



College: You Can Do It!

DO-IT

How students with disabilities can prepare for college

Some adults with disabilities do not have access to the same academic and career opportunities as their non-disabled peers. Improvements in precollege education and increased awareness of the rights and abilities of individuals with disabilities has resulted in a growing interest in expanding their postsecondary options. This publication addresses issues surrounding the transitions from high school to college and beyond for people with disabilities. It covers three phases:

- Preparing for college while in high school.
- Staying in college, which requires numerous self-management skills.
- Preparing to move beyond college and into a career.



Plan

Getting into college involves thoughtful preparation. It is best to start your planning by your sophomore year in high school.

- **Entrance requirements**

Participate in college fairs at your school or in your community to meet college representatives in person. Look at the websites or call the institutions that you hope to attend to find out about entrance requirements. Talk with teachers and school counselors. If you find that you are not able to meet specific entrance requirements during high school, consider attending a local community college to earn course credits you are lacking.

Starting at a two-year institution can provide a solid foundation for further studies at a four-year college or university.

- **Establish a timeline**

It is important to establish a time line that includes testing dates and application and student aid deadlines. When offered, consider applying for early-decision admission to colleges in order to have more time to visit potential schools and prepare for the transition to college.

- **High school GPA**

The grade point average (GPA) you obtain in high school may be an important entrance consideration at your colleges of choice. Work hard to earn grades that are as high as possible.

- **Pre-college examinations**

Pre-college examination (e.g., SAT, PSAT, ACT) scores may be important for acceptance into your college of choice. Work with a school counselor or teacher to arrange disability-related test-taking accommodations a few months before the test date. Appropriate accommodations can help you demonstrate your abilities to their fullest when taking an exam. If you earn a lower score than you feel capable of, ask if you can re-take the exam. If you provided a list of schools when you applied for the test, your scores may be automatically forwarded to these schools.

- **Applications**

When sending an application to a postsecondary institution, you are essentially sending a portrait of yourself—your grades, coursework, recommendations, personal goals, and abilities. Take time to present a full, positive picture of yourself. Before you submit your application, have someone proofread it and give you suggestions for improvement.



- **Funding**

Life in college is full of expenses that are expected and unexpected. There are resources to assist with and, in some cases, fully cover costs such as tuition, books, rent, lab fees, technology, and application fees. Start early and talk to teachers, counselors, disability services office, financial aid offices, and undergraduate support programs at institutions you wish to attend. Consult the brochure *College Funding Strategies* at www.uw.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/financial-aid.html for further information.

- **Support services**

Resources are not the same at each postsecondary institution. Knowing your needs and how they can be met is an important factor when selecting a college. Contact the disability services office at campuses of interest to see if they offer the accommodations and support that you require. Ask what type of disability-related documentation the college requires to provide requested services. Arranging support services can take a lot of time, depending on the services you need and the resources that are available. Be sure to allow enough time before school begins to submit your documentation and accommodation requests.

- **Transition and orientation**

Ask your high school counselor about transition programs that can prepare you for college. For example, *DO-IT Pals* is an electronic community of teens with disabilities. The teens are supported by each other and adult mentors as they take steps toward college and career success. Further information can be found at www.uw.edu/doit/Programs/pals.html. Also, find out if the college you've selected offers summer bridge programs or new student sessions.

Go

Being in college means managing a demanding schedule. It is especially important to develop and use personal skills in the areas of self-advocacy, self-management, and study.

- **Self-advocacy skills**

Self-advocacy skills include knowing how to skillfully initiate action and interact with faculty, staff, and other students to obtain support services necessary for your learning needs. You are the one who must recognize your needs, as well as mainstream services and disability-related accommodations, that will help you be successful. Make contact with those who can provide support or allow accommodations, follow-up on these contacts, and meet any requirements to receive the services needed.

- **Self-management skills**

Take into account your abilities and strengths, as well as your disabilities, when scheduling classes, work, and social activities. If your strength and ability vary daily, allow for flexibility. Self-management skills include maintaining reasonable academic and personal routines on a daily basis.

- **Study skills**

Study skills involve knowing how you can effectively learn academic content. These skills include strategies for note-taking during lectures and labs, reading, and test-taking. Development of each of these skills is important and leads to effective overall study habits. On many campuses, study skills courses are available to students free of charge. Many campus departments have tutoring, study groups, and open labs to help students be successful. Thoroughly explore the availability of these offerings at your school and take advantage of opportunities available to you.

