

Physical Disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities. Some people may use assistive devices. Others may have conditions such as arthritis, or heart or lung conditions and may have difficulty with moving, standing, or sitting for long periods.

- Ask before providing help. Persons with physical disabilities often have their own way of doing things.
- If the person uses a wheelchair or scooter, sit down beside him/her, to enable eye contact and reduce neck strain for longer interactions.
- Offer preferential seating.
- If you have permission to move a person in a wheelchair, avoid leaving the person in an awkward position, such as facing a wall.

Hearing Loss

There are different types of hearing loss. Commonly used terms are hard of hearing, deafened, deaf and Deaf. Persons who are deafened or hard of hearing may use devices such as hearing aids, cochlear implants, or FM systems; they may rely on lip reading. A person with little or no functional hearing may use sign language.

- Ensure you have his/her attention before speaking. Discreetly wave your hand or gently tap the shoulder if needed.
- Reduce background noise.
- Keep your face visible to enable lip reading. If the person is using an interpreter, speak directly to the person; not the interpreter.
- Speak clearly, pacing your speech

and pauses normally. Don't shout or over-pronounce your words.

- Offer to communicate in writing (pen and paper) as needed.

Vision Loss

Few people with vision loss are totally blind. Some have limited vision, such as the loss of side, peripheral, or central vision.

- Don't assume the person cannot see you.
- To get the person's attention, address him/her directly; say your name; do not touch the person.
- Ask the person in which format she would like to receive information.
- When providing printed information, offer to read, summarize or describe it.
- Don't be afraid to use words such as "see", "read" or "look".
- When offering to guide someone, hold out your elbow. Give clear, precise directions.

Deafblind

People who are deafblind have a combination of vision and hearing loss. Many persons who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a person who helps with communicating. Many different ways may be used to communicate, including sign language, tactile sign language, Braille, speech and lip reading.

- Ask the person what will help the two of you to communicate.
- Many people will explain what to do, perhaps giving you an assistance card or note.
- Suddenly touching a person

who is deafblind can be alarming and should only be done in emergencies.

Speech or Language Disabilities

Some persons have problems expressing themselves, or understanding written or spoken language.

- Don't assume that a person who has difficulty speaking also has an intellectual or developmental disability.
- Allow the person to complete what he is saying without interruptions.
- If you don't understand, ask the person to repeat the information.
- Ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'.
- If the person uses a communication board, symbols or cards, follow her lead.

Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities

Intellectual or developmental disabilities such as Down Syndrome can limit a person's ability to learn, communicate, and live independently.

- As much as possible, treat persons with an intellectual or developmental disability like anyone else. They will appreciate respectful treatment.
- Speak slowly and use plain language.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.
- Ask, "Do you understand this?" to check your communication.

Tips for Providing Accessible Service

"How may I help you?"

ACCESSIBILITY

The University of Western Ontario

Western's Commitment: Providing the best experience for persons with disabilities

The University of Western Ontario is committed to increasing the accessibility for persons with disabilities who study, visit or work at Western. We can increase accessibility by proactively identifying and removing barriers so persons with disabilities can receive service in a respectful way.

Those who interact with, or provide service to others at Western are asked to communicate with persons with disabilities in a manner that takes the person's disability into account, and to align their practices with four principles of accessible service as much as possible:

- **Dignity** (person is able to maintain his self-respect and respect of others)
- **Independence** (person is able to do things on her own without unnecessary help)
- **Integration** (person is able to benefit from the same services, in the same place and in the same or similar way as others)
- **Equal Opportunity** (person is able to have the same opportunity as others to benefit from the way you provide goods or services)

This document provides tips for interacting and communicating with persons with disabilities. The information is prepared in accordance with The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, developed under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005. Specific requirements can be found in the companion document, [Accessible Service: Summary of Requirements](#) at www.accessibility.uwo.ca.

The University of
Western Ontario

The goal of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) (2005) is to make Ontario accessible by 2025 through the development of accessibility standards. The Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Ontario Regulation, 429/07) is now law. Other standards currently in development are Information and Communications, Built Environment, Employment, and Transportation.



“How may I help you?”

General Tips for Providing Accessible Service

Keep this Overall Service PACTT:

Pay calm, individual attention to the other person

- Avoid making assumptions about a person's capabilities.
- Adjust posture/sit down as needed for face-to-face service.

Ask “How May I help?”

- Usually, a person with a disability knows what works best for him/ her.
- Before ending your interaction, ask “Does that help you with your need?”

Communicate clearly and patiently to ensure shared understanding

- Allow the person to finish what he is saying without interrupting.
- Provide one piece of information at a time; repeat or rephrase as necessary.
- If you don't understand what's being said, don't pretend, ask again.
- As needed, ask if another method of communicating would be easier—e.g. always have a pen and paper available.

Treat the other person with respect

- Focus on the person as a unique individual.
- Pay attention to her dignity, independence, sense of integration and equality.

