



Providing Print Materials in an Alternate Format for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired

Providing print materials for persons who are blind or have a visual impairment in an alternative format is an accommodation that can be achieved with relative ease. Alternative formats for regular print materials can include Braille, computer diskette, large print, tape recording or documents for scanning. When considering the most appropriate alternative format for someone always remember to ask which they prefer.

Material on Disk

People with visual impairments, people who are blind, or other individuals with print limitations may prefer to have materials on computer disks. The recipient of such materials can then use voice output and other forms of computer-related technology to access information.

The general rule is to provide any information on disk in a text-only format, a word processing file stripped of formatting such as columns, tabs, or shading. Information saved as "MS-DOS text with line breaks" will suffice for many individuals. As computer technology advances, however, complex formatting will become more accessible. When possible, consult with the individual as to his or her preferences regarding formatting, including type of computer disk i.e. PC or Macintosh.

Documents for Scanning

Many individuals with print limitations may access print documents through the use of a scanner with Optical Character Recognition (OCR). Once the document is scanned and interpreted by the OCR system, the individual can then "read" the document using a variety of adaptive computer systems. Because scannability is so restrictive to attractive printing, documents need to be provided in a clean and clear format. Providing materials in other formats can be a better solution, but providing some documents for scanning may be inevitable.



Suggestions for Using OCR:

OCR scanners vary in their ability to “recognize” printed documents. To enhance the scannability of print materials. Keep in mind the following suggestions: Glossy paper should be avoided, as it could create distorting reflections on the scanning element.

Very thin paper may allow two-sided printing to bleed through which decreases scannability.

Thin paper may also become jammed in scanners using automatic document feeders.

Complex columnar arrangements will diminish scanning accuracy, especially if columns are very close together.

For best results, no more than 2 columns should appear on a single page with a clear break between the columns.

Scanners can handle most standard type faces and fonts, but elaborate; highly decorative fonts should be avoided.

No shading and high color contrast should be used whenever possible.

Print which appears with pictures or graphics behind it will not be recognized by most scanners.

Poor duplication of print materials can be very detrimental to scannability.

Print that is blurred, very faint or very uneven, as from poor, or multiple copying for faxes will not scan well.



Large Print Documents

Most sources recommend using an 18 point bold, plain font, like Helvetica, on paper that does not produce a glare when creating a large print document. Large print users generally prefer buff colored paper over white, though the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) recommends light yellow, as it produces the least glare under a magnifying glass. Readability of large print is increased by using a ragged right edge, and 1 inch margins. The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) recommends 1.25 inch spacing between lines when an 18 point font is used.

Braille Transcription

Only about ten percent of persons who are blind read Braille. For those who do however, providing print materials in a Braille format can be very useful.

Most Braille transcription services require receipt of materials in advance of the date needed. Two weeks lead time is typical, though transcription services may need even more advanced notice for complex material.

Most Braille transcription services request that documents sent to them for transcription be provided in hard copy as well as on disk. This assists the transcriber in cross-checking for formatting and pagination. Materials that will be widely disseminated should be transcribed by a certified Brailist to ensure quality. Braille translation software alone may provide adequate Braille materials for simple, informal use. Such software is usually not sufficient to handle formatting situations such as multiple columns or complex information. In all cases, a competent Braille reader should proofread all materials for accuracy and appropriateness before such materials are disseminated.

Tape Recordings

Since many people with print limitations are not Braille users and do not have easy access to computers, print materials will often be requested on tape. Recording materials on cassette tapes is generally inexpensive and fairly simple, but following some basic rules can make a significant difference.



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Materials which will be used repeatedly, or which are very lengthy or complex, should be recorded by an experienced taping service, one which has high quality equipment and trained readers. When such a service is not needed, materials can be recorded on any commercial cassette recorder using standard blank tapes. Simple voice recordings do not require expensive, cassette tapes such as those used to record music. Care should be taken, however, to use cassettes that are not worn or of uneven quality. If possible, a hand-held microphone with an edit switch should be used, as this will greatly improve the recording quality, eliminate much background noise and simplify editing.

The reader should:

Speak in a clear, normal voice at a relaxed but slow speed. Strive for a balance in style, avoiding both a monotonous drone as well as the punchy style of a carnival barker.

Spell unusual words, particularly proper nouns such as last names and streets.

Check to be sure after recording for a few minutes the equipment is working properly and that the recording is easily audible and of good quality.

Review the recording process periodically.



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RESOURCES

American Council of the Blind
1155 15th St., Northwest #720
Washington, DC 20005
202/467-5081
800/424-8666
www.acb.org

American Council of the Blind of
Colorado
1536 Wynkoop Street Suite 203
Denver, CO. 80202
303/831-0117
888-775-2221
www.acbco.org

American Foundation for the Blind
15 W. 16th St.
New York, NY 10011
800/232-5463
www.afb.org

American Printing House for the Blind
1839 Frankfort Ave,
Louisville, KY 40206
502/895-2405
www.aph.org

Assistive Technology Partners
601 E. 18th Ave., Suite 130
Denver, CO 80203
303/315-1280 Main
800/255-3477
303/837-8964 TTY
303/837-1208 Fax
www.uchsc.edu/atp

Assistive Technology Partners
Western Slope Technical Assistance
Center (WesTAC)
2897 North Ave., Modular 3A
Grand Junction, CO 81501
970/248-0876
970/248-0877
www.uchsc.edu/atp

Beyond Sight
5650 S. Windermere
Littleton, CO 80120
303/795-6455
www.beyondsight.com

Colorado Talking Book Library
180 Sheridan Blvd.
Denver, CO 80226
303/727-9277
800/685-2136
www.cde.state.co.us/ctbl



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Helen Keller National Center of Deaf-
Blind Youth

141 Middle Neck Rd.
Sands Point, NY 11050
516/944-8900
www.hknc.org

RESNA State Tech Act Projects

1700 N. Monroe St. 1540
Arlington, VA 22209-1903
703/524-6686
www.resna.org

The Large Book

PO Box 5375
Englewood, CO 80155
303/721-7511
303/721-7512 Fax
800/305-2743

National Federation of the Blind

2233 W. Shepperd Ave.
Littleton, CO 80120
303/778-1130
800/401-4632
www.nfbco.org

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Also available in: Braille, large print, audio tape, disk and alternate language formats