



self - directed
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A C T I O N



UNLOCK
YOUR FUTURE

SELF-ADVOCACY AND NEGOTIATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND
MEDICAL CONDITIONS IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION



AUTHOR: TERRI SHARPE, DISABILITY CONSULTANT FOR EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY. THIS BOOKLET MAY BE REPRODUCED WHOLE OR IN PART BY OTHER INSTITUTIONS IN AUSTRALIA. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: THIS BOOKLET WAS MADE WITH ASSISTANCE FROM MANY INDIVIDUALS. IN PARTICULAR: THE POST SECONDARY EDUCATION DISABILITY NETWORK; ALL POST SECONDARY EDUCATION STUDENTS WHO WERE INVOLVED IN FOCUS GROUPS; AND THE DISABILITY SERVICES COMMISSION LIBRARY AND STAFF. AVAILABLE IN ALTERNATIVE FORMATS BY REQUEST. DECEMBER 2000 ISBN 0 7298 0487 9

THE *key*

TO UNLOCKING YOUR
FUTURE POTENTIAL IS IN
YOUR HANDS.

“whatever YOU CAN DO
OR DREAM YOU CAN,
begin it.

BOLDNESS HAS GENIUS,
POWER AND MAGIC IN IT. ”

| G O E T H E



foreword

This initiative forms part of the growing variety of resources currently available to students with disabilities and medical conditions. This booklet focuses on identifying and developing skills for effective self-advocacy. The addition of these skills will aid students in determining what they need from their post-secondary education experience, resulting in a positive experience for both students and staff. It is with great pleasure that I recommend this booklet for students with disabilities and medical conditions, and trust that in referring to the material within it, students will greatly benefit during their time in post-secondary education, and well beyond.



PROFESSOR MILLICENT E POOLE
VICE CHANCELLOR, EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
DECEMBER 2000

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introduction

1

1.1 Who this booklet is for

So you've finally made it to post-secondary education. Congratulations! What you now need to work out is how to help yourself get through. All students need the ability to self-advocate, but as a student with a disability or medical condition there are issues you face that others may have no awareness of. And effective self-advocacy isn't easy, so this book has been written to help you decide what others can do for you, and what you need to do for yourself.

This book may also be of benefit to post-secondary education staff. Many students suggest that academic staff do not know what it is like to have a disability or the difficulties involved in requesting accommodations.* So, this booklet has some information on advice to staff when interacting with you, as well as things that you need to think about when interacting with staff.

1.2 What this booklet is about

The skills and abilities required by you as a student with a disability¹ while studying at a post-secondary level may differ from those developed prior to entering post-secondary education. Being able to effectively self-advocate is an important skill to have.

It is particularly important for you, as a student with a disability, to learn appropriate skills in self-advocacy as you may find it necessary to express your particular needs and feelings to individuals who are unfamiliar with your experience.³ The particular needs that you have as a student are called 'accommodations' - this refers to all the types of things you need that your institution may provide to you if appropriate.

It is advisable to think about the things you might need. When planning ahead, start thinking about reading lists and materials you might need to purchase. For example, obtaining essential reading lists in advance would be beneficial, to help keep up-to-date with the reading requirements of a unit. Rather than jumping straight in and asking the wrong

person or asking someone else to help, why not think about issues like:

- what is the best way to go about requesting this service?
- who do you approach?
- how do you approach them?
- when is the best time?

Knowing the answers to these questions will increase your chances of getting what you might need to assist you in your studies.

That's the main aim of this book - it's a resource to assist you to advocate and negotiate. The more you do for yourself - the more you act *independently* and with *your own best interests* in mind - the more prepared you'll be for life during and after post-secondary education.

The intention of this book is to help you become a more effective self-advocate." It is hoped that this, in turn, will help to improve your experience in post-secondary education - making the experience more fulfilling and enjoyable for both you and the staff you meet.

1.3 How having a disability may affect study in post-secondary education

There are many issues that all students face when entering post-secondary education. For example, students may be unaware of the workload expected of them, how lectures and tutorials are organised, assessment procedures and other things like housing, transportation and financial issues.

Having a disability can affect post-secondary education in many different ways. Current post-secondary students with disabilities indicate that the experience is not what they expected.⁴ Some of the perceptions that students with disabilities held prior to entering post-secondary education, and the reality of the experience two to three years later, are illustrated in Table 1 on the next page.

table 1

PERCEIVED VERSUS ACTUAL EXPERIENCE OF POST-SECONDARY LIFE ⁵

Issue	Prior to Post-secondary Education*	2-3 Years into Post-secondary Education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A small amount of reading. • Plenty of time given to read in class. • Teachers would read to the class in school time. • Teachers determined most important reading and informed students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enormous amounts of reading required. • Student to determine most important readings. • Student to request reading lists in advance. • Student to inform appropriate staff if alternative formats are required.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strict attendance requirements. • Students attend classes at school and attendance recorded. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varies between units. • Onus is on the students to attend lectures - no attendance record. • Labs and tutorials vary - some take attendance record while others don't. • Onus is on the student to request flexibility in attendance requirements if they are needed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requesting accommodations in general. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents determined most accommodations. • Teachers or parents ensured appropriate accommodations were in place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students must determine accommodations. • Usually, depending on the nature of the accommodation, students request it themselves.

* Students were asked to think of their perceptions retrospectively.

introduction

Some other issues facing students with disabilities upon entering post-secondary education include:

Disability awareness and acceptance: How well do students know their own strengths and weaknesses? What is the potential and real impact of their disability on study? What accommodations do they need? Have they ever had to plan ahead, think about the things they may need and then set up appropriate links to ensure that they are there when needed?

Knowledge of post secondary-education: What services are available to students with disabilities in post-secondary education? How are they accessed? Who makes the contact? Does the student make initial contact?

Learning to self-advocate: Students may be used to other people advocating on their behalf. Have students had to think about the things they might need? Have they ever had to explain their disability to a complete stranger? If students are unfamiliar with this experience, it may be difficult.

Preparation for post-secondary education: Have students set goals before? What are their goals for post-secondary education? What do they hope to gain from the experience? Have students thought about long-term goals and the future?

