

Workplace Accommodations for Physical Disabilities



Employers often have concerns related to accommodating disabilities. It's important to be prepared to answer questions your industry partner may have related to hiring a student with a physical disability.

Many types of apparent and non-apparent disabilities can impact mobility. These include, but are not limited to, amputation, paralysis, heart conditions, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, arthritis, and spinal cord injury. Mobility impairments range from lower body impairments, which may require use of canes, walkers, or wheelchairs, to upper body impairments that may include limited or no use of the upper extremities and hands.

Accommodating Physical Disabilities in the Workplace

Individuals with physical disabilities can be accommodated in many ways, and the specific accommodations will vary by situation. Share any accommodations that you made that your student found helpful with your industry partner. Remind them that the best way to find out what a person needs is to ask, and that not all people with physical disabilities will need accommodations to perform their jobs, and some may only need a few. Below are some examples of common workplace accommodations for people with physical disabilities.

Workplace

Many workplaces are universally designed and already equipped to assist individuals with physical disabilities, including elevators or ramps, accessible bathrooms, automatic doors, and automatic lights. Some other considerations include:

- **Off-site locations:** If you are meeting at an off-site location, consider the accessibility of that location.
- **Tour and evaluate:** When onboarding a person who has a physical disability, provide a tour and evaluate the worksite for accessibility adjustments such as:
 - Clearing aisleways
 - Placing supplies where they are reachable
 - Reserved parking spaces (including for those with non-apparent disabilities)
- **Moving around in the workplace:** Consider the use of mobility scooters for people who have difficulty moving from one workspace to another.

Workspace

Changes to an individual's workspace should always be made according to the specific work-related needs of the individual. Some simple accommodations to consider include:

- Providing an adjustable height/tilt desks or tables, keyboard tray, monitor riser, footrest, or lowering shelves and equipment
- Ensuring there is enough space for a person to move around their workspace in a wheelchair
- Providing room to store a wheelchair/other mobility device if the individual prefers to use an office chair while working.

Technology

The specific need for assistive technology is unique to each individual. Some individuals may benefit from one or more assistive technologies such as:

- Alternative keyboard, mouse, or joystick
- Accessibility settings on cell phone and computer software
- Devices that allow the use of the hand, head, or legs to operate a computer
- Speech recognition software or voice-activated computing
- Recording devices for meetings or a designated note-taker
- Fine motor and dexterity devices such as automatic page turners, doorknob grips or handles, and tools with ergonomic handles or grips.

Additional Resources

- Working Together: Computers and People with Mobility Impairments - <https://www.washington.edu/doit/working-together-computers-and-people-mobility-impairments> (<https://tinyurl.com/aacomputersimpairments>)
- A Planning Guide for Making Temporary Events Accessible to People with Disabilities - <https://adata.org/guide/planning-guide-making-temporary-events-accessible-people-disabilities> (<https://tinyurl.com/aatempaccess>)
- Department of Labor' article on Accommodations - <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/employers/accommodations>



Developed in conjunction with DeafTEC, part of the Rochester Institute of Technology: <https://deaftec.org/>



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AccessATE is funded by the National Science Foundation under DUE#1836721. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.