



HIGHSCHOOL TO POST-SECONDARY TRANSITION RESOURCE FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

This guide provides information, practical tips and resources to help students with disabilities navigate the transition from high school to post-secondary education. Created in consultation with a team of university students in the University of Toronto's Work Study Program at Accessibility Services, this guide empowers and informs students with disabilities to achieve their academic goals and fully participate in university life. A valuable resource to consider investigating is the [Transition Resource Guide for Students with Disabilities](#), specifically the [TRG Next: Post Secondary Prep Course](#). Many sections of this document have been adapted from the Transition Resource Guide.

This guide is divided into three sections:

1. Key considerations and main differences between accommodations in high school and post-secondary
2. Post-secondary student transition checklist
3. Skill development

Key considerations and main differences between accommodations in high school and post-secondary

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Academic accommodations from high school don't automatically transfer to post-secondary settings.
- Accommodations in post-secondary settings may look different than accommodations in high school.
- Academic Accommodation Plans may differ based on program requirements and course-specific learning outcomes. There is also a wider range of accommodation options in post-secondary settings compared to high school. Your Academic Accommodation Plan will likely be based on several different factors, including discussions between yourself and the Accessibility Office staff, your medical documentation and program requirements.
- To access disability-related accommodations, you must register with your Accessibility Office (sometimes called the Disability Support Office). Registering with your Accessibility Office is voluntary. It's up to you to take the initiative to register.
- You may wish to register for different reasons including mental health, learning disabilities, mobility-related disabilities or a temporary injury such as a concussion.
- It's your responsibility to provide the appropriate documentation when registering with your Accessibility Office. For specific questions, please contact the Accessibility Office at your post-secondary institution for more information.

MAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ACCOMMODATIONS IN HIGH SCHOOL AND POST-SECONDARY

Defining accommodation plans:

- **High school:** In North American high schools, these plans are either called Individualized Education Plans (IEP) or 504 Plans. Globally, these plans may have alternative names, but the universal purpose of these plans is to provide a personalized educational program that meets the individual needs of students who require some form of accommodation to succeed in the educational setting.
- **Post-secondary settings:** These are often called Academic Accommodation Plans or accommodation plans for short.

Required documentation to obtain an academic accommodation plan:

- **High school:** IEPs and 504 Plans are provided based on formal documentation or informal identification through teacher recommendations and parental consultation.
- **Post secondary:** Formal documentation must be completed by a health-care provider who is qualified to make the diagnosis. Documentation typically indicates the presence of a disability, outlining the functional impacts experienced in an academic setting.

Involvement in academic accommodation plan creation:

- **High school:** Teachers and parents are actively involved in the creation of the plan, with teachers often being the ones to initiate these plans.
- **Post secondary:** An Academic Accommodation Plan is created together with Accessibility Office staff and is initiated by the student through actively participating in the registration process. Parents have a much more limited role (if any) in the accommodations process in post-secondary settings.

Academic accommodation plan related follow-up and follow through:

- **High school:** Teachers and parents often keep students accountable.
- **Post secondary:** The student is responsible for sending the accommodation plan to their instructors and to keep the Accessibility Office updated about any changes to their disability-related or accommodation needs.

FIGURE 1: HIGH SCHOOL VS. POST SECONDARY ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION PLANS

High school (IEP, 504 or similar accommodation plan)	Post secondary education (Academic Accommodation Plan)
Plans can include: • A description of strengths and weaknesses. • Specific educational expectations. • An outline of special education programming and services that will be received. This includes: • Academic accommodations: Changes in how a student learns materials or completes an activity. • Modifications: Changes in what a student is expected to learn. This may involve changing grade level expectations to meet a student's needs or capabilities. • Alternative skills areas: These are non-academic areas to work on such as social skills, personal skills, fine-motor skills etc. • A statement about methods of progress reviewal. • Transition plan with goals, actions and timelines.	Plans can include: Changes in <i>how</i> a student learns materials or completes an activity. • Accommodations are a planned variation or adjustment in the way a student acquires and demonstrates the essential academic requirements needed to successfully meet the learning objectives of a course or program. • Academic Accommodation Plans do not include modifications or change the level or amount of work a student is expected to complete.

