps have to follow accessibility guidelines for accessibility tools such as screen readers or magnifiers to work. In addition, many specific Apps are being created for people without vision. For more information, consult the documents on "Computer applications" and "Examples of accessible apps" from this course.

4. *Would something like Google's NotebookLM be really for some severely visually impaired or blind students? - it works with PDFs and generates entire podcasts that you can interact with.*

Some tools that are very useful for students with vision do not meet accessibility standards for people with visual impairment. This is the case for devices and applications that only work with audio and do not allow information to be read in braille. It is important to remember that braille is the reading and writing code for people with blindness and, especially, those with deaf blindness. To learn more about braille, visit the following link: [braille for people with vision](#).

5. *How does Plickers work?*

The following link explains how Plickers works: [Plickers Help](#).

6. *I would like to know what braille is like in Cyrillic languages.*

All languages have a braille code, but depending on the type of language, the correspondence is phoneme-to-phoneme or phonological: in Cyrillic languages it uses an adaptation of the Latin braille system, where raised dots are assigned to Cyrillic letters based on their sound or visual similarity to Latin letters. Some letters have been remapped, and additional dots have been added to represent letters that do not have direct correspondence in Latin braille. In Chinese and other logographic languages, braille is based on the phonetics of the language, using symbols to represent initials, endings (equivalent to vowels), and syllable tones.

Session 3 – The student in the classroom: organization, materials and activities

1. Does the difference in time needs impact objectives/expectations?

It has an impact in the sense that you have to reduce the number of objectives or allow more time to achieve them, but the objectives are the same for everyone.

2. How do I check if a table can be read with a screen reader?

To check whether a table can be read correctly with a screen reader, you must ensure that the table structure is well defined, that the row and column headers are clear, and that the contents of the cells are accessible. This can be done by using a screen reader to navigate the table and verify that the information is read logically and consistently. To check accessibility, once the screen reader is open, you need to navigate the table, using the corresponding keys, usually Tab, Shift + Tab, arrows to move between the cells of the table. The first thing will be to verify that the reader reads the headings; Then, that each cell is read in a clear and understandable way, without interruptions or errors. Finally, it must be checked that the reading order is correct and follows a consistent pattern, either from left to right and from top to bottom, or following a predefined order.

3. Can the screen reader read complex tables with merged cells?

Screen readers work by tracking the structure of the table by counting the cells. If a table contains merged cells, the reader may become confused and not be able to correctly determine the position of the cells and the relationship between them. This can lead to a screen reader user not understanding the information presented in the table or the table not being accessible to them. Therefore, when preparing a table, it is recommended to avoid combined cells and use row and column headers. If you need to use merged cells, consider splitting the table into smaller, simpler tables or splitting the merged cells to make the table structure clearer. In addition, you may want to use accessibility checking tools,

such as the Excel Accessibility Checker, to identify and fix accessibility issues in tables, including merged cells.

4. *Do we need to learn braille?*

Although desirable, you don't need to learn braille to be able to follow the student's work. If they work on paper, they can tell you what is written themselves. If, on the other hand, they work on a computer, you will be able to see their work on the screen yourself.

5. *Does the visually impaired student always have to be seated in the same place?*

Not necessarily, but it is necessary to inform them of the changes that occur in the classroom. Even so, if the student has some vision, it is necessary to place them in a glare-free place and where they can see the resources that are going to be used clearly.

6. *What is the minimum age to have a guide dog?*

There is no universally established minimum age for owning a guide dog. The requirements vary according to the organisation and country. However, it is generally considered that the person must have the physical and emotional maturity to care for and control the dog, as well as to work with it in everyday situations. In general, the following is taken into account:

- Emotional and physical maturity.
- The need.
- Prior autonomy: it is essential that the applicant has the ability to move autonomously with a cane and a good level of orientation.
- An economic situation that allows them to take care of the expenses derived from owning the dog, such as its food and veterinary care.

7. *Is the description of images oral or written?*

Image description is crucial for digital accessibility, allowing people with visual impairment to access the same visual information as sighted people. The way to do it will depend on the situation in which we find the image:

- If it is in a book or on paper, it can be done orally or with a reading pen, such as LEO.

- If it is a computer document, the image should have alternative text, which will be read by the screen reader, allowing users to understand the visual content. Alt text should briefly describe the content of the image; If it is complex or contains important information, a longer description can be included in the accompanying text or in a separate section. Descriptions should be objective and focused on the content of the image, avoiding personal interpretations or irrelevant details.
- If you project a PowerPoint on a screen, the description would need to be oral, although it must also have alternative text if you share the presentation with the student. In online classes, even if the student has the presentation, alternative text should be shared in the class chat in the student's language, for any images that are central to an activity.
- In a speaking activity, students should always have the image description close to hand, so that they can refer to it whenever needed, just as sighted students can look at an image as many times as they need.

8. How do we carry out activities where learners search for information or words in a text, taking into account the difference in size between ink and braille?

Generally speaking, line numbers in ink will not coincide with those in braille. An alternative is to use paragraph numbers instead of line numbers or, if you are working on a computer, specify where the ink line begins within the braille text.

9. How can we work on grammar structures in an online class?

It is a complex process in which numerous examples are needed. When we are explaining the structure, the student's first language can be used if necessary for abstract concepts. Frequent exposure to examples in context helps the student get used to listening to the correct structures.

10. How is it best to highlight a correction for the student with severe visual impairment; underlined or in bold?

This recommendation refers to students who have some degree of vision. Whereas underlining will always be seen, bold will depend on the degree of vision. In general, it is advisable to ask the student their preference.

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