Try to see the world in terms of accessibility

- Take into account the ways persons with disabilities experience your services.
- Know the location of nearby ramps, elevators, automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.

Terminology

- Use “disability,” not “handicapped” or “impaired.”
- Say “person with a learning disability” rather than “learning disabled.” Put the person first.

Telephone

- Concentrate on what's being said, not how the person's voice sounds.
- Address the person with a disability directly, even if the person is using an interpreter over the phone.
- If communication is very difficult, make arrangements to call a support person.

Physical Space

- Ensure the area is well-lit so faces are visible for lip-reading.
- Clear aisles, remove obstacles.
- Keep furniture layout the same over time, if possible.
- Reduce background noise.

Alternate Formats

Using alternate formats means making information available in ways other than the original format. Some persons may be able to access information through their own computer software (e.g. translate into audio or enlarged text).

- Offer plain text electronic versions of notes, email attachments, brochures, presentation material. To do this, save files using the option with the .txt extension. Html, pdf, rtf versions are also generally accessible, but are more difficult to work with. Avoid scanned images.
- Provide information in advance – this can be helpful for those with vision loss, hearing loss, or learning disabilities.
- Identify text books as early as possible, to give the person with a disability time to have them produced in an alternate format such as Braille.
- Design websites and web content in an accessible format. Use templates and best practices provided by Communications and Public Affairs. <http://communications.uwo.ca/comms/web.htm>
- If you have questions related to web accessibility or how to make electronic information accessible, visit the website: <http://www.uwo.ca/IP/barrierfree> or email barrierfree@uwo.ca

Event Hosting

- Add a standard line to invitations such as “Please contact (name) if you require information in an alternate format, or if any other arrangements can make

RESOURCES

- Advice regarding students: Services for Students with Disabilities: ssd@uwo.ca 519-661-2147 x82147
- Advice regarding staff and faculty: Rehabilitation Services: 519-661-2111 x85578
- Building and facility inquiries: Physical Plant: ppdhelp@uwo.ca 519 661-3304 x83304
- Accessibility Feedback: accessibility@uwo.ca 519 661-2111 x85562
- Advice regarding alternate formats: barrierfree@uwo.ca

this event accessible to you.”

- In the invitation, describe the location of ramps, automatic doors, elevators, etc.
- Include a link to the campus accessibility map <http://accessibility.uwo.ca/maps.htm>

Service Animals

Service animals include guide dogs, hearing alert animals, animals who help calm anxiety or alert their owner to oncoming seizures. The owner is responsible for the care and control of the animal.

- Allow service animals, except in areas where prohibited by law (e.g. health and safety reasons).
- Offer an alternative method of assistance if the animal is prohibited.
- Avoid touching a service animal – it is working and has to pay attention at all times.

Support Persons

A support person can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or friend of the person with the disability. They may offer physical assistance, personal care, interpretation, note taking or other services.

- Allow access to a support person, provided that the interaction does not compromise academic integrity.
- Ask if it is not clear who the support person is.
- Speak directly with the person with a disability, not the support person.
- Plan for support persons; reserve space for them and provide

both parties written materials.

- Waive admission fees for support persons when possible. If a fee is charged, provide notice of the amount ahead of time.

Assistive Devices

Examples: wheelchairs, canes, hearing aids, listening devices (FM systems), laptops with screen-reading software.

- The assistive device is an extension of the person's personal space – touch only if asked to, and don't move it out of the person's reach.
- If your area provides assistive devices such as special equipment or software, become familiar with what they are, how they work, or whom to contact about operating them.

How can I help someone who is having difficulty accessing my service?

- Ask the person how you may best help them.
- If you see that a service or facility isn't working, contact the unit responsible.
- Seek help from Western resources listed at the top of this brochure.
- Inform the person of the Accessibility at Western Feedback Process if the issue is unresolved.

Specific Tips for Interacting with Persons with Various Types of Disabilities

Learning Disabilities

Examples include dyslexia (problems

with reading and language-based learning); dyscalculia (problems with mathematics); and dysgraphia (problems with writing and fine motor skills). Having a learning disability does not mean a person is incapable of learning. Rather, it means they learn in a different way.

- Ask the person how he would like to receive information. For example, if you have written material, offer to read the information aloud.
- Be willing to explain something again – it may take a little longer for the person to process information.
- Give extra time to complete a task.

Mental Health Disabilities

Mental health disabilities can cause changes in a person's thinking, emotional state and behaviour and can disrupt the person's ability to work. These changes may also affect the way the person interacts with others. With most mental health problems, the symptoms are not static and can improve or worsen over time. These disabilities are often invisible.

- Ask the best way you can help.
- Be patient and respectful. A person with a mental health disability may have difficulty concentrating.
- If the person is in crisis, call Western's 911 Emergency Services for medical or other assistance, as needed.
- Ensure safety of all.