Assistive Technology IEP Goals for Students with Visual Impairment

A district buys a student a braille display. It costs several thousand dollars. Eighteen months later it's in a closet, and the student is still relying on a classroom aide to read things aloud.

This happens constantly, and it has one cause: the device was provided, and the instruction wasn't.

Assistive technology only becomes access when there's a goal attached to it. IDEA requires every IEP team to "consider whether the child needs assistive technology devices and services" (34 CFR 300.324(a)(2)(v)) — but consideration produces a device, not a skilled user. A measurable AT goal is what obligates the district to teach the student to actually operate it.

This page covers how to write AT goals that hold up, with examples by tool and by grade level.

Why AT Goals Belong in the IEP, Not the Accommodations Page

Listing "student has access to a screen reader" under accommodations does two things: it puts a device in the room, and it ends there.

An AT goal does something different. It commits the team to a proficiency target, a data collection method, and a review date. It creates an obligation that survives staff turnover, and it gives you something concrete to point at when progress stalls.

The distinction shows up sharply in transition. A student who arrives at college with a screen reader listed as an accommodation, but no instruction behind it, cannot use the campus library database. A student who had four years of AT goals can.

Naming the Tool, Not the Category

The most common defect in AT goals is generic language. Compare:

Weak: Student will use assistive technology to access grade-level text with 80% accuracy.

Strong: Using JAWS heading-navigation commands, student will locate specified information within a five-page digital article with 80% accuracy and no more than two verbal prompts.

The first can't be taught, can't be measured, and can't be failed. It doesn't say which tool, which skill, or what "access" means. Any staff member could claim it was met.

The second names the software, the specific command set, the task, the accuracy criterion, and the prompt threshold. It tells the TVI exactly what to teach and gives the team a clear data point.

Write goals that name the tool.

Screen Reader Goals

For students who are braille readers or who rely primarily on audio, screen reading software proficiency is the backbone of academic independence.

Elementary: basic navigation

Using JAWS, [student] will navigate a single-page document using arrow keys and read-by-line commands to answer three comprehension questions, in 4 of 5 opportunities, as measured by TVI task records, by the annual review date.

Middle school: structured navigation
Using JAWS heading and link navigation commands, [student] will locate a specified section within a five-page web article with 80% accuracy and no more than two prompts, in 4 of 5 opportunities, by the annual review date.

High school: production and research
Using a screen reader, [student] will independently compose, edit, spell-check, and format a two-page document to assignment specifications, in 3 of 4 opportunities, as measured by submitted work samples, by the annual review date.
Our guide to screen reader software in the classroom covers implementation on the teacher's side.

Magnification Goals

For students with usable vision, magnification software and electronic magnifiers are often the primary access route.

Settings independence:
Using ZoomText, [student] will independently adjust magnification level, color contrast scheme, and cursor enhancement to match a given reading task, in 4 of 5 opportunities, by the annual review date.

Sustained reading:
Using a desktop electronic magnifier, [student] will read a grade-level passage of at least 400 words and answer comprehension questions with 85% accuracy, in 4 of 5 opportunities, by the annual review date.

Portability and setting transfer:
Using a portable electronic magnifier, [student] will independently locate and read specified information from a classroom handout within two minutes, in 4 of 5 opportunities across at least two different classrooms, by the annual review date.

A note on progressive conditions: for students whose vision is expected to change, build goals in both magnification and audio access simultaneously. Waiting until magnification stops working means starting screen reader instruction from zero during a crisis. See magnification software for students with low vision for tool comparisons.

Braille Technology Goals

Refreshable braille displays and braille notetakers serve reading, writing, and organization.

Display navigation:
Using a refreshable braille display paired to a school-issued device, [student] will navigate a multi-page document and locate a specified section independently, in 4 of 5 opportunities, by the annual review date.

Notetaking in real time:
Using a braille notetaker, [student] will take notes during a 15-minute class lecture capturing at least four of five main ideas, in 4 of 5 opportunities, as measured by TVI review of student files, by the annual review date.

Technical notation:
Using a refreshable braille display, [student] will read and transcribe grade-level Nemeth code mathematical expressions with 85% accuracy, in 4 of 5 opportunities, by the annual review date.

