



Older Individuals who are Blind
Technical Assistance Center

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Lesson 10: Five Essential Tasks

Introduction

Many tasks are essential for everyday life, like safely taking medication, using money to manage finances, keeping track of dates and time, signing documents, communicating via telephone, eating a meal in a restaurant, and reading for pleasure and work.

You can probably name other tasks that are priorities for you. This lesson discusses five of these important tasks: taking medications, using coins and currency, talking on a telephone, time management, and signing your name. Other lessons in this series cover additional essential tasks.

Lesson Goals

- Learn to organize, label, and manage your medications
- Make informed decisions about selecting a clock, watch, and calendar
- Learn to perform the three steps for making a phone call independently
- Learn to identify US coins and provide accurate change
- Learn methods to organize US currency for making independent purchases
- Determine if modifications are needed in your signature
- Learn to use adaptive tools and techniques for signing your name on documents

Medication Management

Identifying, organizing, and labeling medications should be high on your priority list as a person who is blind or has low vision. In this lesson, you will learn methods for identifying your prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, and vitamin supplements. Some of the methods are simple, like wrapping a rubber band around a bottle to identify it. Several talking labeling devices and apps that can be used on a smartphone will also be introduced. It's wise to use two different methods to keep track of your medications. Sometimes the simple method is quicker, while at other times,

the talking device is the better way to go. If you use both, you have a choice. This section begins with simpler techniques and then describes some talking devices.

It is important to keep an up-to-date list of all your medications, including dosages, expiration dates, number of refills, and prescribing physician for each. You will need this list for your annual checkup with your primary care doctor and for any specialists or home health services you see. You will also need the list for your use in an accessible format, like large print, braille, audio, or electronic.

Identification

One way to identify medications is by shape. Examine the medications you take every day: Are there noticeable differences in the bottles or pills' shape? If you have five or fewer different medications, and each is a different shape, then organizing by shape may be sufficient for your needs. Remember that the pharmacy or manufacturer may change the shapes of bottles or pills, so you can't rely on this method alone. Organize your medications on a tray with a lip. This method prevents bottles from rolling off the table and can keep dropped pills contained. Keep your medications in an order that makes sense to you.

People with reliable color vision may be able to tell medications apart by the color of the pill. Some pharmacies will also use different color caps on bottles to help with identification. If identifying by color is not a good option for you, ask your pharmacist to use bottles of different sizes for each medication or to use differently shaped tops for each bottle.

Location is also a good method of separating medications. If you take some medications at night, you could set those on the table next to your bed. You could then put your morning medications on a tray in the bathroom and midday medications on the kitchen table. The exact arrangement doesn't matter. What does matter is being consistent and choosing a method that works for you. Remember the rule: Everything has a place and everything in its place.

There are many ways to label and organize medications. For example, if you have similar bottles of pills, you might wrap a rubber band around one of the bottles. Wrap the rubber band around the bottle twice if you take the

pill twice a day. Another strategy is to use stick-on letters, which are available at craft stores. You might use a C for cholesterol, B for blood pressure, and D for diabetes.

Pill organizers are terrific tools if you take several pills a day. There are seven-day pill organizers available in various sizes with up to four compartments per day. The size you need depends on how many medications you take and how many times per day you take them. It might help put large print, raised letters, or braille on the organizer to locate the correct compartment. Even if you need help once a week from a home health nurse, friend, or family member to fill your organizer, you'll be set for a week once the task is done. You could also use a talking labeling device to fill the organizer yourself. If a pill organizer is not an appealing option, you can ask your pharmacy to place all your medications into blister packs by dose. (Note that you must purchase all your medications from the pharmacy who is blister packing them for you.) With both pill organizers and blister packs, you can immediately tell if you missed any doses. This method is helpful if you have memory problems or get easily distracted. There are also organizers with alarms or alerts to help you remember to take medications. You can find several organizer styles in the online catalogs of companies that sell adaptive products for people who are blind or have low vision. These companies also have the option of ordering by phone.

