IEP Goals for Students with Visual Impairment: SMART Framework and Goal Bank

If you're staring at a blank goal field on an IEP form for a student with visual impairment, the standard goal banks aren't going to help you much. They're built for general special education. They'll give you forty variations on reading fluency and nothing on cane technique, braille display navigation, or how to teach a ninth grader to explain their accommodations to a teacher who's never met them.

Here's the short version, and it's the one thing worth taking away: **good IEP goals for visual impairment come from pairing the SMART structure with the expanded core curriculum.** SMART makes each goal measurable and enforceable. The expanded core curriculum tells you which nine areas need goals in the first place. Miss either half and you get goals that either can't be measured or don't cover what the student actually needs.

This page has both. The framework first, then a goal bank organized by all nine expanded core curriculum areas, with the SMART components labeled so you can see the machinery and adapt each one.

Use the goals as starting points. Copy-pasting them verbatim is the single most common mistake in this work, and we'll come back to why.

What Makes a SMART Goal for Visual Impairment
SMART isn't specific to visual impairment. It matters more here than almost anywhere else, because vague goals produce vague services, and vague services produce students who reach graduation without the skills to live on their own.

Specific. Name the observable behavior. "Improve reading" tells nobody anything. "Read grade-level contracted UEB braille" describes something two people could watch and agree on.

Measurable. State the tracking method and the success criteria. Words per minute, accuracy percentage, number of prompts, opportunities out of trials. If two observers would record different results from the same session, it isn't measurable yet.

Achievable. Anchor to documented current performance. A student reading 42 words per minute in braille will not reach 120 in a year. Sixty-five is ambitious and reachable.

Relevant. Tie the goal to this student's functional vision and actual curriculum demands. A student with stable peripheral field loss and a student with progressive central loss need different goals at the same grade level.

Time-bound. Annual timeline plus benchmarks. Quarterly checkpoints let the team correct course before the year is spent.

The real reason to hold this line is enforceability. "Student will use assistive technology as needed" cannot be measured, cannot be failed, and cannot obligate anyone to provide instruction. "Using JAWS heading navigation, student will locate specified information in a five-page article with 80% accuracy" is a service the district has committed to delivering.

The Nine Expanded Core Curriculum Areas

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Much of what young children learn, they learn by watching: how people stand when they talk, how a parent sorts laundry, how someone hands over cash and gets change back. A child with significant visual impairment misses a great deal of that incidental learning, not from any cognitive difference, but because the information arrived through a channel they can't fully access.

The expanded core curriculum is the field's answer. It names nine areas where students with visual impairment need explicit instruction in things sighted peers absorb on their own. For a full walkthrough of each area, see our guide to the expanded core curriculum for visual impairment. It supplements the general curriculum — it does not replace it.

ECC Area	What goals in this area address
Compensatory Access	Braille, listening skills, tactile graphics, note-taking, concept development
Orientation and Mobility	Safe independent travel, cane technique, route learning, community navigation
Social Interaction	Non-verbal cues, conversational skills, personal space, self-advocacy
Independent Living	Personal care, cooking, money handling, organization, time management
Recreation and Leisure	Adapted sports, fitness, hobbies, community activities
Career Education	Career awareness, job sampling, workplace accommodation vocabulary
Assistive Technology	Screen readers, magnification, braille technology, digital literacy
Sensory Efficiency	Efficient use of remaining vision, hearing, and touch
Self-Determination	Decision-making, understanding one's own vision, knowing one's rights

Every area should be considered at goal-writing time. Not every area needs a formal annual goal for every student every year. But skipping the consideration step is how a student graduates fluent in calculus and unable to cross a street alone.

Assessment Comes Before Goals
Two assessments should precede any goal-writing session, and goals built without them are guesses.

The **Functional Vision Assessment (FVA)** documents how the student uses vision in real settings. Not acuity measured in a darkened exam room, but performance in a bright cafeteria, at the board, on a worksheet, moving down a crowded hallway.

The **Learning Media Assessment (LMA)** determines primary and secondary reading media: braille, print, large print, audio, or a combination. This drives nearly everything downstream. The LMA also carries legal weight. Under IDEA, the IEP team must "provide for instruction in Braille and the use of Braille unless the IEP Team determines, after an evaluation of the child's reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media (including an evaluation of the child's future needs for instruction in Braille or the use of Braille), that instruction in Braille or the use of Braille is not appropriate for the child" (34 CFR 300.324(a)(2)(iii)).

Read that carefully: braille is the default. Declining it requires a documented evaluation, and that evaluation must consider the student's *future* needs, not just current ones. For a student with a progressive condition, "she reads print fine right now" is not a sufficient basis for skipping braille instruction.