1.4 A changing role

When you, as a student with a disability, start post-secondary education it might be difficult to know everything that could help you - how do you know what is available in a new educational setting? Don't worry, no one would expect you to know. That is where disability support staff can help you. You should approach the Disability Adviser at your institution when you enrol. At this early stage, they can inform you of the services offered by the institution, and answer any questions that you may have. Once you've been in post-secondary education for a while however, you are the person who best knows what you need. And you are also the best person to get it,

All the issues looked at so far point to a changing role for you - one that requires you to self-advocate to get the things you need in your new surroundings. This does not mean that you will have to arrange

all of these things yourself, but does place the responsibility on you to:

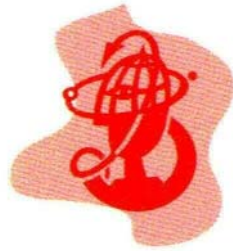
- identify what you need, and then
- **act.**

As was mentioned earlier, post-secondary life may be somewhat different than expected. You may not be experienced at identifying accommodations that can help you and asking people for assistance. Despite this, -when you enter the post-secondary education setting, *you* become the most important person in determining your own accommodations, and how to arrange them. You, as a student studying at a post-secondary education level, best know what accommodations you need and when you need them. The following diagram outlines the relationship between student and institution in determining accommodation provision.

Your ability to both define what you need and request an accommodation may be a reflection of past experience. Regardless of past experience and familiarity with asking for help, at a post-secondary level the onus is on you to determine what you need, and then make the appropriate arrangements to get it. However, while *you* have to determine what it is that you need, the degree to which the responsibility for arranging the accommodation lies with you or with post-secondary education staff varies depending on the nature of the accommodation.[^]

Most accommodations can be obtained without assistance from a Disability Adviser. However it is best to contact the Disability Adviser at your institution if you have identified a need and are unsure how to go about getting it. The important thing is to develop a learning partnership with appropriate staff at your institution, as they are a resource⁹ that should be utilised.

It is important to remember that post-secondary education institutions have limited resources. While every effort is made to ensure that all students have access to all of the services they request, funding is finite. You need to think about the service you are requesting, if you *need* it or just want it, and whether it is your post-secondary institution or another service that should provide it. These issues can be discussed with Disability Advisers at your institution.



making decisions

2

2.1 Actions and consequences

All decisions that you make in life have consequences. When you decide to act on something, there is an inevitable reaction, or consequence, to that decision. Some consequences are felt immediately, others can take some time. Advocating for yourself effectively means that the consequence of your request is more likely to be positive, and provide what you need. Therefore, it is important that you are equipped with the knowledge, skills and abilities to ensure your action has the desired effect. You are much more likely, but still not guaranteed, to have a successful outcome if you are equipped with what you need at the outset.

Diagram 2 presents some of the possible outcomes from an action. This diagram is somewhat simplified, as there are many factors over which you, as a student, have no control. But you do have control over yourself, and to this end, the better equipped you are,

the more likely you will be successful with your request. If you:

- **identify a need;**
- identify the *skills*, knowledge and abilities you must have to act on the need appropriately;
- possess the skills or obtain the required skills (e.g. through practice);
- identify the appropriate person to talk to;
- identify the appropriate time to *talk* to the person; and
- **request the** accommodation appropriately

then you are more likely to gain a positive response. A positive experience is good for you as a student, as you may gain confidence through the experience and this may help you with any future requests. It is also important that staff positively experience requests for accommodations, as it is more likely that they will be willing to help you or other students with disabilities, in the future.

