

Glossary of Disability-Related Terms

The RIT Office of Career Services and Cooperative Education compiled this list to provide suggestions of clear, direct language to use to describe disabilities and accommodations have compiled this list. If you have ever wondered what a term or an acronym means, this glossary can help you find the answer.

Accessible: In the case of a facility, readily usable by a particular individual; in the case of a program or activity, presented or provided in such a way that a particular individual can participate, with or without auxiliary aid(s); in the case of electronic resources, accessible with or without assistive computer technology.

Access barriers: Any obstruction that prevents people with disabilities from using standard facilities, equipment and resources.

Accessible web design: Creating web pages according to universal design principles to eliminate or reduce barriers, including those that affect people with disabilities.

Accommodation: An adjustment to make a program, facility, or resource accessible to a person with a disability.

Adaptive technology: Hardware or software products that provide access to a computer that is otherwise inaccessible to an individual with a disability.

Alternative keyboard: A keyboard that is different from a standard keyboard in its size or layout of keys.

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA): A comprehensive federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, public services, public accommodations and services operated by private entities, and telecommunications.

American Sign Language (ASL): A visually perceived language based on articulated hand gestures and their placement relative to the body. Non-manual markers

such as facial expressions and movements of the body are also used. ASL is the dominant signed language in North America. ASL is not a universal language; many other countries have their own forms of sign language.

Amplifying Telephone Receivers: Telephone receivers with a volume control built into the handgrip. They allow a person who is hearing impaired to amplify the incoming conversation.

Assistance Animals: Enhances the lives of people with disabilities by providing highly trained assistance dogs or simian monkeys to enhance their independence or quality of life.

Assistive Technology: Technology used to assist a person with a disability (e.g., wheelchair, handsplints, computer based equipment).

Assistance Device: Any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): A spectrum of conditions that can cause social, communication, and behavioral challenges. Learning, thinking, and problem-solving capabilities range from gifted to severely impaired. Also now includes several different conditions which used to be diagnosed separately: Autistic disorder, pervasive developmental disorder, not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) and Asperger Syndrome.

Barriers (Architectural): Some common building standards under both the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS) and the Americans with Disabilities Act Architectural Guidelines (ADAAG) that eliminate common physical and architectural barriers. Examples of some architectural barriers may include:

- Walkways – 4 feet minimum width
- Doorways – 32 inches minimum clear opening
- Telephones – highest operable part not more than 48 inches from floor
- Bathroom Stalls – not less than 60 inches clear floor space to accommodate a wheelchair turning radius
- Slopes and inclines – for every one-inch drop between level surfaces, a one foot ramped incline

Braille: System of embossed characters formed by using a Braille cell, a combination of six dots consisting of two vertical columns of three dots each. Each simple Braille character is formed by one or more of these dots and occupies a full cell or space. Some Braille may use eight dots.

Brailled Books: Books with brailled text, rather than printed text. Most of the legally blind population does not read braille (about 7-12% of the population use braille as their primary reading mode). Braille requires a great deal of storage space.

Captioned film or videos: Transcription of the verbal portion of films or videos displayed to make them accessible to people who are deaf.

Captioning: Text that is included with video presentations or broadcasts that enables people with hearing impairments to have access to the audio portion of the material.

Closed Circuit TV Magnifier (CCTV): Camera used to magnify books or other materials to a monitor or television.

Curb Cut: Also called a curb ramp, it is a depression built into the curb of a sidewalk to permit passage by a

wheelchair. The incline should not exceed a gradient of 1:12 and the flat surface width should be no less than 4 feet wide.

Deaf/deaf: Uppercase “Deaf” refers to a group of people who share a language (American Sign Language) and a culture. Lowercase “deaf” is used to refer to the audiological condition of not hearing.

Deaf Culture: A set of values, behaviors, and traditions belonging to the deaf and close allies. American Deaf culture centers on the use of ASL and identification and unity with other people who are deaf.

Detectable Warnings: A standardized surface feature built in or applied to walking surfaces or other elements to warn visually impaired people of hazards on a circulation path. Detectable warnings consist of raised truncated domes and contrast visually with adjoining surfaces, either light-on-dark or dark-on-light.

