



# Information Regarding Orientation & Mobility Instruction for Students with Deafblindness

Note: The following information is from the POPDB website in the [Orientation & Mobility section](#). The Reference List is not included in this printout but can be found on the POPDB website.

Orientation and Mobility (O&M) is one of the nine essential skill areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum for students with deafblindness. Students with deafblindness require specialized instruction and strategies that enable them to access the general curriculum and navigate the world (Lewis & Allman, 2014). For students with deafblindness, the [BC Inclusive Education Manual \(2024\)](#) includes O&M as an essential component of a student's program.

- **Orientation:** using information that you have gathered through your senses to know where you are presently and where you would like to go. It also involves knowing how you will get to your destination (Weiner, Wall Emerson, & Blasch, 2024).
- **Mobility:** process of moving from your current location to your destination safely, effectively, and as independently as you are able to (Weiner, Wall Emerson, & Blasch, 2024).

Everyone needs to be able to get around their home, school, and community whether it is finding the bathroom at home, going to the gym at school, or traveling to work or a doctor's appointment. O&M provides necessary life skills that students with deafblindness need to be active, informed participants in the world around them.

**O&M Instruction can only be taught by a qualified or certified O&M specialist.**

**It is unprofessional and possibly dangerous for unqualified individuals to provide instruction in O&M to students with deafblindness.**

**Questions? Talk to your O&M specialist or Teacher for Students with Visual Impairments.**

## Who is an O&M Specialist?

Qualified and [Certified O&M Specialists](#) are specially trained to provide instruction in orientation and mobility to individuals who are visually impaired, blind, and deafblind. With their knowledge and experience, O&M specialists teach students to understand where they are and where they would like to go (orientation) and how to get there safely and as independently as possible (mobility). O&M specialists also provide instruction in spatial awareness, sensory efficiency, body and environmental concepts which are also essential components of a good educational program. O&M skills are essential for students to be successful and fully participate in life (ACVREP, n.d.).

## What does an O&M Specialist Teach?

Through individualized, direct instruction from an O&M specialist, students with deafblindness learn the skills needed to travel throughout the environment safely, efficiently, and as independently as possible. The scope of O&M encompasses the following teaching areas (ACVREP, n.d.):

- Concept Development
- Sensory awareness and perceptual development
- Orientation
- Mobility systems and techniques
- Blind and vision assisted travel skills
- Street crossing
- Assistive and access technology
- Environmental access
- Self-determination

To read more about the scope of practice, visit the website for the [Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals](#)

## What is the role of the EA-Intervenor in O&M lessons?

O&M specialists assess, teach, implement, and evaluate programs related to O&M for their students. The role of EA-Intervenors in supporting O&M instruction is by working under the direction of the O&M specialist. EA-Intervenors may be provided instruction on how to support concept development and specific O&M techniques and so that their student receives regular practice with skills in their school environments (Fazzi, Naimy, & Casias, 2024).

O&M specialists find EA-Intervenors to be valuable members of the team because they know the student well. EA-Intervenors work with the student's team to facilitate communication, independent living skills, and movement (Sauerburger, Lolli, & Bourquin, 2024). Along with the Teacher for Students with Visual Impairments and Teacher for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the EA-Intervenor can provide information about the student's visual and hearing, communication, and learning needs (Sauerburger, Lolli, & Bourquin, 2024).

If a student uses alternate communication systems and devices, the EA-Intervenor may need to teach the O&M specialist how to communicate with your student. If a student uses ASL, haptics, and/or tactile signing, interpretation may be needed (Sauerburger, Lolli, & Bourquin, 2024).

POPDB offers an advanced course for Educational Assistants training to become Intervenors. [IIDC 330 Key Issues Around Supporting Orientation and Mobility](#) is a hybrid course consisting of online instruction and an in-person component. The course looks at issues in O&M as related to students with deafblindness and participants learn the purpose and role of O&M in the life of students who are deafblind.

For a comprehensive breakdown of O&M Delivery Guidelines, check out the [APSEA O&M Delivery Guidelines](#) document.

## What about O&M for students with deafblindness in wheelchairs?

O&M for students who are deafblind and use wheelchairs is important, so students engage with their environment. It helps increase independence and facilitates a deeper understanding of the world around them (Bozeman & McCulley, 2024)

Spatial awareness, sensory awareness, environmental concepts, directions, laterality, mapping, landmarks, information cues, time-distance awareness, and self-determination are just a few of the critical content areas that are equally important to students who are in wheelchairs as those who ambulate (Bozeman & McCulley, 2024).

O&M specialists have helpful instructional strategies to help teach students with deafblindness in wheelchairs how to navigate independently, including the use of manual and propulsion wheelchairs, forward and backward travel, turns, navigating narrow spaces, operating doors, negotiating curb ramps and street crossings, and public transit (Crawford, 2016; Crawford 2014).

## How can an O&M specialist support the use of adaptive equipment?

Learning to walk is a developmental skill and when an individual is blind or has reduced vision, a greater amount of effort is required to ensure balance, postural awareness, and personal safety (Rosen & Riddering, 2024). It is essential that young children get moving to develop their muscle tone, proprioception, and coordination (Rosen & Riddering, 2024). Students may need encouragement to get moving in their environment and an adaptive mobility device (AMD) may help facilitate movement and the willingness to move around (Sapp & Anthony, 2024).

The O&M specialist, along with physiotherapist (PT) and occupational therapist (OT) are key team members to help get students with deafblindness moving and learning to navigate at the same time. Be sure to involve your O&M specialist when adaptive equipment such as bikes, walkers, and propulsion wheelchairs are going to be part of the program.

## Why should O&M instruction be part of the educational program for students with deafblindness and complex profiles?

Students with deafblindness and complex profiles have an important need for O&M instruction. According to Ambrose-Zacken & Anderson (2024), O&M instruction can help increase a student's movement and participation in their day. Safe travel, as independent as possible travel, and autonomy in travel increases the student's life choices in the present and, in the future, (Ambrose-Zacken & Anderson, 2024).

O&M specialists are specially trained to teach spatial awareness, sensory awareness, environmental concepts, directions, laterality, safe navigation, and self-determination. These are a few of the important content areas for the educational programs of students with deafblindness and complex profiles. O&M specialists also have helpful instructional strategies that will support individuals with a wide variety of cognitive and developmental challenges to travel safely, efficiently, and as independently as possible.