



Glossary of Disability-Related Terms

Accessible: In the case of a facility, readily usable by a particular individual; in the case of a program or activity, presented or provided in such a way that a particular individual can participate, with or without auxiliary aid(s); in the case of electronic resources, accessible with or without assistive computer technology.

Access barriers: Any obstruction that prevents people with disabilities from using standard facilities, equipment and resources.

Accessible web design: Creating web pages according to universal design principles to eliminate or reduce barriers, including those that affect people with disabilities.

Accommodation: An adjustment to make a program, facility, or resource accessible to a person with a disability.

Adaptive technology: Hardware or software products that provide access to a computer that is otherwise inaccessible to an individual with a disability.

ALT attribute: HTML code that works in combination with graphical tags to provide alternative text for graphical elements.

Alternative keyboard: A keyboard that is different from a standard computer keyboard in its size or layout of keys.

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA): A comprehensive federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, public services, public accommodations and services operated by private entities, and telecommunications.

American Standard Code for Information

Interchange (ASCII): Standard for unformatted plain text which enables transfer of data between platforms and computer systems.

Applet: Computer program that runs from within another application.

Assistive technology: Technology used to assist a person with a disability, e.g., wheelchair, handsplints, computer-based equipment.

Binary files: Electronic files with formatting information that is software dependent.

Braille: System of embossed characters formed by using a Braille cell, a combination of six dots consisting of two vertical columns of three dots each. Each simple Braille character is formed by one or more of these dots and occupies a full cell or space. Some Braille may use eight dots.

Browser: Software designed to access and display information available on the web. Browsers may be graphical or text-based. Text-only browsers cannot display images, sound clips, video and plug-in features that graphical browsers can. Talking browsers are also available for use by people who have difficulty reading text due to a learning disability or visual impairment.

Captioned film or videos: Transcription of the verbal portion of films or videos displayed to make them accessible to people who are deaf.

Captioning: Text that is included with video presentations or broadcasts that enables people with hearing impairments to have access to the audio portion of the material.



Closed Circuit TV Magnifier (CCTV): Camera used to magnify books or other materials to a monitor or television.

Communication device: Hardware that allows a person who has difficulty using their voice clearly to use words or symbols for communication. May range in complexity from a simple picture board to complex electronic devices that allow personalized, unique construction of ideas.

Compensatory tools: Assistive computing systems that allow people with disabilities to use computers to complete tasks that they would have difficulty doing without a computer, e.g., reading, writing, communicating, accessing information.

Digital: Computer formatted data or information.

Disability: Physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; a record of such an impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990).

Discrimination: Act of making a difference in treatment or favor on a basis other than individual merit.

Electronic information: Any digital data for use with computers or computer networks including disks, CD-ROMs, web resources.

Facility: All or any portion of a physical complex, including buildings, structures, equipment, grounds, roads, and parking lots.

FM Sound Amplification System: Electronic amplification system consisting of three components: a microphone or transmitter, monaural FM receiver and a combination charger and carrying case. It provides wireless FM broadcast from a speaker to a listener who has a hearing impairment.

Graphical User Interface (GUI): Program interface that presents digital information and software programs in an image-based format as compared to a character-based format.

Hardware: Physical equipment related to computers.

Hearing impairments: Complete or partial loss of ability to hear caused by a variety of injuries or diseases including congenital defects.

Helper: An external program that can be called up by a web browser to display specially formatted material, such as word processed documents, spreadsheet documents or video/sound pieces. The Helper program is launched by the web browser as a separate application to view or play the file.

Host: Any computer which holds Internet resources for access by others, or the computer that maintains your Internet access and email account.

HTML validation: Process that analyzes HTML documents identifies HTML errors and non-standard codes.

HyperText Transfer Protocol (HTTP): Communication protocol used by the web to transfer text, graphics, audio, and video.

Hyperlink, hypertext: Highlighted word or graphic on a web page that when selected allows the user to jump to another part of the document or another web page.



