

# The Three C's to Greater Independence

**A Workshop with Jay Stiteley  
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These materials will focus on suggestions a student with a visual impairment may benefit from when wanting to achieve a greater level of independence. The three C's are:

**College**, in the broadest sense of the word. It is becoming more and more evident that advanced education/training from high school is necessary for an individual to become employed. This advanced training is not just limited to college, but rather any program that offers advance training in any field.

**Computers**, with the emphasis being on solid, basic skills and what might be appropriate skills and needs to possess before acquiring equipment. If a person with a visual impairment wants employment, it is essential that they can operate a computer and the access equipment for their respective visual impairment.

**"Cane-nine"**: It is also imperative for the individual to be able to travel to the employment site, whether they use a cane or dog guide.

These are not separate skill areas, but rather interrelated. Each can stand alone separately, but when combined, presents a much stronger and more complete person.

## **COLLEGE**

Planning and organization are the most important keys to being successful when in college and ultimately when employed. This planning and organization needs to begin in high school or hopefully earlier, especially being organized.

## **BOOKS AND READERS**

### **Books on Tape**

Students should be able to:

1. Order their own tape-recorded books from Recording For the Blind and Dyslexic (RFB&D). In some high schools this may be required each semester, but in college it will definitely need to occur on a semester basis.
2. Telephone etiquette. Can the student use long distance directory assistance? Do they know how to place a long distance call, understand about toll free numbers, or how calling cards operate and who pays for them?
3. Does the student know all the information RFB&D needs to order a book? They need: Their member number, (be sure their annual fee is paid.); Title of Book; Author; Copyright year; Edition; and ISB Number.
4. Skills to copy the information once they approach the respective instructors for the above necessary information for obtaining the books: Braille note taker; Materials for writing in large print; use of a tape recorder for the purpose of transcribing into electronic or paper form.
5. Identify the deadlines of both the school and RFB&D for when books can be ordered and still arrive on time for the beginning of school? (colleges usually have a later deadline then RFB&D.)
6. Identify alternate tape recording sources

### **Developing a resource file.**

1. Identify the most efficient method of inputting and retrieving material in an organized fashion: Braille reading and writing skills; Large print reading and writing skills; Use of a file box and ensuring that the materials are readable from within the box and not having to pull each card out separately for reading purposes; or a Portable notetaking system, in the student's respective learning media. (See Computers section for more details about computer skills.)

## **Readers**

Locating readers:

1. Announce in the class that you need readers, offer that there is minimal pay or volunteer positions are sought. It is suggested that terms like "advertising for a reader" or "hiring several readers" etc., not "I need a reader" or "I want someone to read to me"; the latter two sound like you are less in control and are desperate or have lack of self-confidence.
2. Post advertisements on dormitory or cafeteria bulletin boards, school newspaper, or make announcements at dorm meetings, sororities and fraternities on campus that require community service work as part of the membership, etc.
3. Contact outside sources from the college community, such as senior citizen centers, volunteer organization, or the Delta Gamma sorority. Readers from outside of the college setting will not be as affected by mid term and final exams as the college based readers.

## **Scheduling Readers**

1. Schedule readers for no more than one-hour blocks without a break, this is for their reading and your listening readiness.
2. Always provide some type of liquid refreshment for the reader.
3. Do not rely on one or two readers, have at least five or more. This allows for flexibility, fall back options if a reader cancels.
4. Some readers may be better in specific subjects than others.
5. A reader only working one hour will be less likely to quit than a reader that is responsible for several hours, thus feeling less overwhelmed.
6. Arrange readers in their areas of knowledge or major to maximize their ability to describe or explain graphs, maps, etc.
7. Separate your reading sessions by at least ten minutes.
8. Physically move around during the rest period between readers.
9. Try to establish a consistent hour and day that someone reads to you.
10. Do not date your readers.

11. Minimize the amount that you rely on family for reading. The reason is that there is a tendency to have higher expectations of family members, but a much lower patience level.
12. Arrange time to develop a level of rapport with the reader at the beginning once you have hired or selected them as a volunteer.
13. Try to gain an understanding of what motivates your reader to the process of being a reader, so that you are sure their needs are being met, especially with a volunteer reader.
14. Some reader's schedules will not match with yours. Provide them with a print copy of the book, a tape recorder, and the syllabus and indicate how many days ahead of the syllabus date you need the tape version to allow yourself time to read the tape.
15. When selecting readers always have a practice reading session for you may find that some people do not read aloud very well.

## **Hired Versus Volunteer Readers**

Hired readers offer:

1. More control over becoming sidetracked from the reading assignments for you can remind the reader that the meter is running for their reader fee.
2. Choice of releasing a reader if they are not working out or making scheduled appointments.
3. With hired readers the motivation may be clearer, versus volunteer readers.

## **COMPUTERS**

The following will provide a series of questions and checklists that will address equipment, skills, and abilities that need to be considered when obtaining computer access equipment.

The primary point to remember is: Technology does not replace basic skills. It can only enhance those basic skills.

### **General Questions**

1. What does the user need?
2. What tasks will be performed?
3. Why does the user want it?
4. Does the user have the skills to use the device?
5. What are the warranty/repair/extended service terms and costs? (on site/off site).
6. Is the documentation in an accessible form via telephone help or on-line?
7. Is training available?
8. What is the standard computer package?
9. What accessories/additions are available?
10. What is the upgrade policy (free vs. fee)? Will you get notification about upgrades?