File management:
[Student] will independently create, name, save, and retrieve files in an organized folder structure on their braille notetaker, in 4 of 5 opportunities, by the annual review date.
Where a student needs hard-copy braille for math or tactile graphics, schools producing materials in-house rely on braille embossers — worth noting in the IEP as a material-production need rather than a student goal.

Digital Literacy and Self-Advocacy Goals

Two areas that get skipped, and both predict post-secondary success better than device proficiency alone.

Troubleshooting:
When assistive technology fails during a task, [student] will apply a three-step troubleshooting sequence and, if unresolved, request support using specific language describing the problem, in 4 of 5 opportunities, by the annual review date.

Self-advocacy:
[Student] will request a specific assistive technology accommodation from an unfamiliar teacher, naming the tool and the reason it is needed, in 3 of 4 opportunities, by the annual review date.

A student who can say “I use JAWS, and I need course readings as tagged PDFs rather than scanned images” will get what they need in college. One who can only say “I have trouble seeing” will not.

When an AT Goal Is the Wrong Move

When the device hasn’t been selected yet. Writing a goal around a specific tool before an AT evaluation puts the cart first. Request the evaluation, then write the goal around what the assessment recommends.

When the student is in acute vision change. Mid-progression, tool selection is a moving target. Short-term objectives with a mid-year review beat a locked annual goal.

When the barrier is materials, not skills. If a student is proficient with their screen reader but the teacher keeps distributing scanned image PDFs, the problem is document accessibility. An AT goal aimed at the student won’t fix a staff practice. That belongs in accommodations and staff training.

When there's no one to teach it. A goal requiring braille display instruction, in a district with no TVI and no contracted provider, will sit unmet all year. Solve the service delivery question first, or write the service into the IEP alongside the goal.

Worth saying plainly, from a company that sells these devices: **buying the technology is the easy part, and it's not where the outcome comes from.** A student with a mid-range magnifier and two years of structured instruction will outperform a student with the most expensive system on the market and no training. If your budget forces a choice between a better device and real instruction hours, choose the instruction.

Getting an AT Assessment That Produces Writable Goals

The gap most teams hit isn't willingness; it's that a general AT evaluation often comes back with recommendations too vague to convert into goals.

New England Low Vision and Blindness conducts assistive technology assessments specific to visual impairment, and our reports are structured to produce IEP-ready recommendations: named tools, proficiency targets, and suggested measurement methods your team can write directly into goals. We work with districts, IEP teams, and families across New England, and our support for special education directors is built for exactly this handoff.

Schedule No-Obligation Consultation to review your student's assistive technology needs and turn them into goals your team can measure.

Frequently Asked Questions

Does IDEA require assistive technology goals in every IEP?
IDEA requires the team to "consider whether the child needs assistive technology devices and services" for every student with a disability (34 CFR 300.324(a)(2)(v)), but it does not require a goal. Consideration must be documented. If the team determines the student needs AT and needs instruction to use it, that instruction should be captured in a measurable goal — otherwise there is no obligation to teach it, and the device tends to go unused.

Who writes the assistive technology goals for a student with visual impairment?
Typically the teacher of students with visual impairments, often working from an assistive technology evaluation. In districts with an AT specialist, the two collaborate. The goal should reflect vision-specific tools rather than generic special education AT, which is why VI expertise matters at the drafting stage.

How do you measure progress on an assistive technology goal?
Through task-completion records, timed trials, accuracy percentages, and prompt counts collected by the TVI during instruction. The measurement method belongs in the goal text itself. A goal that says "as measured by teacher observation" without specifying what's recorded is not measurable in practice.

Related Articles

- IEP Goals for Students with Visual Impairment: SMART Framework and Goal Bank
- Screen Reader Software in the Classroom
- Magnification Software for Students with Low Vision
- CCTV and Document Cameras for Students with Visual Impairment

About This Document

This white paper was created by New England Low Vision and Blindness. Portions of the content were generated using AI technology and reviewed for accuracy. However, the information is provided “as is” and is not intended as a substitute for professional advice or a comprehensive assessment.

About New England Low Vision and Blindness

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