A teacher of students with visual impairments conducts both. One credential note, because it gets muddled constantly: TVIs hold **state certification or licensure**, typically earned through a university personnel preparation program in visual impairment. ACVREP — the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals — certifies related specialists including Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS) and Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialists (CATIS). Different credentials, different roles on the team. For a fuller picture of the role, see our guide to what a teacher of the visually impaired does.

If the FVA on file is four years old, the goals are being written for a student who no longer exists.

The Goal Bank: Examples by ECC Area
Every goal below follows the same skeleton: **condition, student, observable behavior, criteria, data source, timeline.** Bracketed fields are the parts you must replace with real assessment data. Baselines are illustrative — pull yours from the FVA, LMA, and progress records.

Compensatory Access Skills
Given grade-level contracted UEB braille passages, [student] will read at 65 words per minute with 90% comprehension accuracy, improving from a baseline of 42 words per minute at 85% comprehension, as measured by monthly running records, by the annual review date.

Given a 10-minute recorded lecture, [student] will take notes capturing at least 4 of 5 main ideas, improving from a baseline of 2 of 5, as measured by TVI review of student notes across 3 consecutive trials, by the annual review date.

Given an unfamiliar tactile graphic, [student] will identify the title, key, and 3 labeled features without adult prompting in 4 of 5 opportunities, as measured by TVI observation records, by the annual review date.

Orientation and Mobility

For how O&M services are written into the IEP, who delivers them, and how to request an evaluation, see our guide to orientation and mobility in the IEP.

Using two-point touch cane technique, [student] will travel independently from the classroom to the cafeteria and return, in 4 of 5 opportunities across 3 consecutive sessions, improving from current performance requiring intermittent verbal cues, as measured by COMS observation data, by the annual review date.

Given a familiar signalized intersection, [student] will analyze the traffic pattern and initiate a crossing at the correct point in the cycle in 4 of 5 opportunities with COMS supervision, by the annual review date.

[Student] will independently plan and execute a two-transfer public transit route to a community destination, including requesting assistance when needed, in 3 of 4 opportunities, as measured by COMS trip logs, by the annual review date.

Social Interaction
During structured peer conversations, [student] will orient head and body toward the speaker and maintain conversational turn-taking for 5 consecutive exchanges in 4 of 5 opportunities, as measured by TVI observation, by the annual review date.

[Student] will explain their visual impairment and one needed accommodation to an unfamiliar adult in clear, non-medical language, in 3 of 4 opportunities, as measured by role-play and real-setting observation records, by the annual review date.

Independent Living
Given adapted labeling and organization systems, [student] will independently identify and select a complete outfit appropriate to the weather in 4 of 5 opportunities, as measured by home-school communication log and TVI observation, by the annual review date.

[Student] will independently identify U.S. currency denominations by tactile and folding methods and complete a purchase with correct change verification in 4 of 5 opportunities, by the annual review date.

Using adapted kitchen tools and safety techniques, [student] will prepare a three-step cold meal independently in 3 of 4 opportunities, as measured by TVI task analysis checklist, by the annual review date.

Recreation and Leisure
[Student] will independently locate, select, and begin one adapted recreational activity during unstructured free time in 4 of 5 opportunities, as measured by staff observation logs, by the annual review date.

[Student] will participate in a modified physical education activity using appropriate adaptive equipment, with no more than 1 verbal prompt, in 4 of 5 class sessions, by the annual review date.

Career Education

[Student] will identify 3 careers of personal interest and describe the accommodations they would need in each, as measured by a completed career exploration portfolio, by the annual review date.

Given a simulated job interview, [student] will disclose their visual impairment and request 2 specific workplace accommodations using appropriate professional language, in 3 of 4 opportunities, by the annual review date.

Assistive Technology
These are starting points. For device-specific goals, measurement methods, and guidance on when an AT goal is the wrong tool, see assistive technology IEP goals for students with visual impairment.

Given a five-page digital article, [student] will locate specified information using JAWS heading-navigation commands with 80% accuracy and no more than 2 verbal prompts, improving from a baseline of 50% accuracy with frequent prompting, as measured by TVI task-completion records across 3 consecutive sessions, by the annual review date.

Using magnification software, [student] will independently adjust magnification level, color contrast, and cursor settings for a given reading task in 4 of 5 opportunities, by the annual review date.

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

When technology fails, [student] will apply a 3-step troubleshooting sequence and, if unresolved, request support using appropriate language, in 4 of 5 opportunities, by the annual review date.

Sensory Efficiency
Using a portable electronic magnifier, [student] will locate and read specified information from a classroom handout within 2 minutes in 4 of 5 opportunities, by the annual review date.

[Student] will apply a systematic left-to-right scanning pattern to locate target items on a cluttered visual array in 4 of 5 opportunities, as measured by TVI observation, by the annual review date.

