

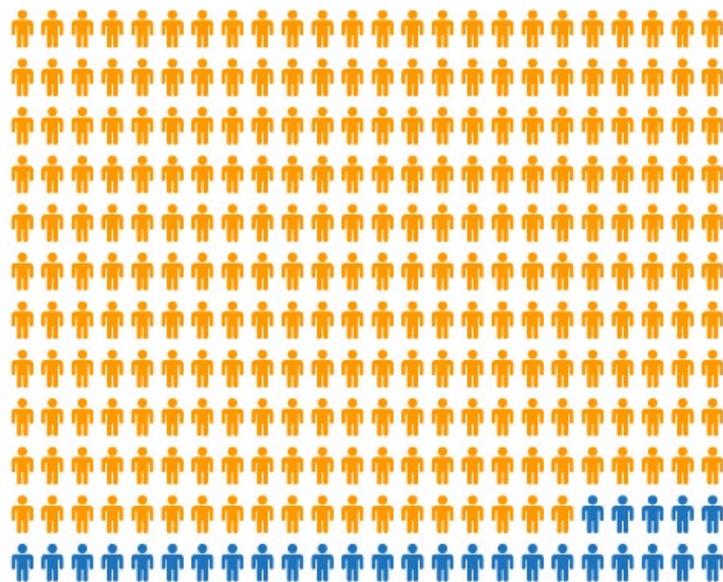
# Winning in College: A Guide for Students with Disabilities

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The transition from high school to college life is difficult enough for any number of students without considering a disability. Odds are that if you have a disability and you made it through high school, you've done it with the help of a very disciplined and structured routine order of classes. College life is a very different game, allowing students to make a lot of choices and decisions for themselves.

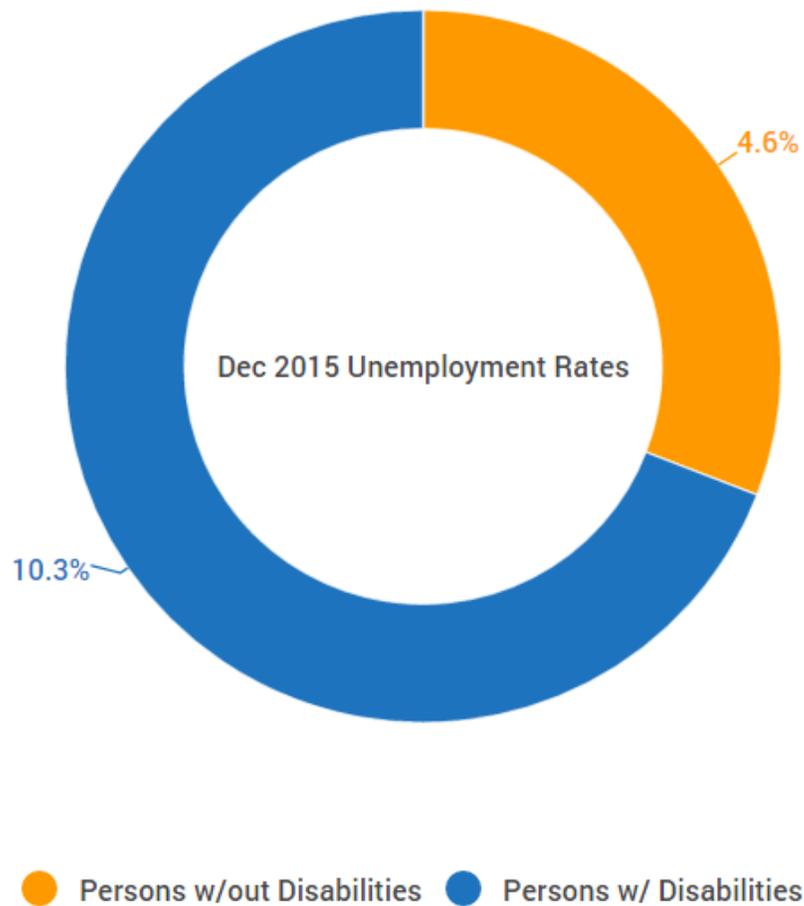
**S**tudents transitioning from the regimented order to this comparative chaos may find themselves lost. That's not to say that it can't be done—there have been many, many successful students that have overcome disabilities and found successful academic lives, and successful careers.

