

# Teaching English to Visually Impaired Learners

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## Session 2. Tools and Resources

# Technical Support in Online Classes

In many cases, when visually impaired students start online English classes, they do not have enough experience of the technological tools that will be used.

Their lack of vision makes it difficult to learn the use of technology in a natural and intuitive way. Students with normal vision can notice the elements on the screen, where they are located at a glance, and can easily begin to manage them.

In students without vision, this must be done in an orderly manner, and with structured learning.

Using a web page is different from knowing how to use a communication tool, a Word document or an educational platform, although the more practice you get with them, the easier it is to learn new tools and applications.

## Some keys for students with low vision

For students with low vision, it will be more difficult to find elements on the screen, recognize details in images and graphics, distinguish text on a non-plain background, etc. And they will need more time to process the visual information contained in any exercise.

Here are some tips to support them in online classes:

- Review with them the display features of their devices and the adaptations it has, to better understand how they will handle them in class.
- Give them the time they need to find the necessary elements on the screen and to process the information.
- Do not assume that they are seeing something the same way we do.
- If they feel unsure of whether they see something, explain it to them and allow them to explain to us the way they perceive it.
- Ask for advice when necessary.

## Blind learners

In the case of blind learners, we must first know which tool they are going to work with. Although our recommendation is to do so with a computer, Chrome, Jaws and a Braille display, each student will be free to choose the tool that best suits them or the one they usually work with. This means that in each case the accessibility options of the tools they use must be analysed and it must be ensured that they can follow the classes with them.

Normally, in the first sessions, we must spend some time ensuring that the students' technical and typhlotechnical resources are adequate and that the student can use them. If this is the case, as the course progresses, they will also become more comfortable and skilled using the tools. If not, which is not common, it will be necessary to contact the student support professionals at their school or at the specific institution for attention to visual impairment in their area and try to solve the problem.

Some tips for providing technical support to students working in Braille in online classes:

- Before starting the course, check that someone will be able to help the student enter the class in the first few days: a family member, a support teacher, someone who can guide them to enter the Zoom session in case they cannot do it alone.
- Check with the Jaws user learner that they have made the necessary changes so that the program speaks and writes to them in English properly.
- Provide them with specific instructions for entering the platform being used. In the case of the British Council, you will find this information in the document “Accessibility Assessment Learning Hub Activities BC\_ONCE” of this course.
- Support class tasks by sending notes and tasks through the Zoom chat and the student's email.
- Assess the accessibility of the resources we will use, make the necessary adaptations, and help the student with tasks that are not accessible.
- When carrying out group work in which there are activities that are not very accessible, encourage cooperative work and give the blind student an appropriate role so that they can participate, contribute and learn.
- Ask for advice when necessary.

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