Self-Determination
[Student] will state their eye condition, functional implications, and 3 required accommodations during their own IEP meeting, as measured by meeting documentation, by the annual review date.

Given a choice of two accommodations for a classroom task, [student] will select one and give a reason grounded in their own visual needs, in 4 of 5 opportunities, by the annual review date.

Six Mistakes That Show Up in Almost Every VI Goal Review
Vague language. “Student will improve reading skills.” Improve from what, to what, measured how? This goal can be marked met or unmet on opinion alone.

Academics only. Reading, writing, math, and then the IEP stops. The other eight ECC areas get no consideration, which quietly decides that mobility and independence aren't educational needs.

Goals that ignore the student's actual vision. A goal written for a student with light perception looks nothing like one for a student with 20/200 acuity and a full field. Recycled goals between students with different conditions fit neither.

No baseline. Without a documented starting point, growth cannot be measured. "Currently reads 42 words per minute in braille" is what makes the annual target mean anything.

Assumed print access. The goal says the student will read a passage without naming the medium or the tool. Braille? Large print? Screen reader? Desktop electronic magnifier? If the goal doesn't specify, the service won't happen consistently.

Last year's goals with new dates. If the goals didn't change after a year of instruction, either the student made no progress or nobody looked at the data.

When This Framework Is Not What You Need
This page is built for writing and reviewing annual IEP goals. It is the wrong starting point in a few situations, and it's worth saying so plainly.

If your student hasn't had a current FVA and LMA, stop here. Writing goals first and assessing later produces goals you'll rewrite in three months. Request the assessments and come back.

If you're at the eligibility stage, this is premature. Determining whether a student qualifies under IDEA's visual impairment category is a different process with different documentation.

If your child has CVI, the standard ECC goal structure needs significant adaptation. Cortical visual impairment is a brain-based condition, and goals built around optical device use and conventional visual efficiency often don't transfer. CVI-specific goal frameworks exist and are a better fit.

If you're a parent looking for help navigating the IEP meeting itself, including your rights, how a 504 plan differs from an IEP, and how to prepare, the goal-writing mechanics here aren't the right entry point. Our guide to IEP and 504 plan tips for parents of visually impaired students covers that ground.
And one thing most vendors won't tell you: **more goals is not better.** An IEP with 14 goals across nine areas usually means none of them get real instructional time. Three to five well-chosen goals, matched to the TVI service hours actually on the IEP, will move a student further than a comprehensive list nobody can deliver.

Getting Specialist Support for Your IEP Team
Writing goals that genuinely span the expanded core curriculum takes visual impairment expertise a lot of teams don't have on staff. Certified vision professionals — TVIs, orientation and mobility specialists, and assistive technology specialists — are in short supply nationally, and districts frequently write goals without a specialist at the table.

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New England Low Vision and Blindness works with school districts, IEP teams, and families across New England on assistive technology assessment, device selection, and the training that turns a device into a skill. Our assistive technology support for special education directors includes assessment models built to produce IEP-ready recommendations your team can write directly into goals.

If you're drafting goals this cycle and want specialist input on what's realistic for a given student and which technology actually fits, we're glad to help.

Schedule No-Obligation Consultation to review your student's assistive technology needs and build goals your team can deliver.

Frequently Asked Questions

How many IEP goals should a student with visual impairment have?
Three to five well-written goals is typical and usually more effective than a longer list. The number should match the TVI and COMS service hours actually written into the IEP. If there are 12 goals and two hours of weekly service, the goals cannot all receive instruction.

Do all nine expanded core curriculum areas need a formal goal every year?
No. All nine should be *considered* at each annual review, and that consideration should be documented. Formal goals are written for the areas where assessment shows a current need. A student may have three ECC goals one year and five the next.

Can I copy goals from a goal bank directly into an IEP?
No. Goal banks, including this one, are structural starting points. Every goal needs the student's real baseline data, criteria matched to their current performance, and specifics tied to their vision condition and setting. Verbatim copying is the most common finding in VI goal audits, and it produces goals that don't survive a due process review.

Related Articles

- IEP and 504 Plan Tips for Parents of Visually Impaired Students
- Assistive Technology for Students with Low Vision: Teacher's Guide
- Assistive Technology IEP Goals for Students with Visual Impairment
- Orientation and Mobility in the IEP: Services, Goals, and Advocacy
- Assistive Technology Support for Special Education Directors

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

New England Low Vision and Blindness is a leading provider of assistive technology, training, and support for people who are blind or visually impaired. We serve individuals, schools, and organizations across the Northeast with personalized solutions that empower independence and improve quality of life. To learn more or schedule a no-obligation consultation, visit NELowVision.com or call 888-211-6933. You can also email us at info@NELowVision.com.