Pharmacy Accommodations

Most pharmacists are happy to work with your needs and offer various accommodations for people who are blind or have low vision. Some pharmacies will even deliver medications to your home to simplify things further. Some common accommodations pharmacies may provide are:

- Easy-open bottles
- Differently sized bottles
- Differently colored or shaped bottle caps
- Large print labels
- Large print prescription fact sheets
- Daily doses grouped in blister packs

- Pill cutting if you take half doses
- Audio labels
- Free delivery
- Automatic refills

Most national chain and mail-order pharmacies now offer various free, accessible prescription labeling, such as Script Talk. Script Talk is a device that allows a visually impaired person to hear information printed on a pill bottle label. Check to see if your pharmacy offers this service. If yours does not, encourage the manager to provide this service, or check for other pharmacies that provide the service.

Audio Labels

Talking pill reminders can be attached to a prescription bottle. The reminder will beep when it's time to take the medication. They also can record and replay an audio message describing the container's contents and proper dosage.

Digital Audio Label, a device about the size of a pack of gum, is programmed by a pharmacist with the medication name, dosage, doctor's name, refill date, and other critical information. When you press the device's single button, the recording is played.

The Script Talk Station works in conjunction with specially tagged prescription bottles provided by participating pharmacies. When you set the pill bottle against the top of the Station or near a smartphone with the Script Talk app installed, the medication name, dosage, and other information are spoken aloud. The same company that makes Script Talk also offers Script View, large, 18-size font labels. Visit En-Vision America for more information.

The PENfriend voice labeling system (first mentioned in Lesson 9) uses special labels and a pen-type device. To use the PENfriend to label a medication, attach a PENFriend label to the bottle, then place the device's point against the label, push and hold down the record button, speak a message with all of the information you'd like to include, and release the button. To listen to the message, put the point of the pen against the label and press Play.

Taking Medications

Along with carefully organizing your medications, you need safe systems and habits for taking them. For example, if you have three nighttime medications, you could keep them next to your bed on a tray. Open each bottle over the tray and hold your hand over the tray as you remove each pill. Replace the cap on each bottle before opening the next. If you prefer to take all the pills at once, then designate one corner of the tray or a small cup as the place to put each pill until you are ready to take all of them. This method will help you avoid accidentally spilling an open bottle or dropping pills on the floor. Taking your medications over the bathroom or kitchen sink is not recommended because it is difficult to retrieve dropped pills from a sink.

If you use liquid medications, such as drops for glaucoma, talk with your pharmacist about bottles that dispense only one drop at a time. You will want to create a similar routine with these medications. Most people find it easiest to sit down to administer their drops. It may be helpful to have a specific place in your home where your eye drops are kept, along with a box of tissues and anything else you may need. Using an eye drop guide can also help administer the drops accurately and without difficulty.

Pouring liquid medicine like cough syrup into a teaspoon can be difficult. Try using an eyedropper with the capacity to get the right dose to draw up the medicine. Then you can squirt it into a spoon that holds more than the needed amount, such as a tablespoon or soup spoon.

Diabetes Management

Diabetes is manageable, even after vision loss. Large print and talking glucose monitors can be purchased from several companies, and some are covered under Medicare. If you are insulin-dependent, you may already be using an insulin pen to take your injections. Most hospitals have diabetes educators who will work with you and train you to use adaptive monitors and other related equipment. These specialists can provide information about financial assistance for insulin and testing strips, which can be costly.

Time Management

Time management is important for a variety of reasons. For example, to safely manage medications, you need to know the time because some medications must be taken at an exact time. Managing appointments requires knowing what time to arrive and being on time. Being able to tell the time independently allows you to control what goes on throughout the day.

Telling Time

You may have a way of telling time that is already working. For example, your vision may be good enough to see a clock on the wall with very large numbers and hands or the clock's digital numbers on a microwave or stove. You may have a clock that chimes every quarter-hour and bongs on the hour. If your method is working for you, then keep using it.