Post-Secondary Student Transition Checklist

This checklist is tailored specifically for students with disabilities, covering everything from accommodations to campus navigation.

TRANSITION CHECKLIST

Please note, deadlines to complete the tasks listed below may differ depending on the institution. Please check with your institution to make sure you complete these tasks on time.

PRIOR TO THE START OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

General program-related tasks

- ☐ Accept your offer to attend post-secondary program.
- ☐ Set up necessary administrative credentials (e.g. student email, student card, etc.)
- ☐ Familiarize yourself with your institution's website, including the Accessibility Office's website.
- ☐ Attend any onboarding/student orientation events.
- ☐ Plan and enroll in courses.
 - > *Tip: Be sure to consider back-up courses in case your first choices are unavailable*
- ☐ Pay tuition fees
 - > *Tip: Some institutions allow deferral of tuition payment if students meet certain eligibility criteria. Check with your institution to see if this option is available.*
 - > *Tip: Some institutions may allow students with reduced course load accommodations to convert their tuition fee to per-course fees. Check with your institution to see if this option is available.*
- ☐ Move into residence.
 - > *Tip: Students requiring accommodations in residence should register with their Accessibility Office as soon as possible to see if such accommodations can be put in place.*

Accessibility-related tasks

- ☐ Register with your Accessibility Office
 - > *Tip: Check with your institution's Accessibility Office to see what documentation is required for registration. You may need to book an appointment with your health-care provider to get the necessary documentation filled out.*

- ☐ Attend student orientation events held by your Accessibility Office (if available).

START OF SCHOOL

- ☐ Plan to meet with Accessibility Office staff to discuss additional resources available to you as a student registered with the Accessibility Office (e.g., programming opportunities & funding to support disability-related matters).
- ☐ If applicable, apply for accommodation services (e.g., note-taking services).
- ☐ Notify your course instructors as soon as possible regarding your accommodations.
 - > *Tip: Some Accessibility Offices provide students with a letter detailing their various accommodation needs, which they can submit to instructors as proof of approved accommodations.*
 - > *Tip: Check course syllabi as soon as it's available and determine possible accessibility concerns to be brought to the instructor's attention.*
 - > *Tip: Unsure of how to communicate your accommodations with your instructors? Meet with Accessibility Office staff to discuss possible strategies.*

ONGOING SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL YEAR

- ☐ Regular check-ins—schedule regular appointments with Accessibility Office staff to review and adjust accommodations as needed.
- ☐ Use resources.
 - > *Consider working with a Learning Strategist to manage your schedule and academic responsibilities, especially around midterms and final exams. You can book an appointment through your school's Student Success/Student Life Office.*
 - > *Discuss with your Accessibility Office about possible resources or services which may be relevant, given your disability-related impacts.*
 - > **International students:** *Check with your institution to see if you have access to health plans and the coverage of such plans. Hoping to connect with other international students? Consider attending an event at your school's international learning office.*
 - > *Are you living far from your family doctor and want to connect with an on-campus doctor for physical or mental health-related support? Connect with your institution's health and wellness clinic.*
 - > *Seek out and engage with peer support groups or drop-in sessions to maintain a supportive network.*

Skill Development

SKILLS INVENTORY CHECK

As you embark on your post-secondary education journey, you'll likely need to rely on your independent living skills. For those moving away from home, these skills will be especially important.

Please review the items below. For each skill listed, indicate whether you agree or disagree that you agree or disagree that you can complete this task independently. If it's a skill that needs improvement, you can check the middle box. This checklist is designed to help you identify areas for improvement before starting college or university. This resource is adapted from the [TRG Next: Post Secondary Prep Course Skills Inventory Check](#).