Send in your REGISTRATION card!!

## **Basic Skills for a Low Vision Student**

1. Capable of touch-typing, a minimum of 30 wpm, before equipment is provided to student.
2. Current low vision evaluation to insure that the student is operating with the most up-to-date reading aids.
3. Has the student received adequate training with the prescribed low vision devices?
4. Method of taking notes in a non-electronic means. This can be a tape recorder, only if they are planning to transcribe them into large print for easier retrieval.
5. A large print technology assessment should be conducted before acquiring an access program. At least two different large print programs should be shown to the student.

## **Basic Skills for a Blind Student**

1. Capable of touch-typing, a minimum of 30 wpm, before equipment is provided to student.
2. Method of taking notes in a non-electronic means. This can be a tape recorder, only if they are planning on transcribing them into braille or disk for easier retrieval.
3. A Speech and Braille technology assessment should be conducted before acquiring an access program. (There should be at least two different speech synthesizers and speech programs shown to the student before a decision is made.)
4. The additional decision to be made is whether or not braille will supplement the speech or vice versa, if it is indicated that the student learns both tactually and auditoraly.

## **Word Processing Skills**

The following are suggested skills that an individual can perform with confidence prior to beginning a higher level of education. These are basic word processing skills that will serve as a good solid foundation for producing most assignments and papers. These same skills could be applied to the use of an electronic note taker/Personal Digital Assistant (PDA).

1. Write text in the file.
2. Review text with the cursor movement keys.
3. Save a file through the quick save feature.
4. Retrieve files through the "load a file" or the "list files" feature.
5. Insert text at the cursor.
6. Demonstrate knowledge of when to use the delete versus backspace features.
7. Underline, bold, and center text.
8. Search for text.
9. Operate the spell-checking portion of the program.
10. Print a document.
11. Use the "help" screens.
12. Select text, via character, word(s), lines paragraph and full document.
13. Delete, copy, and move selected text.
14. Copy and delete files.
15. Operate the thesaurus.
16. Set and change the margins and tabs.
17. Search for and replace text.
18. Adjust font size and styles.
19. Create folders and understand folder structure.

### **Questions Specific to Note Takers and PDAs**

1. Ability to transfer data via infrared port either between a computer or printer.
2. Ability to sync the device with a host computer for files, email, etc.

### **Questions About Lap-tops**

1. How much does it weigh?
2. What is the estimated battery life?
3. Does it have a user replaceable battery pack? Cost?
4. What is the CPU type and speed?
5. How many and what configuration are the cursor movement keys?
6. What is the diagonal measurement of the screen?
7. What is the hard disk size?
8. What type of display is available?
9. How much memory is installed? Can the memory be expanded?
10. What ports are available?
11. What software synthesizers are compatible with the machine?
12. What extras (mouse, carrying case, modem, etc.) are available?
13. What warning beeps are available? (close cover, low battery).
14. What power saving settings are available?
15. How good are the student's/consumer's mobility skills?

## **CANE-NINES**

Whether a student uses a cane or a dog guide, it is very imperative that they secure a working knowledge, mental map of the campus. This could be by way of self-orientation or with the assistance of a friend, family member or mobility instructor.

Either use the actual schedule, if that information is available, or make a mock schedule using the buildings that the classes are generally held.

1. Learn the numbering systems of the buildings.
2. Establish known landmarks that a sighted student would relate to should you become disoriented.
3. Be sure to attempt the newly acquired route when there is a summer session in progress, to get the sense of how the route will be with large numbers of people.
4. Learn the essential elements of the campus during the summer and add details/new areas as the semester(s) progresses.

## **Cane or Dog Guide**

Many wish to have advantages and disadvantages listed between cane and dog guide. That is not the issue, it is a choice that a person makes. Similar to the sighted person who chooses to drive a truck instead of a car. Which system of mobility is a person the most comfortable with?

1. Good travel skills, intersection analysis, awareness of basic orientation methods and general decision making and problem solving skills make working with a dog much easier.
2. The ideal situation is for the new team to return to a known environment, i.e., home or a familiar college campus, so that the new dog guide user can direct his/her dog with confidence and awareness. This familiarity makes the transition from dog guide school to home environment easier. Thus allowing the person and dog to become a smoother team.

## **Characteristics of an Applicant to the Seeing Eye, Inc.**

1. Good health, such that the person could walk between two and three miles through the COURSE of a day. It does not have to be at a fast speed, rather a steady pace that is comfortable to the individual.
2. Limited residual vision such that it will not interfere with the dog's performance of his/her duties. In short, be able to learn to know when to use the remaining vision to supplement with the information you receive from the dog, not let the dog supplement your vision. (We do assist individuals with this training).
3. A person with a hearing impairment may be considered for instruction if they can accurately auditorially assess traffic movement through an intersection.  
--Note that the above two items did not specify acuity or decibel levels. The Seeing Eye believes in basing each person on their own merits, not creating categories then trying to make people fit those groupings. We are much more interested in the individual and their respective skills.
4. Mental stability such that the person will be able to provide the dog with accurate and consistent command structure and can implement the training techniques taught during the instructional class at The Seeing Eye.
5. Emotional and maturity level such that the student will be able to provide the dog with the proper amount of affection and appropriate correction to guarantee consistent behavior from the dog.