Hypertext Markup Language (HTML): Programming language or code used to create web pages.

Image map: Picture or graphic on a web page in which hyperlinks are embedded.

Input: Any method by which information is entered into a computer.

Internet: Computer network connecting government, education, commercial, other organization and individual computer systems.

Interpreter: Professional person who assists a deaf person in communicating with hearing people.

Java: Programming language used to create programs or applets that work with some web browsers to include features with animation or other characteristics not available through standard HTML.

Joystick: A device consisting of a lever that allows a pointer to move up, right, left, or down and serves as an alternative to a mouse. It usually includes buttons to enable mouse clicks.

Keyboard emulation: A method of having an alternative device and / or software, such as a switch-based system, serve the role of a keyboard.

Keyguard: A plastic or metal shield that covers a keyboard with holes over the keys. It allows use of a keyboard without undesired activation of surrounding keys.

Large print books: Most ordinary print is six to ten points in height (about 1/16 to 1/8 of an inch). Large type is fourteen to eighteen points (about 1/8 to 1/4 of an inch) and sometimes larger. The format of large print books is also proportionately larger (usually 8 1/2 x 11 inches).

Lynx: Text-based web browser.

Mainstreaming, inclusion: The inclusion of people with disabilities, with or without special accommodations, in programs, activities, and facilities with their non-disabled peers.

Major life activities: Functions such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, working, and participating in community activities (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990).

Mobility impairment: Disability that affects movement ranging from gross motor skills such as walking to fine motor movement involving manipulation of objects by hand.

Mouse emulation: A method of having an alternative device and / or software, such a switch based system, serve the role of a mouse.

Multimedia: In terms of electronic information, any data which is presented through several formats including text, graphics, moving pictures and sound.

Onscreen keyboard: See Virtual Keyboard.

Optical character recognition (OCR): Technology system that scans and converts printed materials into electronic text.

Output: Any method of displaying or presenting electronic information to the user through a computer monitor or other device.

Peripheral neuropathy: A condition caused by damage to the nerves in the peripheral nervous system which includes nerves that run from the brain and spinal cord to the rest of the body.



Physical or mental impairment: Any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems: neurological; musculoskeletal; special sense organs; respiratory, including speech organs; cardiovascular; reproductive; digestive; genito-urinary; hemic and lymphatic; skin; and endocrine; or any mental or psychological disorder, such as mental retardation, organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, and specific learning disabilities (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990).

Plug-in: Separate program written to be launched by a specific web browser to display or run special elements in web pages, such as animation, video, or audio.

Qualified individual with a disability: An individual with a disability who, with or without reasonable modification to rules, policies, or practices, the removal of architectural, communication, or transportation barriers, or the provision of auxiliary aids and services, meets the essential eligibility requirements for the receipt of services or the participation in programs or activities provided by a public entity (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990).

Reader: Volunteer or employee of an individual with a disability (e.g., visual impairment, learning disability) who reads printed material in person or records to audiotape.

Reading system: Hardware and software designed to provide access to printed text for people with visual impairments, mobility impairments, or learning disabilities. Character recognition software controls a scanner that takes an image of a printed page, converts it to computer text using recognition software and then reads the text using a synthesized voice.

Refreshable Braille Display: Hardware connected to a computer that echoes screen text on a box that has cells consisting of pins that move up and down to create Braille characters.

Repetitive Stress Injury (RSI): A disability that may be chronic or acute and usually is described as pain caused by overuse of extremities, usually hands and wrists.

Scanning input: A switch-based method of controlling a computer. Activations of a switch will, in order, bring up a control panel that upon subsequent switch activations, allow a user to focus in on a desired control or keystroke. Custom scanning layouts can be created for a variety of purposes and programs and may also be used in a communication device.

Screen enlargement: Hardware or software that increases the size of characters and text on a computer screen.

Screen reader: Software used to echo text on a computer screen to audio output, often used by people who are blind, with visual impairments, or with learning disabilities.