However, there are products designed for people who are blind or have low vision to make telling time easy. Several specialty companies sell products for people with vision loss, including clocks and watches, to suit various personal preferences. Some people find it easier to see white numbers on a dark background. Some prefer digital clocks with extra-large numbers, while others prefer talking clocks. What works best will depend on your vision and personal preference.

In addition to specialty companies, almost every mainstream electronics department or discount store sells clocks with large displays or clocks that announce the time. One popular version is the Talking Atomic Clock, which uses radio signals to automatically set the clock to the official US atomic clock time and date. Many include extra features, such as hour and half-hour chimes and indoor and outdoor temperature announcements.

Before you buy a clock, look at several clocks in the store or talk to a specialty company representative to get a thorough description of at least three or four models. You will want to make sure you can easily hear and understand the voice on a talking clock. Think about whether the voice is male or female, the available volume range, and the pronunciation used. Also, consider the number of features a clock offers. Setting instructions

often grow more complex as the number of features increase.

Consider how you will independently set any clock you buy. Some clocks have a few steps that aren't audible or accessible. Also, find out what type of batteries are required and make sure the battery compartment is easy to open.

Many people do not have wall clocks or alarm clocks because they own other devices that make traditional clocks unnecessary. Think about the devices you use around the house or as you travel. Smartphones can be fully accessible for people who are blind or have low vision and have the functionality to announce the time, set alarms, and set reminder alerts. They are also more versatile than most other clocks because the settings and chime tones can be adjusted.

However, for people who do not want to keep their phone on them or are not comfortable with the technology, a smart home device might work well. You might need help with the initial setup, but a device like an Amazon Echo, Google Home, or Apple HomePod may be ideal. These devices are voice-activated and respond to many commands, such as, "What time is it?" or "Set an alarm for 8:00 a.m." These devices also offer other time management functions, like setting appointments on a calendar and appointment reminders. These devices will be discussed in other areas because they can perform several tasks, including ordering items when they run low, providing the weather forecast, or looking up information on the internet.

Telling the time when you are away from home is also important. If you do not want to rely on your phone for telling time, consider a large print, talking, tactile watch, or smartwatch. The styles available are endless, and many look like traditional watches. Try various watches before buying one to make sure you can use, understand, and access the necessary features.

Large print watches have larger-than-usual numbers and high-contrast colors. Talking watches work the same way as the talking clocks discussed previously. They have a button that announces the time when pressed. Many offer an alarm feature and hourly chimes. These devices rarely have

a volume setting, so they may not be ideal for people with hearing impairments or who don't want to disrupt quiet environments.

If your fingertips still have lots of feeling, you might try a tactile watch, often called a braille watch. Truthfully, there's nothing braille about these watches. They look similar to a regular watch. To feel the dots, you must open the watch crystal using a small latch, usually located at the 6:00 position. There are two vertical dots at the 12:00 and 6:00 positions; at 3:00 and 9:00, there are two horizontal dots. All other numbers have a single dot. Like regular watches, the stem is next to the three, and the hour hand is shorter than the minute hand. The minute hand extends over the numbers. One advantage of a tactile watch is you can check the time without disturbing anyone.

Before deciding to buy a tactile watch, practice using and setting one with a rehabilitation specialist. Examine the face of the watch carefully. Then have the specialist set the watch at some easy-to-identify times, such as 6:00. The minute hand will be straight up pointing at 12:00 and the hour hand straight down pointing at 6:00. Other settings could include 3:00, 9:00, 6:15, 3:45, and 12:30. You can progress to identifying more difficult settings.

Tactile watches come in many styles and sizes. There are dainty women's watches with leather or bracelet bands. Because these have very small faces, they can be difficult to read. Another style is somewhat larger, about the size of a sports watch. There are also large wristwatches and pocket watches for men. Some women buy the pocket watches and wear them as a pendant on a chain because they are easier to read.