## 2015 Student College Enrollment



● Total Enrollment ● Students with Disabilities Enrollment

## **Unemployment Rates**



In a [recent study of students with disabilities](#), the National Center for Education Statistics revealed that of the 20.2 million students enrolling in colleges in 2015, *~2.42 million (11.1%) of these students have some kind of disability*. These numbers indicate a growing trend in enrollment as more and more schools develop the necessary resources to support this group of students. While education does open many door for people to achieve more satisfying and higher paying careers, education should be understood in the context of employment. The unemployment rate of people with disabilities tends to double the rate of people without disabilities. In December 2015, [the unemployment rate of people without disabilities](#) was around 4.6% compared to a 10.3% rate of people with disabilities. It won't improve your circumstance much to get your education and end up unemployed anyway. That being said, students with disabilities should also consider what kind of job they want when they graduate.

## Overview

Finding the right university is a daunting task, but it can be done. Take your time with the process, and be sure to be thorough in your inspections of different school's facilities and The biggest mistake that students with disabilities can make in choosing a college or university to go

to is to not consult with the school about their disability. While this is a fully voluntary action, it's highly recommended for students to disclose this information so that they can make a decision as to whether their needs will be met. By law, students are protected from discrimination based on their disabilities, so it's in the student's best interest to be open about their needs.

## Transition into College

Transitioning into college life is a rite of passage—a sign of independence and growing up. For many young adults, this means leaving home and doing things for themselves. For some students with disabilities, this is interpreted as a time to stand on their own and ignore the help available from schools. However, this independence can have a significant negative impact on their academic performance. A study by the [National Center for Learning Disabilities](#) showed that 94% of students with learning disabilities received some sort of help or accommodation while in high school, compared to 17% who received accommodation in college. Of those that never received help in college, a further 44% of students surveyed indicated that they thought some assistance would have been helpful.

Many schools offer a traditional college experience complete with living on the dorms and going to classes, but in recent years distance learning has grown as a legitimate choice for students hoping for a university education. In fact, many top tier universities have some kind of distance learning or online program that makes it easier for students to attend class. Some schools even have hybrid classrooms, requiring only digital attendance while students watch their professor's lecture online.

Regardless of your preference of school-type, there are some basic things you should know before starting your journey. This guide outlines some of the civil rights and liberties that students with disabilities are entitled to, and describes how universities approach students with disabilities. On top of that, we outline a few strategies for finding a school that is a good fit.

### The moral of the story?

**If you want to succeed and be the best you can be, don't be afraid of getting help. Everyone needs help at some point, and the sooner you realize this the closer you will be to attaining your goals.**

A disability is not something that defines you, but it is important to know how the United States legal system defines disabilities so that you know how to protect yourself from discrimination or unfair retaliation. A person with a disability has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity. Major life activities are considered to be activities that may include walking, seeing, hearing, breathing, speaking, learning, working, caring for self, and performing manual tasks. Additionally, to be considered as a disabled individual, a person must be regarded as having an impairment to a life activity, or have a record of such an impairment.

Many impairments fall under the overall umbrella of disability and may include the following: blindness, chronic health impairments, deafness or being hard of hearing, mobility impairments, head injuries, ADHD, learning disabilities, psychological disabilities, and developmental disabilities. The range of disabilities is wide, but thankfully students with disabilities are entitled to certain rights in the United States that maintain an even playing field for everyone.

## The Office of Civil Rights

<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/>

Before discussing specific pieces of legislation, the first thing you should know about is the Office of Civil Rights. As a part of the Department of Education, the office of Civil Rights enforces the ADA and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If you have any questions about your rights as a student with a disability, you should start at the OCR. Discrimination complaints can be filed here and they will investigate your case.

## Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html>

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was groundbreaking for people with disabilities because it was the first civil rights statute that prohibited the discrimination of qualified individuals with a disability. Under this law, an institution receiving federal funding cannot limit the number of students with disabilities admitted. It also prevented schools from conducting inquiries before admission as to whether a student had a disability. This law extended beyond the admissions process and into actual coursework as well. Students could not be restricted because of their disabilities, and could also not be advised into a more limited career choice because of their disabilities. The only exception to this last point was if the student did not meet strict professional standards then a counselor could dissuade a student from a particular course of action. In this act, schools were prevented from enforcing rules and policies that would adversely affect the performance of a student in class work, essentially enabling an equal playing field for students from all backgrounds.

## Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

[http://www.ada.gov/ada\\_intro.htm](http://www.ada.gov/ada_intro.htm)

The origins of this law finds its roots in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which made discrimination based on race, religion, sex, nationality and other personal factors illegal. This watershed piece of legislation in United States history, enabled the Americans with Disabilities act of 1990 to

extend similar protections to Americans who had a disability—discrimination of an individual thus became an act that was punishable by law. There are two titles directly poignant to disabled students looking to attend post-secondary education. Title II of the act prohibits discrimination by public entities on the state and local level. What this means is that public colleges and universities cannot directly discriminate against students with disabilities without facing serious sanctions and penalties. Additionally, Title II requires schools to provide reasonable accommodations for disabled students (more on this later). Title III prohibits discrimination by private colleges and universities with the exception of religious institutions. However, if a school receives any kind of federal funding for its programs, research, or even student financial aid, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act applies to that school.

### *Caveat*

Proving discrimination because of disability can be a very difficult thing based on the varying degrees of evidence required to prove either the intent or the circumstance of the situation. The battle is winnable, but the burden of proof is significant. In this case, be sure to keep documentation and records of specific incidents where discrimination occurred.

While legislation has created a starting point for the equal treatment of individuals with disabilities, every school has its own policy regarding disability. All schools are federally mandated to offer “reasonable accommodation” for a student’s disability. But what exactly constitutes “reasonable accommodation” is up for debate—some schools lead the way with accessibility, while others lag behind. Generally speaking, accommodation can include things like the following:

- Physical facility modifications—ramps, curb cuts into the sidewalk, hand controls
- Learning assistance such as interpreters, readers, note takers, computer assisted transcription, listening devices and telecommunication for the hearing impaired
- Additional time to complete tests, coursework, and graduation
  
- Replacement of non-essential courses towards degree requirements
- Tape recording of class
- Modifications of tests and performance evaluations to not discriminate against those with disabilities

While these accommodations are helpful for students, the school is not required to make a change that would result in a fundamental change in how their programs are structured. Essential courses generally cannot be waived due to a disability.

### **Examples of University Policies**

- [Bentley University](#)
- [Syracuse University](#)
- [Boston University](#)

- [Brigham Young University](#)
- [University of Memphis](#)
  
- [Princeton University](#)
- [Cornell University](#)

### Note to the Student

As a student it is your responsibility to seek out the school and figure out whether or not their services and accommodations are appropriate for your specific needs. Informing the school of your specific needs is not required and is fully voluntary. But if you would like the school to make academic adjustments for you, you will need to inform the appropriate school department of your disability, and most likely provide documentation of your disability.

This area also represents a major shift in the responsibilities of the school towards your disability. School districts are generally responsible for identifying a student's educational needs and provide them with special education needs. A postsecondary school's main responsibility is to provide accommodation so that it does not discriminate on the basis of disability. Whether that accommodation meets your specific needs is up to you to figure out.

To receive academic accommodations and support, students must first register with the school and submit current documentation by a licensed or certified diagnostician or medical professional. Documentation must be a comprehensive assessment including recommendations, rationale for accommodations, and recommendations for treatment. Documentation must clearly state the diagnosed disability, the functional limitations resulting from the disability, a complete educational and developmental history relevant to the disability for which the accommodations are being requested. In some cases students are required to prove through documentation that their disability results in a "material functional deficit" and that the deficit is demonstrable by generally accepted comparison measures.

#### Tip

**Some schools may not know how to adequately accommodate your disability. Be sure to have some suggestions of services the school can provide you.**

Additionally, the source of the documentation is very important. For most schools this means that the documentation must come from qualified professionals that meet current professional requirements. Some schools offer their own screening process for students to be evaluated if they have not been previously evaluated by qualified professionals.

Ultimately because there is no federally mandated standard for accommodations every university has a different standard to its amount of documentation required. This guide is a starting point—be sure to conduct your own research into what documentation is needed for the school of your choice.

## Course Accommodations

- **Note Sharer Support**

A student with a documented disability that interferes with his or her ability to take notes in class may receive notes from a classmate for in-class lectures

- **Alternative Format Textbooks**

e-text books, audiotapes, braille, large print, etc.

- **Class Replays**

Video recordings of each class period so that students may watch class again and review things they may have missed

Finding the right school can be a daunting and stressful task for any student. Beyond financial considerations, most students want to find a school that is the right “fit” for them. The search for the right fit is true students with disabilities as well. What makes the right school? For a student with disabilities, it could be a school with adequate resources to meet your needs and a good track record of helping disabled students succeed. To that end we **MUST** emphasize how important it is to have a good dialogue with your prospective school and how important it is to go and see the facilities for yourself. While searching for your right school, consider the following points.