diagram 1

STUDENT INSTITUTION RELATIONSHIP⁷

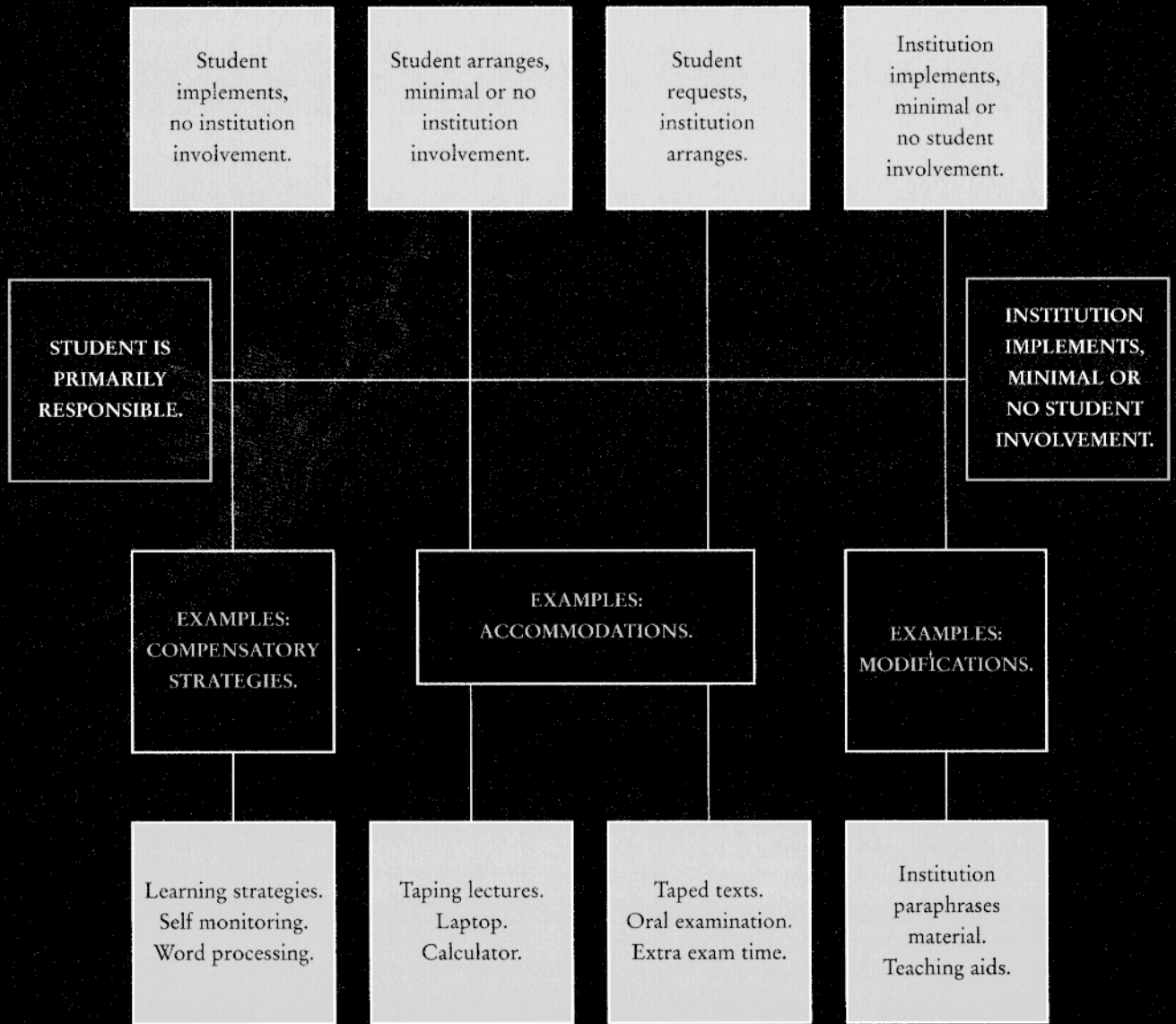
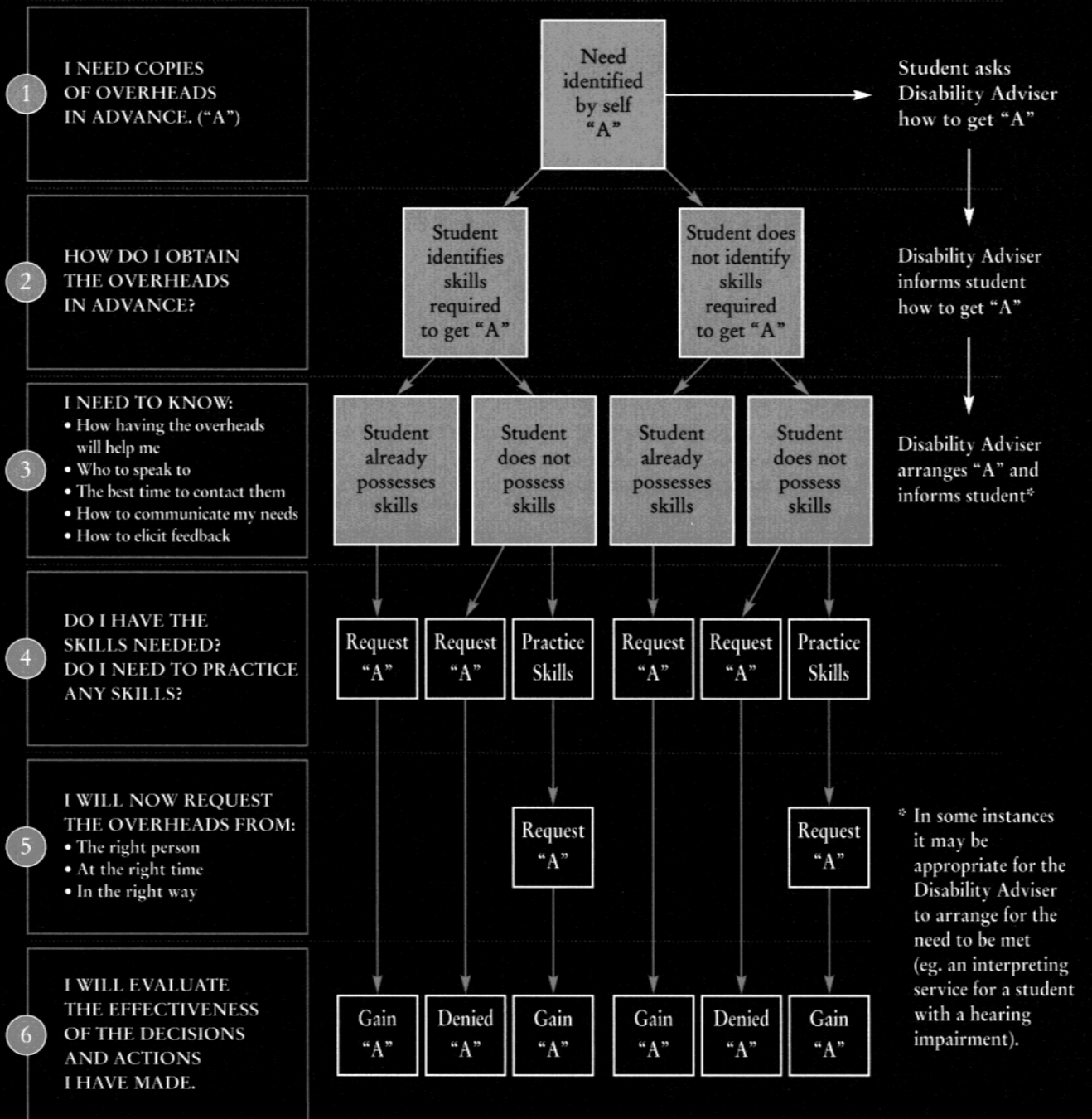


diagram 2

SELF-ADVOCACY DECISION MAKING TREE





requesting accommodations

3

The ability to self-advocate effectively is crucial to getting what you need in post-secondary education. Some students may, due to past experiences and different environments, have developed excellent self-advocacy skills before entering post-secondary education. Other students may not. The question then becomes - can effective self-advocacy skills be taught? The answer is 'yes' - Research has indicated that self-advocacy skills can be taught to students with a wide range of disabilities (including physical ** and learning disabilities ^).

There is no 'right way' to act on every occasion that will ensure a successful outcome for you, as each situation is different. There are different combinations of people involved, resources available and services required. Rather, the skills identified below can serve as a guide to increase the likelihood of receiving a favourable outcome.

3.1 Types of accommodations and skills needed to request them

In order to effectively self-advocate there are a number of skills and abilities that you must have to help you get the things you need.

Take the example of requesting copies of lecture overheads in advance from one of your lecturers. To increase the likelihood of a positive response from your lecturer, there are a number of things that you

need to be able to do.

- You have to identify that a need exists.
- You then have to examine the best way to get what you need - the appropriate way to ask for the accommodation and the appropriate person to request the accommodation from.
- You may have to communicate the nature of your disability to your lecturer, and indicate the degree to which the disability impacts on study.
- You may also have to tell your lecturer why you need the overheads in advance, that is, exactly how this would help you.

To do all of these things effectively you should understand both verbal and non-verbal cues, understand the nature of your disability and its impact on study, elicit feedback to ensure your request has been understood, and effectively manage your own and your lecturers time.

Now look at some of the other requests you may need to make while studying, and some of the skills, knowledge and abilities you should have to make effective self-advocacy more likely. The following list is not exhaustive - there will be things you will need to do that are not here - rather use this list as a guide so you can get an idea of the range of issues you may encounter.

requesting accommodations

3.2 Fostering relationships

When you look at the List of possible accommodations, which of those would you request by yourself and which of those would you seek help from the Disability Adviser? One way to think about requesting accommodations is to consider the relationship between yourself and the person from whom you are requesting the accommodation.