Smartwatches are becoming more popular, and some, including the Apple Watch, is accessible for people who are blind or have low vision. As with smartphones, an Apple Watch can verbally announce the time and other information. It can also tap or vibrate to provide helpful information. There are high contrast and multiple large print watch face choices for people with functional vision.

Calendars

Knowing the time is only one part of time management. Keeping track of appointments, birthdays, and social events is just as important. There are large print, braille, and electronic methods of keeping a calendar that can help you manage your time.

Many large print calendars are available in stores, and some people like to create their own. Specialty companies sell large print wall calendars that you can write on in large letters with a bold pen. Some large desk calendars have space for only two entries per page, giving you lots of space to write. Braille calendars of all sizes are also available. A braille calendar marketed by the American Printing House for the Blind displays photographs of artwork created by artists who are blind or have low vision.

Before losing vision, you may have used your smartphone, smartwatch, or tablet to keep track of time and appointments. Training can help you continue this habit using built-in magnification and speech software on your device's pre-installed calendar app. Many of these devices also have an option to record and access calendar appointments using voice commands.

If you cannot read print and don't want to use a smartphone, another alternative for keeping track of your appointments is one of the smart home devices mentioned previously, controlled with voice commands. These devices can often be connected to a smartphone calendar, so you or a family member can access the list of appointments when away from home.

A low-tech alternative is a digital recorder that is easily transportable. Choose one with voice guidance to speak to you as you navigate the functions, including setup, folder organization, and menu navigation. Some of these recorders offer five folders: one for phone numbers, one for appointments, one for recipes, and so on. These devices can be used as calendars but are more difficult to manage than the other suggestions since all appointments get recorded in a folder in no particular order and without an option for reminders.



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Telephone Communication

The telephone is the primary safety tool in your home. It lets you contact emergency services if you are seriously ill or feel threatened by someone and need the police. If you have broken glass on the floor and need help to clean it up, your phone connects you with a neighbor. If you need to confirm an appointment, the information is just a phone call away. For all these reasons, your telephone is a vital part of everyday life. Many people new to vision loss get discouraged after their first attempts to dial a familiar number and get it wrong two or three times. Landline phones will disconnect if more than seven seconds elapse between digits. It may be impossible to imagine dialing a number on a smartphone without seeing the keypad. However, dialing a phone does not need to be a source of frustration. Training can be helpful, but there are also some tips provided here to get you started.

For many, landline phones are the most familiar telephone model. Many people make accommodations for landline phones, like large, stick-on numbers you can attach to the phone buttons or buying a large-button phone. However, it is wise to learn alternative dialing techniques if you need to use a telephone away from home.

Regardless of whether you are dialing on a corded landline phone, a wireless handset, or a cell phone, the keypads are all alike. Visualize your phone or look at the keypad to refresh your memory if you have some vision. How many horizontal rows are there? How many buttons are there on each of the four rows? Now think about the order of the buttons. Row one: 1-2-3. Row two: 4-5-6. Row three: 7-8-9. Row four is the odd one: star-0-pound.

If you have a landline phone at home, try this practice exercise. Don't worry: You won't be dialing unless you lift the receiver or push the phone button on a cordless phone. If you can, place your index, middle, and ring fingers over the 1-2-3. Move those fingers down a row, and place them over the 4-5-6. Can you feel the little dot in the center of the 5? This dot is your landmark on the telephone. If you are right-handed or dial the phone



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with your right hand, press the 4 with your index finger, then reach up and press the 1. Press 5 with your middle finger and reach up and press the 2. Do the same with your ring finger, pressing six and then 3. Do this several times until your muscle memory knows exactly how far to reach. Next, practice moving from the 4 to the 7, from the 5 to the 8, and from the 6 to the 9. This movement may not feel as comfortable. Even if you move your whole hand down to 7-8-9, slide your fingers right back to 4-5-6. Again, practice this several times. Some people use their thumb for the 0.