Home living & budgeting

I can...	Agree	Disagree
Do laundry		
Keep my living space clean		
Create and follow a budget		
Pay bills, tuition, rent etc. on time		
Learn how to get around the city		

Healthy living

I can...	Agree	Disagree
Choose and plan healthy snacks and meals		
Manage my health needs (book appointments, show up)		

Academics

I can...	Agree	Disagree
Create and stick to a homework/studying schedule		
Know when and how to ask professors for clarification on assignments		
Know when and how to access academic support (writing centers, learning strategists)		

RESPONSIBILITY, INDEPENDENCE AND TIME MANAGEMENT

In high school:

- Typically, your schedule is structured with classes from morning to afternoon, and teachers often remind you of assignments and deadlines.
- Teachers will also often conduct review sessions before tests, going over the most important concepts before a test.
- Teachers may let you complete make-up assignments for poor project or test grades.
- You are generally at school for five hours a day, from morning until mid-afternoon.

In post-secondary settings:

- Course scheduling in post-secondary education is both more and less flexible than high school. Like in high school, the courses you take will be limited by program requirements. But unlike high school, your program may have some flexibility in the courses you can take to satisfy particular requirements. There is also variation in course offerings year to year, depending on demand and availability. You're responsible for balancing your course schedule every semester. You're also responsible for managing your time, keeping track of assignments and seeking help when needed.
- Course instructors may not remind you of deadlines or remind you to complete missed assignments. Usually, these important dates will be communicated to you at the beginning of the semester through the course syllabus.
- Instructors rarely offer review sessions in class. Sometimes there will be an optional review session where they will go over questions that students ask.
- Your classes can be at any time of the day (including in the evening) and you may have several classes on one day and none on another day.

Skill-building opportunity: Consider the following:

- How will you track progress in your program?
- How will you build your own schedule?
- How will you implement reminders in your schedule?
- How will you learn to manage your own time?
- How will you review course material and prepare for tests and exams?

Tips

- *Reflect: Ask yourself when you feel most productive during the day, consider medication or disability-related impacts, consider when you are able to focus best and build your schedule around your natural productivity peaks, if possible.*
- *Meet with a Learning Strategist.*
- *Attend learning skills workshops.*
- *Visualize your calendar - invest in a physical calendar or build a digital one.*
- *Read your syllabi.*

CLASS SIZE AND INTERACTION

In high school:

- Classes are typically smaller, with around 20-30 students, allowing for more personalized attention from teachers as well as opportunities to build close bonds with peers.
- Teachers typically approach you if they notice you are struggling.
- In some cases, students with IEPs 504 or similar accommodation plans may have even worked in smaller classroom spaces with more individualized support.

In post-secondary settings:

- Classes can range from small seminars (less than 30 students) to large lectures with hundreds of students (up to 1,000+ students).

- Larger courses may involve instructional teams including a course organizer, multiple lecturers, teaching assistants, etc. You may be assigned to a particular lecture and tutorial session. It's your responsibility to understand how the course is organized and seek the right people for support on different challenges.
- Interactions with instructors may be limited. You'll be required to take initiative and seek out office hours if you need assistance.
- In larger courses, it may be more difficult to build close bonds with peers due to the sheer size of the class. It's up to you to seek out opportunities to connect with other students if that is something you wish to do.

Skill-building opportunity:

- How will you take initiative?
- How will you ask for help and/or follow up with instructors?
- Where will you be able to focus best in large classroom settings?

Tips

- *Take note of your instructor's office hours at the beginning of the course and remember to attend when you have a question. If you're unable to attend during scheduled office hours, email your course instructor to arrange a time outside of office hours when you're available. Show up to office hours prepared with your questions.*
- *Some students prefer to occupy the front few rows of the class to ensure that they can pay attention. When sitting at the front you can remove distractions such as other people arriving late, people in front of you scrolling through social media/not paying attention, etc. Course instructors may also get to know you better if you sit in the front, as they begin to recognize you. Sometimes, if there is time at the end of the session, you can quickly approach the instructor with any questions you may have. You may also be more inclined to participate in class discussions when located at the front of the class.*
- *If your course has tutorials, talk to the teaching assistant about who is best to contact for questions about the course, assignments and any other relevant materials.*