Screen resolution: Refers to the clarity or sharpness of an image. For computer monitors, this term indicates the number of dots on the screen used to create text and graphics. Higher resolution means more dots, indicating increased sharpness and potentially smaller text.

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act: Legislation that requires federal agencies to develop, procure, and use accessible electronic and information technology.

Sensory impairment: A disability that affects touch, sight, or hearing, or both.



Server: Any computer that stores information that is available to other users, often over the Internet.

Sign language: Manual communication commonly used by deaf. The gestures or symbols in sign language are organized in a linguistic way. Each individual gesture is called a sign. Each sign has three distinct parts; the handshape, the position of the hands, and the movement of the hands. American Sign Language (ASL) is the most commonly used sign language in the United States. Deaf people from different countries speak different sign languages.

Specific Learning Disability: Disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in difficulties listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or doing mathematical calculations. Frequent limitations include hyperactivity, distractibility, emotional instability, visual and/or auditory perception difficulties and/or motor limitations, depending on the type(s) of learning disability.

Speech impairment: Problems in communication and related areas such as oral motor function, ranging from simple sound substitutions to the inability to understand or use language or use the oral-motor mechanism for functional speech.

Speech input or speech recognition: A method of controlling a computer and creating text by dictation. Speech input software is combined with a microphone.

Standard HTML: Version of HTML accessible by all web browsers.

Streaming multimedia: A method of transferring audio and/or video via a network from a server to an end user's computer. During the transmission, the material is displayed or played on the target computer.

Switch input: A method of controlling a computer or communication device. It is most often used with Morse code or scanning methods, but may also be used for controlling household appliances and related controls. Switches are available in a nearly endless array of sizes, shapes, and activation methods.

Tag: HTML code that prescribes the structure and formatting of web pages.

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) or Teletypewriter (TTY): A device which enables someone who has a speech or hearing impairment to use a telephone when communicating with someone else who has a TDD/TTY. TDD/TTYS can be used with any telephone, and one needs only a basic typing ability to use them.

Trackball: A mouse alternative that is basically an upside-down mouse. Useful for some people with mobility impairments because it isolates pointer movement from button clicking.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI): Open and closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas, including cognition; language; memory; attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem-solving; sensory, perceptual, and motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; physical functions; information processing; and speech. The term does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital, degenerative, or induced by birth trauma.



Universal design: Designing programs, services, tools, and facilities so that they are useable, without modification, by the widest range of users possible, taking into account a variety of abilities and disabilities.

Universal design of instruction: The design of instructional materials and activities that make learning achievable by students with a wide variety of abilities and disabilities.

Universal Resource Locator (URL): Address used to locate a specific resource on the Internet. DO-IT's URL is www.uw.edu/doit/.

Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973: Act prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability which applies to any program that receives federal financial support. Section 504 of the Act is aimed at making educational programs and facilities accessible to all students. Section 508 of the Act requires that electronic office equipment purchased through federal procurement meets disability access guidelines.

Virtual keyboard: Software used to emulate a keyboard. A picture of a keyboard is displayed on a computer screen and the user points and clicks on the pictures of keys to enter text.

Vision impairments: Complete or partial loss of ability to see, caused by a variety of injuries or diseases including congenital defects. Legal blindness is defined as visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with correcting lenses, or widest diameter of visual field subtending an angular distance no greater than 20 degrees.

Word prediction: Software that reduces the number of keystrokes needed to type words and sentences. As characters are entered on either a standard, alternative or virtual keyboard, suggested completions of the word that has been started are provided to the user.

World Wide Web (www, w3, or web): Hypertext and multimedia gateway to the Internet.

About DO-IT

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) serves to increase the successful participation of individuals with disabilities in challenging academic programs and careers, such as those in science, engineering, mathematics, and technology. Primary funding for DO-IT is provided by the National Science Foundation, the State of Washington, and the U.S. Department of Education.

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