Before you try dialing a complicated phone number that goes from 1 to 0, from 3 to 7, and so on, practice numbers that don't move your hand very far. It's kind of like learning to type. You learn the home row first and then the letters above and below before learning the keys further away. You might want to mark 1, 9, and 0 with a raised dot similar to the one on the 5. If you need to dial 911 quickly, the numbers will be marked. Packages of clear bump dots can be purchased from specialty stores, so you don't cover up the numbers for sighted individuals.

If arthritis or neuropathy in your hands makes this technique too difficult for you, modify it by moving your hand up and down the rows on the phone. Mark the 1, 9, and 0 to help you reorient yourself to the buttons. Alternative options are available, like large-button phones or programmable phones. You may find available options by contacting your local senior center or agency that provides older individuals services.

Dialing the phone is just one step to making a phone call. Obtaining and remembering a phone number while dialing is the first step. Trying to remember seven to 10 numbers as you dial them is not easy. Practice reciting any important phone numbers you need to remember until it gets easier.

No one has every phone number in their phone book, memorized. If you have some usable vision, it may help record frequently used numbers in a large print address book with dark lines and wide spaces so you can write in large text. Some area phone services are more generous than others with free directory assistance calls.

Directory assistance is a feature of landline and cell phones that is especially helpful for people who are blind or have low vision. To use free directory assistance, call the number for directory assistance and request the information you need. They will give you the number or even dial it for you. Directory assistance usually would incur a fee, but when the application proving you have a vision impairment is submitted, there should no longer be a fee for this service. You might also store frequently used numbers on the phone and ask the phone to dial Dr. Johnson, the pharmacy, the weather, or your daughter.

The third step of a phone call is recording needed information, such as days and times of appointments; addresses; directions; or environmental information, like floor numbers or number of stairs required to get to a new place. Specialty companies sell small digital recorders that will temporarily hold a little information or store addresses, phone numbers, and appointments until they are deleted.

Cell Phones and Smartphones

Landline phones are becoming less common and are being replaced by cell phones and smartphones. If you use a flip phone, also known as a feature phone, but struggle to see the keys or read the display, it may help determine if your phone has speech capabilities. You may need sighted help to set it up, but after that, the phone will speak every time you turn it on. You will hear phone numbers as you dial them, and caller-ID will be announced for incoming calls. Names and phone numbers can be added to the contact list for faster dialing. Some flip phones have full-feature voice guides that will read text messages and let you compose and send outgoing messages. Check the specialty catalogs for other cell phone options. Currently, one option is the BlindShell phone.

The limited functionality of flip phones has led many people who are blind or have low vision to switch to a smartphone. The touchscreen platforms from Apple, Google, and Microsoft each include two accessibility features for people with visual impairments: a screen magnifier and a screen reader.

For more details on using a smartphone, read Lesson 19.

Money Identification

You likely have years of experience earning, spending, and managing money. You've made house payments, paid rent, and shopped for groceries, clothing, and home furnishings. You've paid your monthly bills and enjoyed a variety of entertainment activities. Whether the onset of your vision loss was sudden or gradual, you may find yourself struggling with paying bills or identifying coins and currency. There are strategies for all these tasks that will help you regain your independence in managing your money.

The following strategies describe ways to tell coins apart and keep track of paper money without relying on vision. These tips will restore your confidence in handling cash daily and help you regain a sense of independence.

The need to differentiate a five-dollar bill from a twenty-dollar bill or a quarter from a nickel may arise several times a day. When you purchase something at a bookstore, receive change, use the ATM, or buy a drink out of a vending machine, your knowledge of coins and paper currency makes a difference in the transaction. The US mints six coins: penny, nickel, dime, quarter, half-dollar, and dollar. Dollar coins are rarely given as change, but they are not difficult to identify because of their size. Half-dollars are also rarely received as change, and they are considerably larger than a quarter. Now you are left with the four most common coins given as change and used in vending machines. The largest and smallest of these, the quarter and dime, have serrated edges. If you run a fingernail around the edge of these two coins, you can feel the grating sensation on your fingernail. You can probably identify a quarter easily because of its two distinctive characteristics: size and the serrated edge.