- First and foremost: find out what kind of services they offer, and learn about the reasonable accommodations they can provide to match your disability. The best place to start is by talking to the school’s respective disability office or department.
- Don’t rely on the pamphlet or online images. Visit the campus for yourself. Every school can look their best on a website or a pamphlet—how they look in real life is another story. Go check out the campus yourself, and look at the physical facilities, and living accommodations. Consider if the residence halls are close enough to campus buildings, and if school buildings have enough elevators, ramps, cut curbs and entrances that are accessible.
- Ask your school about student retention rates. We’ve mentioned this in a number of other articles as being a key factor in choosing your school and it’s particularly relevant here. In addition to the retention rates of students, what is the retention rate of students with disabilities? This percentage could offer key insight as to the nature of the school’s support, coursework and accommodation methods.

On a whole the national average of graduation of students with a disability is 62%, compared to the national total average of 81%.

- Talk to current students with similar disabilities to find out what their experiences are like. It's one thing to listen to what the school wants you to believe about their facilities and support, but it's another thing all together to actually talk to someone on the receiving end of those accommodations.
- Try a free course online. Many large schools offer courses that are available online for any student to try through websites like Coursera or Udacity. In fact, groups like the Khan Academy have made big names for themselves in providing online education to any who are willing to learn.
- Visit the career services center of the school. Even though unemployment rates are on the decline, a good career service center is every student's best friend. This is especially true for students with disabilities, as they present a unique set of challenges that traditional counselors may not know how to address.

### Note to the Student

There is a lot to do in finding the right school. If you forget everything else, just remember: Don't be overwhelmed—The transition from High School to College is difficult enough for any student, but there are many successful people that have made the transition before.

If you decide to go to a school with an online program, you'll need to understand whether or not the online program meshes well with your disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act mandates schools to provide accommodation but offers little to no guidance as to what that entails—especially in online programs. As schools develop programs to cater to this growing population, accessibility is often not a priority. Essentially, every online course is made up of [four components](#):

1. **The Learning Management System (LMS)** – This is the platform where students generally view their syllabus, receive assignments and course materials, participate in discussion boards and contact their professor. Some of the common systems you may see are Blackboard, Moodle, Desire2Learn.
2. **Course Materials** – In the Learning Management System students can access course materials. Often these materials are textbook readings, online articles, videos, podcasts, PowerPoint presentations of lectures.
3. **Assignments and Group Projects** – Though an online program doesn't require physical meetings, instructors will often assign students into groups to complete assignments. Communication will have to be done through email, or chat applications like Google Hangout, Skype, or even Facebook Messenger.
4. **Exams & Grading** – Depending on the type of class, some professors will have large projects due for the end of the semester instead of a final exam. However, if an exam is required, then students may have to go to a proctored location where someone can monitor them as they take the class. Alternatively, some schools may be set up for remote monitoring—teachers will be able to see what the student does on their computer screen while taking the test.

Students with physical or sensory limitations have expressed difficulty using digital course material or completing assignments. Because a significant part of an online program is dependent on a student's ability to use digital content, disabled students face significant challenges in keeping up with course material—often requiring a significant amount of more time to complete the same assignment. A good measure of how well your needs will be met can be gained by looking at the accessibility of the Learning Management System. If the system seems difficult to use with little accommodation for your needs, then it might be a good course of action to consider different schools. Even systems that are accessible are no guarantee that coursework and assignments will be smooth sailing. At some point students will encounter problems. Professors may end up posting content required for class that is not accessible for disabled students, and thus make the course more challenging than intended. This is an example of a situation where students and teachers would have to work together in coming up with an appropriate solution.

### Note to the Student

In the end it really is up to you as a student to be honest and open with the school if you decide to attend an online program. Remember, a school can't help you with your specific circumstance if they don't know about it.

Getting a scholarship to help pay for school is an absolute must—especially since there are a significant number of scholarships available for students with a disability. A great starting place is the federal [government's official website for individuals with a disability](#). Because the range of disabilities and scholarships for those disabilities is so large, we recommend starting here to get a better understanding of what is available out there. A number of websites have also published [lists of scholarships](#) broken down by disability and state.

