

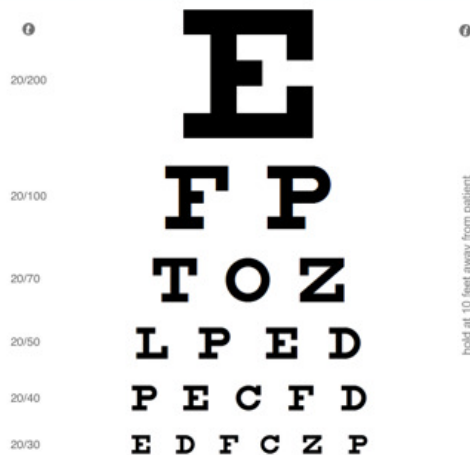


Accommodations for a person with low vision or who is blind

A person may ask for specific accommodations. Persons who are blind or have low vision often become very early adopters of technology. They may have preferences for specific assistive technology. However, a person who is a participant in a hearing may not know enough about the hearing process to know what they need. No two persons with low vision or blindness are exactly alike.

- Blind means
 - Clinically blind, a complete loss of vision, or
 - Legally blind, a corrected vision of 20/200 in the better-seeing eye
- Low vision means a condition caused by eye disease with visual acuity at 20/70 or poorer in the better-seeing eye

A person who is legally blind wearing corrective lenses can see at 20 feet what the average person can see clearly at 200 feet. Most people in the United States are familiar with the eye chart in a doctor’s office. While wearing corrective lenses, if from 20 feet away a person can only read the big “E” on the top line, the person is legally blind. If the smallest print a person can read while wearing glasses is the third line (T O Z), the person has “low vision.”



It is important not to assume that a person who is blind or has low vision also has intellectual or other disabilities.

Examples of Accommodations
Accommodations and supports that may help individuals with low vision or blindness include:



Examples of Accommodations

- Enlarge font, or enlarge and bold font
- Print notices, orders and written communications on colored paper
- Place colored separator sheets to distinguish between documents
- Place a colored sheet on top, to alert it is something received in the mail is important (so the person can arrange to have it read)
- Allow communication with OAH by email
- Allow party to authorize OAH to send information by non-secure email
- Send notices and orders by email in accessible format

- Allow electronic records (convert all documents in the case record to electronic format so that it can be manipulated on a tablet or “read” with a speech synthesizer or Braille translator)
- Arrange for Braille translations of OAH documents, taking into account to meeting deadlines the time needed to obtain the translations
- Allow extra time for the use an electronic Braille display or screen reader applications
- Assign a staff person to read aloud case records, including those that are not in an accessible format
- Modify the requirements for marking and identifying exhibits
- Allow time, and as needed space, for use of a magnifying sheet or lamp or other assistive device
- Assign a staff person to help organize, identify and mark exhibits and create an exhibit list
- Modify processes that require something in writing; allow audio recordings or other alternative method of communication suited to the disability

Interacting with a customer who is blind or has low vision

1. When greeting the person, identify yourself and introduce others who may be present.
2. Do not leave the person without excusing yourself first.
3. When asked to guide someone with a sight disability, never push or pull the person. Allow him or her to take your arm, then walk slightly ahead. Point out doors, stairs, or curbs, as you approach them.
4. As you enter a room with the person, describe the layout and location of furniture, etc.



5. Be specific when describing the location of objects. (Example: "There is a chair three feet from you at eleven o'clock.")
6. Do not pet or distract a guide dog. The dog is responsible for its owner's safety and is always working. It is not a pet.

Scenarios: Meeting a customer who is blind or has low vision

Scenario #1

You are returning to the office when you see a man ahead of you enter the reception area. He is using a white cane. He pauses for a minute as if he is getting a feel for the place and the sounds around him. He turns slightly sensing your approach and you ask, "Can I help you?" "I'd really appreciate if you could direct me to the front desk." "If you'd like to take my arm, sir, I'd be happy to," you reply.

You did exactly as you should. It would not have been as helpful if you told the man that the front counter was about 15 steps ahead and slightly to his left, particularly if he seemed unfamiliar with the room. It was important to offer your arm to the man, rather than taking his arm and risking violating his personal space. You would not want to take his hand or arm to lead him to the front desk. Your touch may startle or surprise him because he cannot see it coming. In addition, when you ask a person who is blind to take your arm you show respect to the person and the right to control over his own body.

Scenario #2

At the front desk, you see Support Staff is on the telephone with another customer. You guide the man to the counter and ask him to wait while you go around behind the counter. You ask, "Is this your first time here?"

"Yes. I want to make a public records request."

"Well, we have a form to fill out to make a request. Normally, we just give people a clipboard with the form on it. But, with your situation, I will go find a room where I can ask you about the public records you are seeking in a more private setting, so other people won't overhear us."

There are more appropriate words than "normal" or "regular" when you talk about OAH procedures. The way we do things most of the time could be considered the "normal" way, but when a thing is not normal it may be perceived as inferior. Some people with disabilities would not take offense or would politely ignore your poor choice of words, but others would be bothered. Why does it matter? Because first impressions matter. A party's feelings about their first interaction with OAH may color how they feel about the entire hearing process and whether



Scenario #2

they will feel fairly treated.

It was fine to say OAH has a form to fill out to make a public records request, and then let the customer know that if they needed assistance, a private place could be arranged when you could go through the form with them. The customer may have accepted that offer, or they may have asked to take the form with them so someone they knew could assist them. Also, you could have told the customer the public records form is accessible on our public website. Some customers with visual disabilities may ask for the form in large print or in electronic format so that they could fill them out on their own with the help of magnifying equipment or adaptive software. All of these options would result in a properly completed form, so there is no reason to suggest these methods are “abnormal.”

A Note on Privacy: Having a disability does not, and should not ever, mean a person has to give up his or her privacy or confidentiality when providing information for paperwork. Other people who are able to complete the paperwork without assistance do not have to divulge personal information, such as name, address, phone number or work history, in a way that others can overhear. So, why should this happen to someone with a disability? It shouldn't. Therefore, when you help a customer complete any paperwork, you should move to another office or to some place in the room where you can work together without being overheard.