Pennies, nickels, and dimes can be confusing, especially if you have a mixture filling your pocket. Although a penny is slightly larger than a dime, the size is similar, but the edge is smooth, not serrated like the dime. Likewise, there is not much difference in the sizes of a penny and a nickel. The nickel is slightly larger, and the edge is thicker. Both have a smooth



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edge, not serrated, and the nickel's thickness is a good identifier. To build confidence, you might put together a bag of mixed coins and practice telling one from another. Practice counting out various amounts of change: 42 cents, 67 cents, 19 cents, and so on. Even if you give a dollar bill instead of counting out change, you may need to make sure you've received the correct change from a transaction.

US paper currency cannot be differentiated by touch. If you have low vision and the lighting is sufficient, you may be able to distinguish the denominations of bills. The numbers are fairly large, and the picture on the front of each bill is distinguishable. If you have no usable vision, you have two options when you receive currency as change: You can ask the clerk to identify each bill as you receive it, or, if you know the amount you should receive, you can ask for specific denominations and, therefore, control the transaction. It is helpful to extend your hand as you hear a cashier getting the change and ask for the bills to be handed directly to you in order of denominations. That way, the cashier won't hand it to the person with you or count it out on the counter, leaving it for you to find.

Some people feel more comfortable carrying a small, talking currency identifier when shopping for checking denominations of currency. The iBill is free through the Department of the Treasury, and it is quite accurate. It can be applied for through the National Library Service. There are also free money-identification apps available for smartphones.

To simplify transactions and ensure accuracy, you will probably want to organize your currency by denomination using a money-organizing wallet or a folding system. There are numerous options, so find the system that works best for you and keep it consistent. Money-organizing wallets, which have separate compartments for each denomination, are a simple solution. If you prefer to create a folding system, one method is to leave \$1 bills flat; fold \$5 bills in half, creating a square; fold \$10 bills in half lengthwise; and fold \$20 bills in half, like the \$5 bills, then fold in half again. This technique is one example; as long as you come up with a system that makes it easy for you to differentiate bills consistently, it will be effective. If you use a money-organizing wallet, you may also want to use a folding system still in

case you accidentally put a bill in the wrong compartment. Some wallets have more than one compartment for change, so pennies can be separated from nickels since it can be hard to tell those two apart quickly.

As a precaution, you might want to choose never to carry a bill larger than a \$20 bill. It is less costly to make a mistake with a smaller denomination or accidentally drop a less valuable bill. Also, devising a folding system is easier if you only carry four different denominations.

Many people prefer to use a credit or debit card for transactions rather than using cash. These transactions can be achieved in various ways and are covered in more detail in Lesson 12.

Finally, don't let a customer's shuffling feet or mumbling behind you force you to rush through a purchase or make a mistake. Instead, safely get ready to complete your purchase at the register while waiting in line. If possible, estimate what you owe and be prepared with your wallet. When you complete a transaction, take a couple of steps away from the counter and put your money and wallet away before leaving the store. There is additional information on money management in upcoming lessons.

Signatures

Sighted children learn to write their name and display it with pride, often on the refrigerator door. By third grade, many children have developed a unique signature. As an adult, you have probably used your signature to sign legal and financial documents, checks and deposit slips, credit card slips, birthday and thank-you cards, or sign-in sheets at the doctor's office. Creating a signature is a cornerstone of personal literacy.

A person who has lost some or all of their vision has not lost the ability to sign their name. Our bodies develop muscle memory to write a signature. Signatures often look the same as they did before a person experienced vision loss, perhaps except for dotting an "i" or crossing a "t." What does change is the ability to monitor how your signature looks. If you are worried about your signature being legible, consider how many sighted people have illegible signatures!