Disability: Physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; a record of such impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment.

Dog Guide: The dog guide (“seeing eye” and “guide dog” are brand names) undergoes extensive specialized training to assist and alert persons who are blind, deaf and hard of hearing. It must learn basic obedience, to lead rather than “heel,” to avoid obstacles (including overhead objects), and to “work” in stores and elevators, on various forms of public transportation, and when crossing streets, etc. Dog guides are legally permitted to accompany their owners into buildings including all Federal and State buildings, hotels, motels, restaurants, grocery stores, airplanes, trains and buses. To refuse to allow a dog guide entry to any of these places is a violation of the law.

Finger Spelling: When no sign exists for a thought or concept, the word can be spelled out using the American manual alphabet. It is also used for titles, proper name, and convenience.

FM Sound Amplification System: Electronic amplification system consisting of three components: a microphone or transmitter, monaural FM receiver and a combination charger and carrying case. It provides wireless FM broadcast from a speaker to a listener who has a hearing impairment. RIT venues with FM sound amplification systems include: Lyndon B. Johnson classrooms and theatres, Gordon Field House and the Ingle and Webb Auditoriums.

Hard of Hearing: A person with mild to moderate hearing loss. A person who is hard of hearing may or may not consider themselves part of the Deaf community.

Hearing Aid: A hearing aid consists of a receiver and amplifier of sound. All sounds in the environment are amplified with the same intensity. A hearing aid does not sort, process, or discriminate among sounds. Because someone is wearing a hearing aid it does not mean that the person can hear normally. Aids do not correct hearing, but they improve hearing in some people.

Hearing Impairments: Complete or partial loss of ability to hear caused by a variety of injuries or diseases including congenital defects.

Interpreter: Professional person who assists a deaf person in communicating with hearing people.

Joystick: A device consisting of a lever that allows a pointer to move up, right, left or down and serves as an alternative to a mouse, It usually includes buttons to enable mouse clicks.

Keyboard emulation: A method of having an alternative device and/or software, such as a switch-based system, serve the role of a keyboard.

Keyguard: A plastic or metal shield that covers a keyboard with holes over the keys. It allows use of a keyboard without undesired activation of surrounding keys.

Large-Print Books: Most ordinary print is six to ten points in height (about 1/16 to 1/8 of an inch). Large type is fourteen to eighteen points (about 1/8 to 1/4 of an

inch) and sometimes larger. The format of large print books is also proportionally larger (usually 8 ½ x 11 inches). This accommodation may be used for individuals with vision impairments or a disability which affects accuracy in tracking letter to letter or line to line.

Mainstreaming, inclusion: The inclusion of people with disabilities, with or without special accommodations, in programs, activities, and facilities with their non-disabled peers.

Major life activities: Functions such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, breathing, learning, working, and participating in community activities (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990)

Mobility Impairment: Disability that affects movement ranging from gross motor skills such as walking to fine motor movement involving manipulation of objects by hand. In addition to these people who are born with a disability, this group includes a large amount of people whose condition is related to age or accidents.

Neurotypical or “NT”: A term used to describe someone not on the Autism Spectrum.

Peripheral neuropathy: A condition caused by damage to the nerves in the peripheral nervous system which includes nerves that run from the brain and spinal cord to the rest of the body.

Physical or mental impairment: Any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems: neurological; musculoskeletal; special sense organs; respiratory, including speech organs; cardiovascular; reproductive; digestive; genitourinary; hemic and lymphatic; skin; and endocrine; or any mental or psychological disorder, such as mental retardation, organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, and specific learning disabilities. (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990)

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): A condition that is triggered by experiencing or witnessing a

terrifying event. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety and uncontrollable thoughts about the event. Sometimes people with PTSD have difficulty adjusting and coping and can get better with good self-care and therapeutic intervention.

Qualified Individual with a Disability: An individual with a disability who, with or without reasonable modification to rules, policies, or practices, the removal of architectural, communication, or transportation barriers, or the provision of auxiliary aids and services, meets the essential eligibility requirements for the receipt of services or the participation in programs or activities provided by a public entity. (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990)

Reader: Volunteer or employee of an individual with a disability (e.g., visual impairment, learning disability) who reads printed material in person or records to audiotape.