- **Support services**

Many students, including individuals with disabilities, find it useful to obtain assistance from campus offices as well as outside resources. A disability services office can be a good place to start. Support services can be long-term or temporary. In many instances, a service that provides assistance requires ongoing attention. For example, to continue receiving some services you may need to provide updates on progress, status reports, and renewal requests. Factoring these requirements into a regular schedule of activities will ensure continuity of services.



- **Technology**

Use of computer and Internet resources is often essential in college and work. Assistive technology makes it possible for people with a variety of disabilities to use these powerful tools. Take advantage of opportunities in high school and college to learn about and use computer technologies. Of particular importance is developing skills in word processing and information access for research purposes. Many colleges have computer labs available to students and, in many cases, provide assistive technology. Find out what technology is available at your school and make use of these resources.

- **Networking**

Throughout the process of preparing for and attending college, conversations, interactions, and assistance from a broad range of people will likely take place. Take advantage of networking opportunities through the career center, professional organizations, friends, family, and coworkers because who you know, as well as what you know, can determine your success.

Think Ahead

Working toward a career should begin early in your college life. Making prudent choices academically (e.g., choosing a major, selecting appropriate coursework, engaging in work experiences) can assist you in making your career choices. For more information about career preparation consult the brochure *It's Your Career* at www.uw.edu/doit/Brochures/Careers/worklearn.html.

- **Academic and career choices**

College can prepare you for a specific career as well as provide broad-based preparation for a range of career opportunities. Seek advice from family members, teachers, school counselors, and career guidance counselors when making decisions about choosing a direction that is best for you. Career services offices at your school may offer classes, testing, and consulting in these areas.

- **Building your résumé**

To begin building a résumé, make a list of all of your relevant work experiences (paid and volunteer), academic experiences, and other activities. Seek advice from campus career advisors and consult printed and online resources as you select the best style and format for your résumé depending on the type of job for which you are applying.

- **Work-based learning**

The career services office at the postsecondary institution you attend may offer employment, cooperative, and internship opportunities. If opportunities are not available, make efforts to obtain other work-based learning experiences for your résumé. These experiences can also help you confirm your area of interest and career path, as well as establish a network of contacts, that will be needed for post-college employment.

Helpful Hints

The following helpful hints are offered by participants in DO-IT, most of whom have disabilities and are in college or pursuing careers.

- Research all of your options for college.
- Work with the school you plan on attending ahead of time.
- Seek assistance from student service offices, such as disabled student services, career services, and cooperative education.
- Plan, organize, and evaluate your needs so that support service units can work together to ensure there are no gaps in assistance.
- Communicate with your professors. They are there to help.
- Request accommodations in a timely manner.
- Be realistic about the number of credits you take, especially the first quarter.
- Take some courses that look like fun, as well as more challenging courses.
- Take some time to enjoy the social life on campus. It is a good way to meet new people and make friends.
- Know yourself. Evaluate your strengths, abilities, skills, and values at various times throughout your college experience.



- **Community support services**

For some individuals, the need for support services continues past college graduation. Which support services will need to continue and which ones need to be newly established will depend on specific post-college job requirements. Early awareness of services you need will ease your transition from college life to life on your own and on the job. Work-related accommodations may be supplied by your employer, while personal support services may need to be provided by outside sources. Start planning early as this can be a slow process of research and practice.

Have Fun

- **Social activities**

A social life is important. Make time in your schedule to socialize and get involved in extracurricular activities. Forming study groups is a good way to tackle challenging classes and meet new people. Joining campus clubs or organizations will help you connect with others who have similar interests.

Additional Resources

Useful resources are available from many organizations. A good starting point is the *AccessCollege* link from the DO-IT home page at www.washington.edu/doi/. The *Student Lounge* at www.uw.edu/doi/Student/ provides resources for precollege and college students. The short video *College: You Can DO-IT!* may be freely viewed online at www.uw.edu/doi/Video/college.html or purchased in DVD format.

About DO-IT

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) serves to increase the successful participation of individuals with disabilities in challenging academic programs and careers, such as those in science, engineering, mathematics, and technology. Primary funding for DO-IT is provided by the National Science Foundation, the State of Washington, and the U.S. Department of Education.

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