

Self-Advocacy at College or University

Self-advocacy is understanding your strengths and needs, identifying your personal goals, knowing your legal rights and responsibilities, and communicating these to others. One of the biggest changes students with disabilities face as they make the transition to post-secondary studies is that they must advocate for themselves. In high school, you may have had others speak on your behalf.

The arrangements necessary for you to receive your accommodations were made for you. In college and university, arranging for and receiving accommodations works quite differently; you are responsible for advocating for yourself.

You will be required to communicate your needs and make arrangements to receive accommodations and services. Learning to advocate for yourself is an essential component of achieving not only academic success but fulfillment in life after school. Here are some guidelines to follow as you practice self-advocacy.

Self-Knowledge

- Accept your disability. Before you can advocate for yourself, you have to admit that you have a disability and that you may need some extra assistance to be successful.
- Understand your disability and the implications it may have in an academic setting.
- Know what you need to successfully cope with the academic challenges presented by your disability. Think about the accommodations, strategies and services that work best for you.
- Acknowledge when you are having difficulties and ask for assistance.

Rights and Responsibilities

- Learn about your legal rights and the accommodations and services appropriate to your needs
 - Remember that you have the right to privacy and confidentiality with regard to your disability. Disclose information to those who need to know and can assist you (e.g., Disability Services, professors) in an environment that is comfortable for you.
- Request the specific accommodations that you need for tests or assignments each time you need them.
- In the unlikely event that a professor refuses your request for accommodations, politely thank him or her and leave. Then contact the College or University Disability Services for help in resolving disability related accommodation concerns.
- Follow through on any arrangements you need to make to receive services and accommodations.

Communication

- An effective self-advocate is assertive, not aggressive. *Always* be polite and respectful when speaking with others. Start with the assumption that college personnel want to help meet your needs.
- Practice what you are going to say beforehand (you will be less likely to feel tongue-tied).
- Communicate clearly.
- Rephrase what you hear to be sure you really understand.

“How Will I Talk with My Professors?”

In college, you must talk with your professors about your disability-related need for accommodations. Here are suggestions for ways to begin your discussions.

Presenting your *Memo to Faculty*:

“My name is _____. I am registered with Disability Services and this is the list of the accommodations that I will need. My disability causes the following difficulties in learning: _____.”

Extended Time on Tests and In-class Assignments:

“I would like to discuss the accommodation of extended time. Because I will need to use the extra time to complete my test/in-class assignment, I would like to arrange to write it in a quiet alternative setting with supervision. Can we work with disability services to make arrangements?”

Quiet Environment:

“Because I am easily distracted, I need to take tests/quizzes in a quiet environment. Can we work with disability services to make arrangements?”

Access to Computers for All Written Tests and In-class Assignments:

“My disability makes writing tests or in-class assignments by hand extremely difficult for me. I will need to use a computer in order to produce an accurate, legible assignment. Can we work with disability services to make arrangements?”

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