Try this exercise. Start with a plain piece of unlined paper. Write your signature once at the top and once at the bottom, and twice in the middle. This spacing will help you relax and give you plenty of room to write in an unconfined space. Now ask a sighted friend or family member how your signature looks. Are the four samples similar? If your name includes letters with dots, consider leaving them undotted; create four more samples and see if it's easier to write when you leave out the dot. Crossing an "x" or a "t" can be hard unless it comes at the end of a name, such as Alex or Pat. With a name like Alexandra or Patrick, you might make a slight modification: Stop and cross the "x" or "t" before finishing your signature. At first, it might feel awkward to interrupt your movements' flow, but you will develop a new pattern in time. If you can still see your handwriting, you may not need to make any changes even if you can't read it.

A few adaptations can help you orient your signature to the signature line on a document. You can buy a signature guide that outlines the exact place where you need to sign. These guides are about a credit card's size with a long rectangular opening (half-inch by three inches) in the middle. They are usually made of flexible plastic in a dark color to provide color contrast. Some have an elastic band along the bottom that allows for signatures with letters that drop below the line. A friend, family member, store clerk, bank teller, or another helper can line up the guide's opening with the signature line for you to sign your name in the appropriate place.

In addition to signature guides, some homemade guides are useful in different situations. For example, if your signature is especially long, you may prefer using a homemade signature guide. Making a homemade signature guide can be done similar to making the typoscope mentioned in Lesson 7. Ask a friend or family member to help you create a guide out of cardboard or an expired debit or credit card. You can make it in any size to accommodate your signature.

Another alternative is to ask the store clerk or server in a restaurant to fold a receipt backward so when it is unfolded, it makes a crease along the tip or signature line. This technique makes it easy to write a signature or other information while feeling the tactile raised line. With this method,

descenders in letters like "y," "j," "f," or "g" will not be impeded by the frame of a basic signature guide.

One way to sign a letter-sized document is to use tape or sticky notes to identify the lines. If there is a larger area or more information needed than just a signature, two or three sticky notes can be placed along or just below the signature line. The edge of the sticky notes can be tracked with one hand as the other hand signs.

If a signature guide is not available, the top edge of a credit card or ID card can be placed under the signature line of a store credit card slip or a document as a guide.

For people with functional vision, increasing size or contrast may be needed to identify the lines. Someone can write an X at the beginning of the line or darken the entire signature line with a bold pen to make signing easy. Switching to a pen with a slightly thicker tip may help you better see your signature and handwriting.

Alternative signatures (using your first and middle initials or shortening your name) are perfectly valid as normal signatures. Although an "X" is acceptable, your signature carries more authority and validity. Unless you have a medical reason, like arthritis, tremors, or muscle weakness, and need to use a signature stamp, it's better to use your signature regardless of how it appears.

Too often, people with severe vision loss sign important documents without knowing the complete content of what they're signing. It can feel awkward to ask someone else to read three, four, or ten pages aloud. However, it is critical to never sign an important document without having a trusted friend, family member, or legal advocate read the entire document to you. People who use a computer or smartphone may prefer to have documents read aloud by software.

Summary

This lesson covered five essential skills that most people who are blind or have low vision need to use regularly. We discussed adaptive methods and

equipment to make these tasks easier to complete independently, but other methods could be equally effective. Experiment with the methods provided and your approaches to determine what will be most effective. As mentioned earlier, the method you use is not as important as finding something that works and being consistent. With practice, you will be able to do these tasks with ease.

Suggested Activities

Try these activities to help you better understand the lesson and develop adaptive skills:

- Practice signing your name multiple times on a blank sheet of paper. Do this regularly to maintain muscle memory.
- Practice dialing the phone in several different ways. Use a landline as well as a cell phone if you have access to both.
- Compile a list of your medications and determine which organizational and labeling methods you will use.
- Practice identifying the denominations of coins by touch. If you find that two are hard to distinguish from each other, create a method to separate those coins.

Resources

To find products described in this lesson, such as a signature guide, organizing wallet, bump dots, or labeling systems, see the following companies.

- Envision America - ScripTalk
- Independent Living Aids
- MaxiAids
- LS&S Products
- National Library Service – iBill