It is important to establish contact with the Disability Adviser at your institution as soon as possible even though you may not need any accommodations at that point in time.

The Disability Adviser can provide:

- answers to any questions you may have;
- advice on possible accommodations available to you, taking the nature and degree of your disability into account;
- general information on other services the institution may provide (e.g. counselling service, academic skills support);
- evidence/support to aid your request for an accommodation to a staff member if it is required (e.g. a letter of support for an assignment extension due to illness); and
- advice on your request style and appropriate strategies.

For the majority of requests (those listed 1 to 29), you could approach the staff member in question yourself. For example, items 2 to 23 involve teaching

staff and items 24 to 29 involve general staff. Item 1 could involve either type of staff member. Requests like those listed 1 to 29 typically involve you and the staff member/s the request is directed to. If the Disability Adviser is involved in requests of this nature it is usually before the request has taken place - you may ask for advice from the Adviser, or after the request has been carried out if you are dissatisfied with the outcome. Items 30 to 34 require the Disability Adviser to arrange the accommodation for you. However, the onus is still on you to inform the Disability Adviser that you think you need the accommodation. At this point, the Disability Adviser will inform you if you are eligible or not for the accommodation you have requested. Remember, regardless of your effectiveness as a self-advocator, you will not always receive the accommodation you have requested. The diagram below examines the relationships you may have with different staff in post-secondary education.

As a general rule in post-secondary education, your Disability Adviser is the person with whom you are the closest, then academic and general staff that you see on a regular basis, and then any other staff that you do not see on a regular basis. The further the distance between you and the person you are seeking to request the accommodation from, the more prepared you must be.

diagram 3

DISTANCE RELATIONSHIP

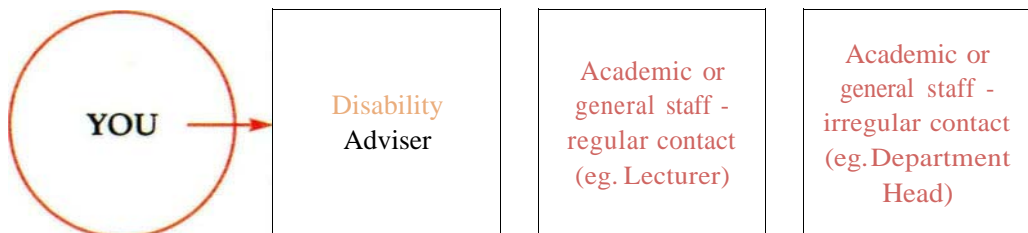


table 2

TYPES OF ACCOMMODATIONS

Examples	Knowledge, skills, abilities	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. we meet to discuss my needs 2. lecture material in advance 3. essential reading lists in advance 4. flexibility in assignment deadlines 5. flexibility in attendance requirements 6. an alternative to group work 7. possible alternative course assessment 8. lectures be taped 9. lectures available in print or on disk 10. you face me when speaking 11. barrier free lecture and tutorial rooms 12. you indicate verbally when you are entering or leaving a room 13. you convey all written material verbally 14. appropriate notification of last minute organisational changes 15. you write key concepts on the board 16. more use of visual aids during lectures 17. concepts be paraphrased 18. hand-out material to be read aloud 19. clearly labelled equipment in laboratories 20. more use of examples 21. hand-outs in large print 22. a break during the lecture 23. laboratory assistance 24. enrolment assistance 25. housing or accommodation assistance 26. parking assistance 27. media services assistance 28. library assistance 29. assistance at food/beverage outlets 30. alternative exam arrangements 31. specialised equipment 32. ergonomically designed furniture 33. support staff 34. any other accommodations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communication • assertion • negotiation • coping • self-esteem • stress and anxiety management • self-organisation • goal and career planning • developing a plan • time management • specific study skills 	

You may have to:

Know your disability and how it may affect studying: ¹²⁻¹⁷ It is very important that you know how your disability may impact upon study. It is equally important that you can express this to someone else, and that you have an effective communication strategy in place should you need to disclose your disability. When requesting accommodations, you need to be able to explain how the particular accommodation will help your study.

Know your strengths and weaknesses: ¹⁸⁻²⁰ Have a realistic picture of yourself - the things you do well and those you do not. It is important to determine the areas in which you may need to seek accommodations. It is important to be able to portray these to staff, particularly in situations where your disability may potentially impact upon course assessment.

Identify and access services you need: ²¹⁻²⁵ When you enter post-secondary education you may not be aware of the services available to you. It is important that you seek out those services. You also need to think about how to make access to these services easier, for example making sure you plan ahead and contact staff well before the accommodation is needed. You may already be studying and require a specific accommodation. Discuss your need with staff or the Disability Adviser on campus, to determine if the accommodation is already offered on campus. Conversely, if you discover the accommodation is not offered by the institution, approach other disability support services in your community. You need to be able to identify what it is that you need, and then organise how to get it.

Request what you need: ²⁶⁻³⁷ Depending on the nature of your disability, the accommodations you may require will vary from those provided by the institution to those available outside the institutional setting. Sometimes your lecturer/tutor will be able to provide the support, sometimes not. This also applies to the accommodations provided by specialist disability staff within your institution. The important thing you need to do is identify a need exists, and then act upon this. The outcome will be dependent upon a number of factors including the nature of the accommodation required, who you have requested it from, and the resources available. You may not be used to determining what you need yourself, and disability staff are aware of this when you first enter post-secondary education. However, once you have settled into study, it is very important that you take responsibility for identifying and facilitating your own accommodations, as you are best equipped to do so.

Communicate appropriately: ³⁸⁻⁴³ Your disability may impact upon your communication style so it is important that you have determined your best method of communicating and that you have strategies for effective communication with others.

Study effectively: ⁴⁴⁻⁴⁵ Workload is something that many students struggle with when first entering post-secondary education. You need to be able to prioritise tasks, have good organisational skills and plan ahead. There are also specific courses that cover topics like study skills, organising your time, goal setting, writing academic essays and organising a study group run by most universities. Other students are also a valuable resource.

Know the legislation: As a student, you are responsible for knowing the legislation that applies to your situation. You need to know your rights and responsibilities according to State and Federal legislation, as well as institutional rules and regulations. Only with appropriate knowledge can you make informed decisions about your rights and responsibilities.

