

Guidelines for Documenting Visual Impairments

Students seeking support services from Accessibility Services on the basis of a previously diagnosed vision loss must submit documentation that verifies their eligibility under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The documentation must describe a disabling condition, which is defined by the presence of significant limitations in one or more major life activities. Merely submitting evidence of a diagnosis is not sufficient to warrant academic accommodations.

Documentation from a recognized agency as being eligible for services, for example the New Mexico Commission for the Blind, will be considered but specific accommodation requests may require the documentation outlined below.

An ophthalmologist, optometrist or other qualified professional should make the diagnosis and complete the appropriate documentation. The diagnostician should not be a family member of the student. Documentation should include:

1. A clear statement of vision-related disability with supporting numerical description. The age of acceptable documentation is dependent upon the nature of the condition and the student's request for accommodations. Visual disabilities of a changing nature may need to be documented more frequently. Also include a statement as to whether the condition is progressive or stable.
2. Include the following sections that are relevant to the individual:
 - o Eye Health
 - o Visual Fields
 - o Binocular Evaluation
 - o Accommodative Skills
 - o Oculomotor Skills
3. A summary of assessment procedures and evaluation instruments that were used to make the diagnosis and a narrative summary of evaluation results.
4. Narrative or descriptive text providing both quantitative and qualitative information about the student's abilities is helpful in understanding the student's profile, including the use of corrective lenses and ongoing visual therapy (if appropriate). Medical information relating to the student's needs and the impact on the demands of an academic program.
5. A statement of the functional impacts or limitations of the vision loss on learning or other major life activity and the degree to which it impacts the individual in the learning context for which accommodations are being requested (i.e. the implications for reading, mobility, seeing the black board).
6. Specific cognitive processing strengths, weaknesses, and deficits.
7. Recommended accommodations.
8. All documentation must be submitted on the official letterhead of the professional describing the disability. The report should be dated and signed and include the name, title, and professional credentials of the evaluator, including information about license/certification.