BRAILLE

Braille is code in which some words are spelled out, some have letter parts combined, and some have contractions:

Example: “cat” is Brailled c-a-t (spelled out)
“shout” is Brailled with a sign for sh and out
“for” is Brailled by using a contraction

That is why, when you ask the blind student to spell out the work he/she is stuck on, he/she can’t do it because he/she is actually stuck on the Braille symbols (or contractions).

YOU WILL NOT BE EXPECTED TO READ AND/OR TEACH BRAILLE YOURSELF. Materials for 1st and 2nd grade will be “interlined” (a print transcript is written above each Brailled word) so that you can follow along as the student does his/her work.

In regards to Braille, the VI teacher will be providing the following:

- Direct instructions with the student to teach Braille reading, writing, and formats (writing personal letters, outlines, graphs, charts, maps, tables, word searches, crossword puzzles, etc.)
- All materials needed to produce Braille
- A print interpretation of everything the student Brailles so that you may grade it
- All of your handouts and overhead transparencies in Braille
- Workbooks, library books, and basals are already Brailled by other agencies and are ordered by the VI teacher at your request

Some print formats do not transform into Braille well, particularly in first and second grades. The best thing to do is to always provide a copy of the sheet in question and the VI teacher will change the format so that the student still learns the concept.

BRAILLE PROCUREMENT

The print materials you use in your class should be made available to the blind student at the same time they are issued to the print students so as to avoid gaps in learning. If you are using “duplicating masters”, “practice worksheets”, or other papers generated from the various subject curricula, let the VI teacher know at least two weeks in advance so he/she can Braille them for you on time. DO NOT be afraid to ask to have something in Braille, thinking you may not use it after all. The VI teacher would much rather Braille too much than not enough.

You and the VI teacher will discuss how to organize this “paper shuffle” so that you find it workable.

Before we leave this topic—a word on “spontaneity”. Many teachers say they sometimes feel somewhat stymied by having to prepare in advance so that the Braille student will have the materials needed, particularly in situations in which they see the class needs immediate review of a concept they are having trouble learning. You should go ahead with what you would normally do, and just do your best at describing the material in a way to include the blind student.
BRAILLE BOOKS

Braille books are big and bulky. One print book may have as many as 4 or more Braille volumes. The VI teacher can provide a box in which the student keeps the current volume next to his/her desk. Ideally, the rest of the volumes should be stored on a shelf in your room so that they may be quickly retrieved by the student as needed. This should not take up more than 2 shelves. If print users are allowed to write in their workbooks, i.e. circle or underline answers, the Braille student should be doing the same in his/her Braille book. Answers can be transferred to a print sheet for you to grade and for parents to see. That is why the VI teacher may request print copies of all workbooks that are issued to the blind student.

Braille books may be taken home if you assign homework from the book.

DICTIONARY WORK

Subject text glossaries can be used to teach and reinforce this skill. If you are covering dictionary work fairly often the VI teacher can provide your visually impaired student with an electronic dictionary.

MATERIALS WRITTEN ON CHARLBOARDS/CHARTS

Let the VI teacher know which charts and maps you typically use and he/she will Braille the materials in advance.

It helps the blind student if you read over the material, which has been written on the chalkboard, and/or verbalize as you write. Another approach is to have a neighboring student quietly read the material to the blind student as he/she Brailles anything that is needed for later use (e.g. vocabulary words, daily assignments, math problems).

STUDENT OUTPUT

Studies indicate that a Braille reader takes sometimes as much as twice the time to read and write due to the bulkiness and awkward formats of Braille. Sometimes the best thing to do is to allow the Braille student to complete a little more than half the work WHEN THIS WILL NOT JEOPARDIZE content mastery. This will not work for all subjects, particularly science and social studies. But it does work well in spelling, math, and some reading activities. Assign the same volume of work the first 6 weeks to roughly evaluate the student’s speed, and then talk with the VI teacher about reducing the workload, if needed. Remember, a blind student cannot usually insert a page of work into a brailler to “fill in the blanks”, and so for everything he/she does he/she is having to prepare an answer sheet and transfer the item number as well as the answer over the paper. This alone take more time than simply writing answers directly on the page as print users can do.