Know grievance procedures: Should the situation arise where you are unhappy with a particular person, event, situation or behaviour, you need to know who you can see to ensure that your grievances are discussed. You need to establish contact with someone that you trust, and someone who will be able to help you. Disability Advisers at all institutions are good contacts to help inform you about institution policy and procedures that may be relevant to your particular situation. Disability Advisers can also provide you with information about services available to you external to the university e.g. advocacy groups.

developing and applying the skills

4

This booklet has so far identified some of the accommodations that you may need to request, and the knowledge, skills and abilities that you need to have to effectively self-advocate.

The very nature of self-advocacy requires you, as students with disabilities, to ACT for yourselves. The next section of this booklet links effective self-advocacy skills with exercises aimed at developing those skills. The exercises also suggest ways to apply the skills in various settings. Practice the skills at home and with friends and colleagues. You can also use the Disability Adviser at your institution to rehearse your request for accommodations. Once you feel confident, apply the skills in your request within the post-secondary setting.

4.1 Practice methods

There are many ways to practice the skills you need to effectively self-advocate. There is no one 'best' method. Try several of the following and settle on those that you feel are making a difference to your behaviours and attitudes. It is also good to get a second opinion, as we often do not know how we come across to other people - we need someone to be able to tell us. Choose someone who you feel comfortable with, but also someone who is not afraid to give constructive criticism!

Some of the methods commonly used in skills training include:

- homework assignments;
- structured exercises;
- role playing;
- video taped feedback;
- postural and verbal training; and
- real life practice.

A final word - do not expect instant results. It takes time and practice to develop some of the skills outlined below. The important thing to remember is that developing these skills will help you to not only effectively self-advocate in post-secondary education, but also -within other areas of your life - home, work, leisure etc.

4.2 The skills

While it is important to develop the skills required for effective self-advocacy, it is equally important to apply them in the correct setting. The first three skills identified below are particularly important - communication, assertion and negotiation. Focus on developing and applying these skills first. Once these skills are mastered, those remaining will be easier to achieve.

4.2.1 Communication

Communication consists of a number of subset skills such as listening, questioning, recording and eliciting feedback. You need effective communication skills for all interactions with people, whether these be staff or students, in either one to one or group interactions, or by phone. Most people talk to each other to communicate. If talking is the method you use to communicate remember to: ^

- speak at the right pace, not too fast or too slow;
- speak at the right loudness, too quiet and people will not hear you, too loud and people may move away;
- look directly at the person you are talking to and maintain eye contact;
- sometimes silence is okay - do not feel you need to talk just to fill a gap.

Try practicing these by talking to someone and getting feedback, or tape yourself and play it back. You may like to role-play requesting an accommodation, where you play both the student requesting the accommodation, and then, try being the lecturer from whom the accommodation is being requested.

When listening remember to: ^

- look at the person who is speaking;
- give them feedback so they know you are hearing them;
- ask for feedback and confirmation that what you have heard is correct e.g. paraphrasing "are you saying that you..."

developing and applying the skills

Have a friend talk about what they did yesterday for about two minutes. When they have finished, recite what they have just told you. How much did you remember? Did you look interested? How did your friend feel when talking to you? Reverse roles and repeat the exercise.

You may use other methods to communicate. You need to be clear that your method is working, and elicit some form of feedback to make sure people have understood your intended message. Other methods of communication include sign language and lip reading.

Body language is also very important, as people often subconsciously read non-verbal cues. It is crucial that you understand the non-verbal cues your body may be giving, so you are aware that they may affect the intent of your message.

Try practicing these by role playing different emotions through only facial expressions and body posture. See if someone else is able to guess the emotion you are displaying.

The method of communication you use depends on several factors, e.g. your degree of comfort and the person or persons to whom you are communicating. Doing some of the exercises above may uncover some surprises. Do not assume that you know how you appear to people - find out!

4.2.2 Assertion

Assertion is about being able to express yourself in a direct, honest and non-manipulative way. ^ This may sound easy but it can be very difficult. People can be aggressive or at the other end of the scale, submissive. Assertiveness falls in the middle, and is an appropriate way to request accommodations. You can be more assertive by: ⁵⁰

- being aware of your body posture. Sitting or standing straight with your shoulders and head back makes you appear more confident and sure of yourself;
- looking at the person to whom you are speaking;
- speaking for yourself;
- requesting your accommodation in a clear, polite and firm way;
- saying 'no' when you do not want to do something;

- telling people what you think rather than just expecting them to 'know*';
- asking for help if you need it;
- using appropriate gestures.⁵¹

After you have been introduced to someone, try starting up a conversation. If someone new joins a group you belong to, go and introduce yourself rather than waiting for them to come to you or not talking to them at all.

Consider some of the following situations. What would you do in each? Discuss this with a friend.

You suffer from very bad migraines. You think you'll be able to do the latest assignment on time but if you get a migraine you know you will not be able to finish it. Would you do anything? If so, what?

You are hearing impaired and lip read quite well. However, your lecturer tends to turn her back while giving lectures. You think you've missed about 40% of what she has said. It is week 8 and getting late in the semester and you have not said anything to her. Now you are worried about what you may have missed. Would you do anything? If so, what?

Exams are two weeks away and you have just had another bad asthma attack. You spent four days in hospital and missed classes for that time. You are worried about your exams as you have missed valuable study time. Would you do anything? If so, what?

Assertion is also about expressing appropriate feelings. Consider the next two situations and think about how you would express assertive statements, rather than those that are aggressive or submissive. ->^

A friend finally drops off the lecture notes you've needed for the past two weeks. What would you say?

Someone in your tutorial class has just said something you consider to be a ridiculous stereotypical remark about people with disabilities, something you know to be false. What would you say?

If you practice some of the exercises above, you will come to distinguish between statements that are assertive, and those that are not. It might be

developing and applying the skills

interesting to see how other people you know respond - are they assertive, submissive or aggressive? By knowing how to request or respond in an assertive way, you may find the outcome is quite different to what it might have been.

4.2.3 Negotiation

Negotiation is about communicating your accommodation to another party or parties whose interests may be different to yours. It is about getting a result that you are satisfied with. Sometimes this means you may have to settle in 'middle ground', as negotiation involves being aware of other points-of-view, even if you do not agree with them. Effective negotiation may mean you:

- have a plan or strategy of negotiation; -^
- identify the appropriate person to negotiate with;
- try to understand the other person's point-of-view;
- are clear about the objectives you want and are well-prepared. •**

While it helps the negotiation process to listen to other points of view, it is important that you decide upon your most important outcomes prior to the negotiation and stay fixed on achieving these outcomes while in the negotiation stage.

