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**For parents of children
with visual
impairments**

How Students Who Are
Blind Read and Write

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español

As a sixth grader in math class, this student uses her braille writer to answer problems she reads on a braille worksheet.



If your child has little or no usable vision, he will probably be learning to read and write in braille. Braille is a code—a system of dots that represent the letters of the alphabet and that your child can use to read independently and to write down his own ideas. As with children learning to read and write print, instruction in braille will be a major part of your child's education for the first few years of elementary school.

- Your child will need instruction from a [teacher of students with visual impairments](#) in how to read and write the braille code. Like students learning to read and write in print, he will need braille instruction several days a week in the early elementary grades, if not every day.
- Braille materials need to be available to your child at the same time that his classmates who are sighted get the information in print. Having materials read to your child because they are not available in braille is not a permanent solution and should not be an ongoing practice. Your child needs to read a lot of braille to become a proficient braille reader.
- When your child writes his assignments in braille, the teacher of students with visual impairments will need to make it available to his teachers who don't know braille. He or she should write out in print exactly what your child wrote in braille, including any mistakes, so that the classroom teacher can see his actual work.

To provide your child with access to information at a distance, such as assignments written on the chalkboard, the classroom teacher has several options:

- The teacher can provide your child a copy of the material on the board by giving it ahead of time to the teacher of students with visual impairments so he or she can produce it in braille for your child.
- The teacher can read aloud what he or she is writing on the board.
- If your child is using a computer, the teacher can provide an electronic file containing the material so your child can read it with [synthetic speech](#) software, which simulates speech.

Tools for Reading and Writing Braille

There are a variety of tools for both reading and writing that are used by children who are blind. These might include the following:

- **Perkins braillewriter** (also referred to as a braillewriter): Similar in appearance and function to an old-fashioned manual typewriter, the braillewriter has six keys used to emboss (press) dots on the page to form braille.
- **Slate and stylus**: A portable tool for writing braille, the slate and stylus is often used like a notepad to write down short messages, such as a telephone number, telephone message, or shopping list or to produce labels for items such as DVDs or cereal boxes. It is typically introduced to children in the third or fourth grade.

- **Personal digital assistant (PDA)**: Also known as a portable notetaker or electronic notetaker, a PDA is similar to a laptop computer without a screen. Using this device, your child can write with either a standard keyboard or a braille keyboard, and he can read material on the PDA either by listening to it spoken aloud via synthetic speech or by reading braille on a refreshable braille display.
- **Audio books**: When there is a large volume of material to be read, your child may find it beneficial to listen to the material. Audio texts may be available on tape or CD, or, increasingly in digital formats downloadable to a computer, PDA, or other device.

- **Computer:** Your child will probably learn to use a computer with some kind of assistive technology, such as a screen reader or refreshable braille, to have direct access to text that is available in electronic files or on the Internet and a braille embosser to be able to have a hard copy of his work that he prints out in standard print for his teachers to read

It is important that your child not rely on just one tool. Rather, the goal is for him to be skilled in using a variety of tools, so that he can pick the most appropriate tool for any given task he needs to complete.