

TRANSCRIBER AND EDUCATOR SERVICES

Transition Services: The Role of Transcribers During Transition

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How do braille readers in the K-12 setting receive their educational materials in an accessible format and in a timely fashion? Well, through the garden of braille books, of course! A teacher of students who read using braille simply has to go out and pluck the books from the garden, and place them in front of the student every August, right?

As professionals in the field, we know this couldn't be further from the truth. There is a long line of support services, procedures, and personnel put in place many months in advance. These may include some or all of the following: the original publication of the text, the district's decision to use the text, the TVI's (Teacher of the Visually Impaired) request for a copy of this text, the TVI's submission of the book for braille transcription, the transcription of the book (sometimes in a non-chronological order), delivery of an e-braille file to the TVI, embossing of the file, delivery to the student, and classroom/home use by the student.

The sequence mentioned above outlines the steps for a typical textbook. Assuming everything goes well in the process, this can take anywhere from 1 month (if the book is already available in e-braille format) to 1 year (if a complex math/science book needs to be transcribed from scratch). But what about worksheets, handouts, tests, quizzes, etc.? The same process applies, with the only difference being that these materials are typically much shorter in length (perhaps between one and ten pages), and they might therefore be turned around within a few days.

However, regardless of whether a student needs a 500-page advanced calculus textbook or a 1-page elementary-grade reading worksheet, there is a missing component in the process. This is ... *student advocacy*.

If students are not given the opportunity to actively participate in the acquisition of braille materials, what will they do after they leave high school? There is no TVI or special education director who is dedicated through federal legislation to provide accessible materials to students with this need. There is certainly no braille book garden.

Fortunately, there is a disability services office at every community college and public university, which is legally required to provide such services. Unfortunately, they are not required to proactively find students with these needs. The students themselves must initiate contact with the disability services office, set up appropriate accommodations (including alternative formats like braille), request syllabus/textbook lists from their professors, purchase copies of the books, submit the purchased copies to the disability services office, and then obtain the braille copies once completed. The post-secondary process is nearly identical to the K-12 process—but this time, the student is facilitating each move, not the TVI.

As Charles Kettering has said: "A problem well-stated is half-solved." Although not everyone may agree that there is a problem with how the K-12 setting prepares students for post-secondary independence, I think we would all agree that there is always room for improvement. A student and his or her family, TVI, classroom teacher(s), other educational specialists, and school and district administrators all play a critical role in collaborating with a transcriber who provides braille materials. Here are some of the ways each of these stakeholders can better support transcribers at each level of a student's educational program, thereby increasing the long-term independence of the students, and making everyone's job a little bit easier.

Pre-Kindergarten:

- Give students the opportunity to choose between braille, audio, or large print formats (as appropriate) for certain classroom activities.
- Wherever possible, assist students in procuring and delivering print materials that need to be transcribed into braille.
- Help students understand the difference between play, pause, rewind, and forward on audio or other electronic playback devices.

1st-6th Grade:

- Introduce contractions in a systematic way. Present weekly handouts with only those contractions that students have mastered.

- Introduce Individualized Education Program (IEP) concepts to students—specifically, alternative format accommodations.
- Teach students the different formats and ways in which they can access their educational materials. Help them explore options to develop a better understanding of what is available to them.
- In February, March, and April, assist students in requesting print copies of their textbooks for the next school year from their classroom teachers.

7th-8th Grade:

- Students should become familiar with how to use braille translation software, a printer, and an embosser.
- Students should become familiar with how to use an electronic braille display and screenreading software.
- Students should become familiar with how to use the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS) BARD and Bookshare applications.
- Students should develop the ability to obtain weekly print and electronic handouts from their classroom teacher(s), and then request them in specific accessible formats from their TVI.

9th-12th Grade:

- With support as necessary, students should develop a communication and organization system (e.g., Google Drive, Dropbox, email, etc.) that they can use to request their textbooks and classroom handouts in accessible formats.
- Students should be guided in providing feedback to their classroom teachers, TVI, and transcribers (as appropriate) on how they can assist in making documents more accessible and easier to use.
- Students should make independent choices about which format(s) would be best for them to use for each class or situation (e.g., hardcopy braille for a math textbook, electronic text for a literature book).
- Students should use advanced technology, such as braille-to-print hardware/software, that allows live translation of materials for their classroom teachers to use in reading and grading their assignments.

The acquisition of materials in accessible formats is a multi-faceted and detail-oriented process. There are so many things for a student to learn if he or she is to become a truly proactive advocate for accessible materials by high school graduation! By working together and using these suggestions, all who are involved can begin as early as preschool to support students in their journey toward post-secondary independence.

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