Should communication be an issue, you may also need to start thinking about a person who could negotiate your case with you. Obviously this person must be someone that you trust, but should also be someone who is skilled at negotiation. It is also important to fully understand the points conveyed by the other person, but equally important, to know your most important outcomes and remain focused on these.

This booklet does not provide the scope to consider a negotiation exercise, as negotiation issues are usually quite complex and there are many factors to be considered. Therefore, the best practice for negotiation is to be competent in skills such as communication in general, assertiveness, goal setting and time management.

4.2.4 Coping

Coping skills will be needed in a variety of situations. You may need to cope with a large workload or an unexpected event, such as a venue change. Coping is

really about how you choose to deal with events, people and yourself.

Coping is difficult to practice, as we never really know what we will do in any given situation until we find ourselves in it. However, one way to think about coping is to think of a scenario, and then think about how we would deal with it should it arise.

Think about how you would feel if you navigated your wheelchair through six corridors and a very small lift, only to find that the venue had been changed one hour prior to the lecture. How would you feel? How do you think you might react? Is there anything useful and constructive you could do at that point in time to decrease the likelihood of it happening again?

4.2.5 Self-esteem

Self-esteem looks at how you feel about yourself. You can have good or poor self-esteem. Good self-esteem is the ability to: -*"

- know your strengths and weaknesses;
- work on your weaknesses;
- keep ups and downs in perspective; and
- think positively about your own qualities.

Self-esteem is about the value we place on our own self regardless of the opinion of others. -"^ Self-esteem is developed from two sources, external factors such as praise or recognition from other people and internal factors such as feelings of self worth, how well we know ourselves and if we like what we know. -"^

Self-esteem and self-confidence are interrelated - if you have high self-esteem you tend to be confident in yourself and believe in your own abilities. Therefore, when you request an accommodation with high self-confidence, the listener to that request perceives that you are confident in your actions.

There are some exercises that you can try to improve yourself-confidence. -"^

We tend to praise others yet find it difficult to praise ourselves. The next time you complete an essay, silently (or verbalise if you want to!) praise yourself. Think about the things in the essay you did well and accept these. Think about the things in the essay that could have been improved. Accept these points and think about ways to improve these in future essays.

developing and applying the skills

Think about something you did recently at which you failed. How did you react at the time? Did you tend to find fault with yourself rather than recognising and accepting a failure and encouraging yourself to try again?

One thing we often do without even thinking is to find fault within ourselves rather than with the thing we have done. Try to separate 'what I am' from 'what I do*'. For example, think from:

'I am so pathetic' to 'handing in the assignment late was so pathetic'.

'I am stupid' to 'leaving the exam early was pretty stupid'.

Improving your self-confidence and therefore your self-esteem involves focusing on your strengths and weaknesses in a realistic manner. Try to think about many of the things you do every day in this way, and change the negative to the positive. It is important to keep both your strengths and weaknesses in perspective.

4.2.6 Stress and anxiety management

One of the most difficult skills to master while in post-secondary education is stress management. There are many factors that could add to your stress levels, such as workload, staff and student interactions, and social situations. One of the most common anxiety provoking factors is exams. Anxiety is characterised by fearful anticipation of a future event perceived as unpleasant by an individual.^ Anxiety is something that many people experience while studying.

There are some methods that you can use to reduce the feelings of anxiety that you may experience in anticipation of an unpleasant event. Anxiety reduction may occur if:

- you are realistic in your assessment of the unpleasant event;
- you are well prepared before going to the event.

Think about going to a lecturer to ask for notes to be provided on disk. The thought of having to ask the lecturer for this accommodation may be anxiety provoking. So what could you do to reduce the anxiety of this situation?

Apart from thinking about things like being prepared, being assertive, knowing how the disk

will help study etc, there is one very simple technique that helps to reduce anxiety. ^ Think about seeing the lecturer - what is it that is causing you to be anxious? Think of the worst possible outcome. This may be that you will feel terrible because the lecturer might refuse your request and tell you to go away and stop wasting his time. Unlikely as this is, anxiety does not have to be based on reality! The simple way to help reduce the anxiousness associated with this scenario is to insert the phrase 'so what if' before the thought. So what if the lecturer refuses your request and tells you to go away. You can handle that! You'll approach the Disability Adviser to see if there is an alternative that can be organised. It is not the end of the world. At least you tried! Inserting 'so what if*' is simple, but effective. Try it in real situations and see.

There are also other techniques for stress management, like being organised, making sure you plan ahead and prioritising work tasks to make sure they are done on time. Another technique involves taking time out for you, even if it means setting aside one hour a week where you have no interruptions and you are free to do something you really enjoy. Setting time aside for yourself is important to ensure you keep a balance between that which causes the stress and that which may help to alleviate it.



developing and applying the skills



4.2.7 Self-organisation

Self-organisation has several components, these being setting goals and priorities, being able to develop and commit to a plan and timing issues. These three areas all contribute to your ability to be self organised - a skill crucial to success at post-secondary education. But how does self-organisation make you a more effective self-advocate? Put simply, the more you are in control of the events that you can influence, the more likely you can self-advocate for the appropriate things, to the appropriate people, in an efficient and productive manner.

4.2.8 Goal and career planning

When entering post-secondary education it is important to have thought about the goals that you want to achieve. You may have thought about the course of study you are entering, but have you thought any further than this? These questions focus on planning for the future.

Goal-setting is also required to get through the day-to-day requirements of being a student. You need to try a few different time frames to see which works best for you. Some people like to plan day-to-day, others week-to-week, some on a monthly basis and others on a yearly basis. Obviously there will be some trial and error to determine what works best for you.

To identify your study goals (and this works equally well in other arenas in your life) write down a list of the things you hope to achieve while in post-secondary education. You may have

smaller sub-goals that you can also list, such as: To do well in Unit X, I need to get my assignment in on time.* If you become specific enough you can narrow your goals down into specific actions that are required to achieve the goals. Then all you have to do is to act on these.

A sign of a good goal setter is to develop back-up plans.*[^] Consider the example below:

I need to request an extension on my assignment. The assignment is due in two weeks. I should ask for the extension now. If I do not get the extension how will I complete the assignment in time? I will now develop a back-up plan.*

Obviously the back-up plan is dependent on what else you have on at the time but the point is that you have one in place should you need to call on it. It is also important to look at your goals regularly⁶² and change them as appropriate. It is very likely that your goals will change over time reflecting changes in you as a person.