[Affordable Colleges Online](#) – Lists scholarships by disability, amounts, due dates, and the requirements of each scholarship.

[Accredited Online Colleges](#) – Highlights 250 scholarships that can be sorted by disability type, GPA, renewability, school sponsorship and more. This guide also showcases government resources that can be leveraged to help you learn more about your rights as a student.

[National Center for Learning Disabilities](#) – While these scholarships are geared to students with a learning disability, they can be a significant help for students hoping to gain an education.

The following is a list of further resources that might help you in your college careers. There are actually a lot of different apps and software designed to assist students with disabilities. It can be overwhelming to sift through all the offerings, so we've narrowed it down to a few here. The real key to being successful is to find a system that works for you and stick with it. If you have an

app you love and works for you, then that's what works for you. If there is an app or a resource we've missed, comment below and we'll add it.

[General Resources](#) | [Resources by Disability Type](#) | [Assistive Technology](#)

## General Resources

### Government Resources for Students with Disabilities

- [Ada.Gov](#) – A guide to the Americans with Disabilities Act with detailed information on your rights, advice, and assistance in understanding the law.
- [Disability.gov](#) – Federal government website for information regarding disability-related programs, policies, and regulations.
- [US Department of Education – Office of Civil Rights](#)
- [National Council on Disability](#) – A council of Presidential and Congressional Appointees responsible for advising policies that may affect people with disabilities.
- [Online Colleges That Offer Laptops](#)

## Resources by Disability Type

### Learning Disabilities

- [National Center for Learning Disabilities](#) – The starting point for many students with learning disabilities, the NCLD is a great resource for students that want to understand their disability better and how to help others with it.
- [Learning Disabilities Association of America](#) – One of the stand out features of the LDA's approach to education and advocacy is its ability to help parents, educators, adults, and professionals cope and overcome learning disabilities. With helpful guides on how to deal with learning disabilities in a wide variety of scenarios, LDA is a great resource for everyone.
- [LDOnline](#) – Created as a service by PBS, LDOnline is a treasure trove of stories from people that have struggled with their own disabilities, and advice on how to motivate people with certain learning disabilities.

### Visual Impairment

- [Perkins Teaching Resources](#) – The Perkins School for the Blind has set standards of excellence in blindness education for more than 185 years. Though this site is more geared towards educators, there are lots of resources that parents and students can use to discover their own skills and passions.
- [National Association of Blind Students](#) – As a part of the National Federation of the blind, the NABS works to promote equality for the blind by acting as a source of information and a network for students in need of assistance.
- [National Federation of the Blind](#) – The National Federation of the Blind is a group dedicated to helping blind students everywhere. The NFB hosts many different programs

like the Braille is Beautiful Program, and the International Braille and Technology Center for the Blind. Students can search for scholarships here and can participate in many different programs that enable blind students to reach their true potential.

## Physical Disabilities

- [National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials](#) -A great resource that shows educators and students alike the different kind of technologies and methods of education available for people with physical disabilities. Accessible Education Materials can be used in a wide number of ways in learning and work environments.
- [Mobility international USA](#) – As a resource for those with disabilities, MIUSA advocates for the rights of disabled persons everywhere. This site has many wonderful and insightful ideas on wheelchair use and maintenance, as well as travelling with a wheelchair domestically and internationally.

## Autism

- [Autism Speaks](#) – Autism Speaks is an organization that advocates for people with autism, and helps further research into this condition. Throughout the year the organization funds a walk in major cities around the country to raise awareness. The organization is known to give out scholarships to those that help further the cause of Autism awareness.
- [Navigating College](#) – One of the big tips we recommended for students with disabilities was to seek out to the experiences of other students with disabilities and learn from them. Navigating College is a network that introduces the experiences of autistic adults who have survived college and have now written about their experiences for the younger generation.
- [US Autism & Asperger Association USCAP](#) – The US College Autism Project is designed to help students and educators alike learn to work together. This site provides resources for both parties in the education environment.

## Deaf and Hard of Hearing

- [Described and Captioned Media Program](#) (DCMP): a media library of over 4,000 free captioned titles for educational use. Funded by the U.S. Dept. of Education.
- [Pepnet 2](#): a range of professional coaching, note taking, and study strategy guides for post-secondary students who are hard of hearing or deaf.