MATH

Because Braille students cannot “figure” on papers as easily as print students, they are taught to use a device called a Cranmer abacus. This is an abacus that has been modified for used by blind students. The VI teacher will provide all instruction on the abacus in conjunction with your math curriculum. The abacus typically takes years of training and is fairly complex. However, TEA allows this device to be used in all standardized testing situations through college, and

Tips for working with blind students-2
therefore it is a tremendous advantage for the blind student. *The use of “talking calculator” is not appropriate until math facts are memorized and your class begins to work with calculators.*

Before he/she begins to add and/or subtract on the abacus, the student must know basic facts just like his/her sighted peers. He/she must also know multiplication facts before he/she can perform multiplication and division on the abacus. The student will not “borrow” and “carry” in addition and subtraction on the abacus, so the VI teacher will not stress these or “regrouping” with the blind student. Likewise, we do not use the print formats used in multiplication and division. Again, the VI teacher will be responsible for teaching these processes on the abacus as they coincide with your curriculum. For this reason, he/she will need to know what daily assignments you are working on so he/she can see how best to prepare the abacus lessons. The easiest way to do this is for you to allow access to your planning book.

**COMPUTER**

If your class frequents the computer lab, a computer will be equipped with both the hardware and software necessary for the blind student’s use. The VI teacher may be expected to teach the modifications to the blind student at the appropriate developmental stages.

**TECHNOLOGY**

Typically, instruction on touch-typing begins once a student reaches the 2\textsuperscript{nd}-3\textsuperscript{rd} grades so he/she can learn how to use a note-taking device to produce his/her work in print. We also have available other electronic devices which translate Braille into print as the student Brailles. In some situations the equipment may take up a lot of room and we may need lots of desktop space! Typically, a technology assessment is performed with each student to match equipment with the student’s needs.

**ORGANIZATION**

You and the VI teacher will work together to teach organization to the blind student. They have so many books to deal with and papers coming from all directions that they have a real impossible time FINDING things! So there are a few rules you may want to stress:

- All papers must have a heading, including name, date, and the assignment
- When print sheets are stapled to the Braille copy of a worksheet they must remain together
- Books must remain in their designated place when not in use
  - Old volumes must be placed back on the shelf when they are no longer being used
  - Completed papers must be turned in to be either translated into print by the VI personnel or directly graded by you if already in print
  - Graded papers must be stored in one location and taken home on a specified date (follow class routine)
- Incomplete work should be stored in one location until ready to turn in
  - At no time should papers be shoved into a desk or left lying around on the floor

Ideally, students in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} grade on up should start using a 3-ring binder with subject dividers and pocket folders for loose worksheets to keep everything together in one place.
DISCIPLINE

Blind children are not different from their sighted peers in regards to discipline. They, too, require a structure that is well defined with consequences for misbehavior. This is crucial if we are to help a blind child function successfully within any environment. So if homework isn't turned in on time, if the child doesn't raise his/her hand before responding, if he/she talks out of turn, if he/she does a sloppy job on his/her work, or goes against any of the other rules you feel are important—react as you would for any child. If a particular behavior bugs you and/or seems “socially inappropriate”, it would be a tremendous social value to the blind child for you to help change that behavior, and, in fact, that’s one of the main reasons blind children benefit so much from an education in the general education setting.

TEACHING METHODS

These are some things you might consider as you embark on the day-to-day routines of teaching with a blind student in your classroom.

- Verbalize as you write on the board, overhead projector, and/or charts
- Be as explicit as possible as you verbalize, for example: “Go stand by the door” instead of “Go over there”, “Let’s look at sentence #5” instead of “Look at the next one”, “I have circled one quarter and one nickel; how much is that?” instead of “How much have I circled?”
- When you tell the students to get out their books and open to page ____, glance over to the blind student to make sure he/she is following your instructions, then check to see he/she is on the right page (for 1st–3rd graders)
- As you introduce a lesson and are giving examples to how to complete an activity, ask the blind child a question to check his/her understanding of the task
- If you are handing out a worksheet on which the directions have been modified for the blind student, you may want to develop a routine in which you go around to him for more specific instructions after you get the class started (this applies mostly to 1st-3rd graders)
- Don’t be afraid the words “look” and “see” as these sound more normal than saying things like, “Here, feel this (!), or, “Did you listen to TV last night?”
- If it can be touched, encourage tactual exploration