4.2.9 Developing a plan

Good goal setters are sometimes very good at determining the goals, spending hours working out what they want and how they should be able to achieve things but then tend to procrastinate and don't actually start the actions required to bring the goals into reality.

Crucial to the success of setting goals is the ability to prioritise tasks and conceptualise those tasks as separate events that can be achieved over time to create a positive outcome on completion.

You need to be able to break the larger goal into smaller actions that are possible for you to complete in your day to day life. These also need to be tied to a deadline - some point in the future that is realistic and achievable. If you are not internally motivated to complete the work, rely on others to help you - make a meeting with other team members at which you all have to present your section of work. When others are relying on you it may help to motivate you to act.

Self-organisation also requires effective time management. This is perhaps one of the most difficult skills for students to grasp.

developing and applying the skills

4.2.10 Time management

This skill consists of two separate subsets. The first is ensuring that you are able to manage your own time effectively. The second is that you take time into account when requesting accommodations.

One way to examine exactly what you do with your own time (where does the time go?) is to run a time log sheet for a week. ^ Recording exactly what it is that you do with your time is very interesting, as long as you are honest! You may find that you will see patterns of less productive time emerge, and you can then take steps to remedy the situation.

Another useful strategy is to deliberately block interruptions.⁶⁴ This means phone calls, television, radio and other noise. You may like to use these as a reward when particular goals are met. For example, I can have a cup of coffee when this paragraph is finished. This method only works if you are true to yourself and do go back to the job upon completion of the coffee!

The other timing that you must be aware of is that related to requesting accommodations and talking to appropriate staff. You must request accommodations in enough time so that they will be of use to you and so that they can be arranged if needed. Obviously this depends on the nature of the accommodation being requested. If you are organised and have planned goals and set dates, you should know well in advance when you are likely to need some accommodations (for example, alternative exam arrangements). Similarly, should you need to discuss something with an academic or general staff member, you can not expect to see them when it is of convenience to you. You must contact the staff member and determine a time that suits you both. Showing this courtesy will be appreciated by staff.

4.2.11 Specific study skills

The final area of *skill* development that will aid in effective self-advocacy in post-secondary education is the development of study skills. Effective study skills will aid in reducing your stress and anxiety levels and can also serve as an excellent source of social interaction.

There are some training courses offered by Universities on study strategies. There are also mentoring programs. Asking students within your tutorial group if they wish to study in a group is also effective. You can also study while travelling to and from post-secondary education if using public transport.

Your studying time will be more effectively spent if you are organised, develop goals and prioritise tasks. Some further study strategies include:

- identify alternative ways of completing course requirements should they be required;
- if working on a group project, set individual tasks and make people accountable to the group;
- contact student support to find out study skills training units that are offered by the institution;
- join peer study skills groups.

Think about the assessed requirements of the unit. How can these best be completed? Is there group work? Do you need an alternative to this? If so, what could you suggest? How much of the unit is assessed on written components and how much on oral or other components? Where do your strengths and weaknesses lie? Can you suggest alternative methods of assessment?

If no mentor group or study group exists, think about asking if anyone would like to join you in forming one. Use the 'so what if strategy*' to reduce anxiety levels when contemplating this scenario.

Utilising effective study strategies makes the post-secondary education experience a far more enjoyable one. Make sure you determine the areas you may need to work on (your strengths and weaknesses) and then contact student support services if you would like to know what they offer that may be of assistance to you.

staff

5

This section of the booklet examines the interaction between staff and students, and the ways that both parties can help to ensure a satisfactory relationship exists between the two.

As noted earlier, students with disabilities may perceive that academic staff have little understanding of what it is like to have a disability.⁶⁵ Students also feel that staff have had little experience with students with disabilities.⁶⁶ It is no surprise that students with disabilities may find the experience of approaching staff to request accommodations daunting.

5.1 How staff can help students

There are some things that staff can do to encourage students to self-advocate and these include:⁶⁷

- allowing students to take risks and make mistakes in order to develop independence and problem solving experience;
- supporting students to determine their current skills, decide on future goals and design plans to attain those goals;
- supporting students to increase self knowledge and understanding about their specific disability;
- helping students identify what may be interfering with successful academic performance and employment;
- helping them identify any services that may help them to succeed;
- encouraging self evaluation;
- encouraging students to practice ways to express self preferences, suggest alternatives, negotiate for services, and solve problems; and
- providing mentors and role models.

Staff can also ensure they are prepared when students visit them (or when they visit students) by:

- keeping to meeting times and allowing the student enough time to communicate effectively;

- ensuring the student is informed of any meeting time changes well in advance;
- eliciting feedback from the student to ensure the intended message has been received;
- following up on any actions.

5.2 How students can help staff

Students also have an obligation to make interactions with staff as satisfactory as possible. Students with disabilities can aid the relationship by:⁶⁸

- considering the issue of disclosure carefully;
- identifying themselves at the beginning of the semester;
- being able to explain their disability and the extent to which it will affect them to staff;
- creating a positive image - sitting in the front centre of class; demonstrating attentiveness to lectures or discussions; asking appropriate questions; utilising instructor office hours; in general showing interest in learning from the course;
- keeping to meeting times;
- being aware of time constraints when meeting staff; and
- being aware that the provision of accommodations is dependent upon many factors including the nature of the accommodation requested, staff involved and resources available.

Remember, through no fault of your own, you may not receive the accommodation that you request. When this occurs, you do have a right to ask why and if you are unhappy with the decision, to discuss the outcome with your Disability Adviser. If the issue is with the Disability Adviser, seek someone else within the post-secondary education setting to whom you can confide, or approach an external support service, such as an advocacy agency.





training

6

6.1 Student training session

Training in self-advocacy skills should occur throughout a person's life. However, should a self-advocacy skills training session be required, it would be appropriate to identify those students *who* may benefit from the course (as it is unlikely that students with no or poor development of self-advocacy skills would enroll themselves in the course). In this instance, it would be appropriate for staff (both academic and disability specialist staff) to identify potential candidates.

In conjunction with students, post-secondary education staff should also undergo training on institutional policy related to the encouragement of self-advocacy, as staff may find that they receive more queries from students with disabilities as students become more confident in the post-secondary setting. Staff need to be equipped with the skills to interact with a wide range of students with disabilities.

