

IATEFL 2025

Teaching English to Visually Impaired Students

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Samantha Lewis and Elsa O'Brien, British Council Spain

Types of impairments and support tools

A visual impairment can mean something completely different in each student. Teachers should find out what each individual's needs are in order to plan the appropriate support.

Low vision	Colour blind	Monochromacy	No vision
Low acuity, low range or both.	Can't tell the difference between certain colours.	Sees everything on a scale of greys.	Blind.
Colour contrast	Colour contrast	Colour contrast	Braille text
Font size	Alternative to colour coding	Alternative to colour coding	Alt text
Light source			Braille keyboard
Obstacle-free classroom			Obstacle-free classroom
Line spacing			Screen reader
Enlarged text/images			

Adapting tasks and materials

The **main goal** of adapting tasks and materials should be to maintain **the same learning objective** as in the original one.

General task considerations.

- Font size, line spacing and contrast (non-cursive font e.g. Arial: Word 12pt min, Ppt 18pt min, line spacing: Word 1.15 min, PPT 1.5 min).
- Images need to be **described in their mother tongue (Alt text)**.
- **Objects** and **models** help to contextualise.
- Task Organisation – **clearly staged**.
- Give **instructions orally** and a **running commentary**.
- Tasks **take longer**.

Adapting Tasks and Materials: **Listening**

1. Describe any accompanying **images central to the task**.
2. **Lift** matching activities off the page if possible.
3. Accessing **tables** with screen readers can be **challenging**.
4. **Simplify complex tasks** such as lengthy multiple choice and break the audio into **shorter** sections.

Adapting Tasks and Materials: **Speaking**

1. Check the **colour and contrast**.
2. Can the **information** in the **images** (e.g. head shapes) be read by a screen reader?
3. The information on a page may not follow a logical order when read by a screen reader.
4. Can the activity be **lifted off the page**?

Adapting Tasks and Materials: Reading

Word tends to be the best format for screen reader apps.

If a text has been saved as an image the screen reader won't be able to read it. How to check this? Try to copy the text with your computer's mouse. If you can't it's because it's an image. You can use [Google Lens](#) on your phone or computer to turn image into text. You can use [ILovePdf](#) to turn Pdf into Word.

Open questions: check there is enough space to answer if there is a gap or if it's a table.

True or false: If the sentences are in tables, check that they are accessible.

Search for words in text: with tasks like 'search for a synonym in line 6' we need to remember that the lines might not coincide if the visually impaired student is using enlarged text or Braille.

Matching: students who use a screen reader or Braille might find exercises with a lot of matching options tedious as they have to move up and down the page to re-read or listen again to the answers as they can't just glance at them. The best option is to break it down into groups of 3-4 sentences.

Long readings: Again, as students won't be able to glance back at the questions, reading exercises should be broken down into chunks of text + question so that blind students don't have to try and remember a lot of questions while reading the text.

Adapting Tasks and Materials: Writing

Challenge	Solution
Can the model text be read by screen readers?	Check that it's not an image. If so transcribe using Google Lens .

Is the image related to the text?	If not, mark as decorative or delete.
How will the student submit the task?	Word document or Braille if translation available.
How can we convey the format particularities of type of text and register?	Describing in writing or orally anything that other students would pick up from visual cues.
What about any written tips in adjacent speech bubbles?	They must be included in an accessible table or between brackets before or after each paragraph so that the additional explanation is adjacent to the part of the text it mentions.

Adapting Tasks and Materials: **Vocabulary**

A lot of the vocabulary activities and techniques we already use would work with visually impaired learners as well.

Introducing the **meaning** of new words.

- Real object or toys.
- Flashcards with print and Braille.
- Translation.
- When the word is introduced involve the students and ask questions using language they understand e.g. 'ice cream'.
 - *Put your hands up if you like ice cream.*
 - *Is it hot or cold?*
 - *What's your favourite flavour?*

Helping learners **understand** new words.

Sorting flashcards and objects in different groups.

Responding if the word the teacher says is correct.

- Put your hand up.
- Hold up the object.
- Stand up.
- Model it with plasticine.
- Repeat the word if correct (clever parrots).

Playing games.

- Bingo
- Playing 'Taboo'.
- Plickers

Helping learners **produce** the new words.

Respond by saying the correct word.

- Feel the object.
- Look at the flashcard.
- Listen to a definition.

Drilling and repetition.

- Clever parrots – repeat after the teacher if they are correct
- Chain drill '*I like pizza*', '*I like pizza and sandwiches*', '*I like pizza, sandwiches and apples*'.

Playing games.

- Guess my word.
- Baamboozle.

Create a 3D poster and label.

Final tips

- **Try things out & give things time to work.**
- **Talk** to your learners. They are the best source of information about their needs.
- **Never underestimate** your learners.
- Despite their learning differences they are **typical kids or teens** with typical interests.

Links to additional resources

ONCE Educación, click [here](#).

Teaching visually impaired students online-Speaker's Digest, click [here](#).

Teaching English to visually impaired students F2F-Speaker's Digest, click [here](#).

Lego bricks for the blind-The Guardian, click [here](#).

The Boy who Invented Braille-Film English, click [here](#).

Audio series: The survivor-Learn English Teens British Council, click [here](#).

Plickers game, click [here](#).

Baamboozle game, click [here](#).

SCULPT accessibility tips, click [here](#).

Contrast checker, click [here](#).