Reading system: Hardware and software designed to provide access to printed text for people with visual impairments, mobility impairments, or learning disabilities. Character recognition software controls a scanner that takes an image of a printed page, converts it to computer text using recognition software and then reads the text using a synthesized voice.

Recorded Books: Recordings for the blind (RFB), a national non-profit voluntary organization which is supported primarily by contributions from the public, provides taped educational books, free on loan, to print-impaired elementary, high school, college and graduate students, as well as to non-students who require specialized reading material in their professions or vocations.

Refreshable Braille Display: Hardware connected to a computer that echoes screen text on a box that has cells consisting of pins that move up and down to create braille characters.

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf: The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) Inc., a national corporation with over 50 chapters, was organized in

1964 for the purpose of providing interpreting services to the deaf of America and its trust territories. In addition, the RID has members from other nations. The RID provides certification of interpreters and a grievance process for the clients to file a complaint about a certified interpreter who does not comply with the RID Code of Ethics.

Repetitive Stress Injury (RSI): A disability that may be chronic or acute and usually is described as pain caused by overuse of extremities, usually hands and wrists.

Screen Enlargement: Hardware or software that increases the size of characters and text on a computer screen.

Screen Reader: Software used to echo text on a computer screen to audio output, often used by people who are blind, with visual impairments or with learning disabilities.

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act: Legislation that requires federal agencies to develop, procure, and use accessible electronic and information technology.

Sensory Impairment: A disability that affects touch, sight, hearing or both.

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD): A condition in which the brain has trouble receiving and responding to information that comes in through the senses. Some people with sensory processing disorder are very sensitive to things in their environment such as sounds or bright lights.

Specific Learning Disability: Disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in difficulties listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or doing mathematical calculations. Frequent limitations include hyperactivity, distractibility, emotional instability, visual and/or auditory perception difficulties and/or motor limitations, depending on the type(s) of learning disability.

Sighted Guide: A sighted guide is a person who physically assists an individual who is blind, only when that person accepts assistance. When serving as a sighted guide for an individual who is blind, let the person take your arm (right or left depending on the person's preference), walk about one half-step ahead. S/he will follow the motion of your body. When showing a person who is blind to a chair, place his/her hand on the back of the chair. At times, it may also be helpful to provide a physical description of the physical environment surrounding them and the route being taken.

Speech Impairment: Problems in communication and related areas such as oral motor function, ranging from simple sound substitutions to the inability to understand or use language or use the oral-motor mechanism for functional speech.

Speech input or speech recognition: A method of controlling a computer and creating text by dictation. Speech input software is combined with a microphone.

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) or Teletypewriter (TTY): A device which enables somebody who has a speech or hearing impairment to use a telephone when communicating with someone else who has a TDD/TTY. TDD/TTYs can be used with any telephone, and one needs only a basic typing ability to use them.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI): Open and closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas, including cognition; language; memory; attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem-solving; sensory, perceptual, and motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; physical functions; information processing; and speech. The term does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital, degenerative, or induced by birth trauma.

Undue Hardship: The term "undue hardship" means significant difficulty or expense in, or resulting from, the provision of an accommodation.

Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973: Act prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability that applies to

any program that receives federal financial support. Section 504 of the act is aimed at making educational programs and facilities accessible to all students. Section 508 of the Act requires that electronic office equipment purchased through federal procurement meets disability access guidelines.

Vision impairments: Complete or partial loss of ability to see, caused by a variety of injuries or diseases including congenital defects. Legal blindness is defined as visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with correcting lenses, or widest diameter of visual field subtending an angular distance no greater than 20 degrees.

Word Prediction: Software that reduces the number of keystrokes needed to type words and sentences. As characters are entered on either a standard, alternative or virtual keyboard, suggested completions of the word that has been started are provided to the user.

Visual Alarms: A flashing light that is placed into a building or facility alarm system. If single station audible alarms are provided then single station visual alarm signals should also be provided.

Tactile Signage: Signs or labels with Braille, raised letters or textured patterns that can be read tactilely by persons with visual impairments.

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