The following are guidelines for a possible training session to take place in a post-secondary educational setting. The content is flexible - utilise staff available and adapt the content to the needs of students and resources of the particular post-secondary institution.

Ideally, a facilitator skilled in group work should present the session, and have some experience in training people in self development skills (e.g. self-confidence, assertiveness training, etc.). The session would be approximately three hours in length with a strong practical orientation. Depending on the nature of disabilities in the group, two breaks (one 15 minutes and the other 20 minutes) should be scheduled within the outline.

6.2 Suggested self-advocacy training session outline*

6.2.1 Introduction and outline of program

- What the session aims to do.
- Definition of self-advocacy and related terms.
- Possible changing role - prior to and then in the post-secondary educational setting.
- Icebreaker - expectations about studying - what do students think the experience is going to be like, do they have friends, others already studying?

6.2.2 Students with disabilities studying in post-secondary education

- Types of supports available.
- Guest student speakers - mentor, what it's like studying in post-secondary education, experience with supports, experience with staff, things they found difficult/easy, things that made the transition easier.
- Questions.

6.2.3 Types of accommodations

- What are the types of accommodations students may need? (Overhead: Left hand column of Table 3)
- What are the knowledge, skills and abilities? (Overhead: Centre column of Table 3)
- What might students need to know? (Overhead: Right hand column of Table 3)

6.2.4 Skill identification

- Self-analysis of skills students do and do not have.
- Skills students identify as needed to effectively self-advocate (have examples as prompts).
- Skills identified in the literature - compare.
- Degree to which students feel they are equipped with the skills they need to self-advocate.

training

6.2.5 Skill development

(Time constraints - students choose those that they feel will be of most value).

- Choose a skill (decided by student for example: communication skills).
- Place the skill in a request (e.g. I need good communication skills when I tell my lecturer the impact of my disability on study and how lecture notes in advance will aid me).
- Ways to develop the skill (e.g. refer to section 4.2.1, or other relevant section depending on skill chosen).
- Practice skill.
- Practice outside training session (e.g. homework).

6.2.6 Skill promotion

- Share experiences of what it is like asking for supports prior to post-secondary education. Who did the asking? Who identified the need for something?
- The reality of the post-secondary setting.
- The onus issue - responsibility of whom? - to do what? (Overhead Diagram 1: Range of Accommodations).
- A post-secondary education example (each student completes for him/herself, Overhead Diagram 2: The Decision-Making Tree).
 - » Student to refer to the skill and request they have developed in section 6.2.5 and to apply this to the Decision-Making Tree.
- Knowing who to talk to.
- Negotiating with staff.
- Communicating the need appropriately (in the right style and to the right person).
- Following up on a request if necessary.
- Who to approach if a request is not met.
- Grievance procedures.

6.2.7 Post-secondary education

- Services and people to help students.
- Emphasise the role of the institution - students do not always get the accommodations they request.

6.2.8 Close

- Importance of self-advocacy in post-secondary education.
- Future contact names and numbers.
- Usefulness of training session and evaluation sheets.
- Good luck in study.

TM The Eaton Coull Learning Group has developed an excellent self-advocacy instructional package. While the material is primarily directed at the transition to post secondary learning for students with learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder, some of the material applies to all students with disabilities. The package consists of:

- a 50 minute video;
- a discussion guide for teachers/facilitators;
- a self-advocacy handbook for students; and
- a reproducible student work guide.

This material is extremely useful and with minor modifications is applicable to an Australian context. It would prove very beneficial to any training session on self-advocacy for students with disabilities in post-secondary education (particularly those students who have recently entered post-secondary education). The Eaton Coull Learning Group can be contacted at www.eclg.com.



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endnotes

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- ¹ Focus Group, University of WA, October 1999, 6 students with disabilities and medical conditions, 17 students with no disability disclosed. Students indicated that academic staff (as opposed to general staff or disability related staff) had little empathy with students with disabilities and they also perceived that academic staff had very little experience with students with disabilities.
- ² For the purposes of this booklet the term 'students with disabilities' encompasses students with disabilities and students with medical conditions.
- ³ Starke, M. (1987)
- ⁴ Focus group participants indicated that their perceptions of what University life would be, and the actuality of the experience, were very different. Main areas of variation were the large amount of reading required, attendance requirements and requesting accommodations from academic staff.
- ⁵ *ibid.*
- ⁶ Ness, J. (1989)
- ⁷ adapted from Aune, B. and Friehe, M. (1996)
- ⁸ Aune, B. and Friehe, M. (1996)
- ⁹ Lynch, R.T. and Gussel, L. (1996)
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- ¹¹ Durlak, C.M., Rose, E. and Bursuck, W. D. (1994)
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- ²¹ Lynch, R. T. and Gussel, L. (1996)
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- ³⁸ Starke, M. C. (1987)
- ³⁹ *ibid.*
- ⁴⁰ *ibid.*
- ⁴¹ *ibid.*
- ⁴² McWhirter, B. T. and McWhirter, J. J. (1990)
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- ⁴⁴ Lynch, R. T. and Gussel, L. (1996)
- ⁴⁵ *ibid.*
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- ⁴⁶ Bateman, N. (1995)
- ⁴⁷ Crawley et al, (1998)
- ⁴⁸ *ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ Bateman, N. (1995)
- ⁵⁰ Crawley et al, (1998)
- ⁵¹ Kidman, A. (1988)
- ⁵² Adapted from Kidman, A. (1988)
- ⁵³ Bateman, N. (1995)
- ⁵⁴ *ibid.*
- ⁵⁵ Moseley, J. (1994)
- ⁵⁶ Nove, T. (1986)
- ⁵⁷ *ibid.*
- ⁵⁸ Adapted from Nove, T. (1986)
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- ⁶⁰ Adapted from Kidman, A. (1988)
- ⁶¹ Kidman, A. (1988)
- ⁶² *Ibid.*
- ⁶³ *ibid.*
- ⁶⁴ *ibid.*
- ⁶⁵ Focus Group, N=23 (6 students with disabilities and medical conditions, 17 without), October 1999.
- ⁶⁶ *ibid.*
- ⁶⁷ Nove, T. (1986)
- ⁶⁸ McWhirter, B. T. and McWhirter, J. J. (1990)

“TO be

WHAT WE ARE,
AND TO BECOME

what we are
capable
of becoming

IS THE ONLY END IN LIFE. ”

| R. L. STEVENSON





**UNLOCK
YOUR FUTURE**

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