## Dyslexia

- [The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity](#): A digital resource of collected assistive technology suggestions and higher education tips from dyslexic students.
- [Landmark College](#): A Vermont-based college was founded in 1985 to serve students with dyslexia, ASD, and ADHD.
- [International Dyslexia Association](#): A professional and academic organization dedicated to promoting dyslexia awareness through global advocacy, research, and education.

## ADHD

- [ADDITUDE ADHD College Survival Guide](#): A digital publication that guides students through the process of selecting a college, applying, and navigating campus life with ADHD.
- [Attention Deficit Disorder Association College Resources](#): A professional networking society provides college students with links to study strategies and campus life tips.
- [ADDvance](#): A resource database helps students ease into college life with links to stress management tips, ADHD academic success stories, and medication advice.

## Assistive Technology

### Mobile Apps for Students with Disabilities

- [Dragon Dictation](#) – Dragon Mobile Assistant is an intelligent app that dictates what you want to do and say, simply by speaking. Using the app on the phone will let you send emails, search the web, update social networks, make notes and more. There is a software version that is even more powerful. An important tool for any budding college student.
- [Skype](#) – Really any video app can work effectively for students that need to communicate via sign language with friends and family. Skype is a powerful app that is integrated well with existing mobile phones and computer technology, but if you have a favorite app for video calls, like [Google Hangouts](#) or [Apple's FaceTime](#), go with it.
- [ASL Dictionary](#) – A great app for teaching people how to use ASL to communicate. Each word or phrase has a video that shows users how to accurately sign. Can be a great tool in helping friends or roommates communicate.
- [Ariadne GPS](#) – One of the most fascinating advances in GPS technology, Ariadne GPS allows blind users to identify distances, landmarks, and locations by creating an auditory map of the world around them. Users can find out what is in their immediate area using the app, and map out routes using public transportation or walking routes.
- [Braille Touch](#) – BrailleTouch is a revolutionary iPhone app that lets users type using braille on the touch screen. Based on the familiar six-key braille keyboard, BrailleTouch can send texts, emails, and integrates well with other apps that need text entered into it.
- [Say Hi! AAC](#) – Say Hi! AAC displays images and plays sounds so that people with severe physical disabilities, limited movement, or challenges with dexterity can communicate with others.
- [Dexteria](#) – Users of Dexteria can improve their fine motor movements in this occupational therapy in mind.
- [Visual Steps](#) – Visual Steps works for users with autism by creating step by step instructions on how to complete a given task. These steps have video and images that serve as visual reminders and cues for the steps, mitigating some of the difficulties that come with autism.
- [InClass](#) – Learning disability or not, InClass is an essential tool for organizing class schedules, sharing class notes and making the learning process easier. Students can add photos, videos, audio or text notes and set up alarms for important due dates.

- [Flashcards Deluxe](#) – A powerful but easy to use app for making flashcards. Any student can use this app to make flashcards to review for tests and assignments.
- [Learning Ally](#) – The Learning Ally app is the official app for the Learning Ally organization. This non-profit is dedicated to providing access to audiobooks for students and anyone who needs books in audio format. Currently the Learning Ally library has more than 75,000 different books, textbooks available for free.
- [HomeRoutines](#): For students that have ADHD, or really anyone that has a hard time getting a routine in order, HomeRoutines is there to help. The app allows users to create lists of jobs that need to be done around the same time or the same day, rewarding users that complete their tasks.
- [Epic Win](#) – Level-up your life! Epic Win turns your normal to-do lists into a RPG setting. Each task completed provides your avatar with experience and loot that improves your character. Turning mundane tasks into a game have proven to make to-dos more fun.

### Software for Students with Disabilities

- [Purple](#) – This software company’s products provide video relay services (VRS) for deaf and hard of hearing individuals to communicate in real time using ASL interpreters.
- [Dragon Naturally Speaking](#) – Like the mobile app, Dragon’s software is a high quality dictation software that can be used to quickly and accurately transcribe speech. Dragon can be used to create spreadsheets and reports, and run all sorts of software.
- [Hangout Captions](#) – Sometimes it can be hard to hear what is going on in a Google Hangout session. Thankfully software like Hangout Captions can provide live, real time captions for
- [Zoom Text](#) – If you find that your computer’s built in zoom functions are ineffective, ZoomText can help enlarge and read aloud anything that is on your computer screen.
- [VoiceOver](#) – Actually part of the iOS operating system for Apple users, VoiceOver gives you complete voice control over your MAC and uses text-to-speech systems to write and read text.
- [SpeakIt!](#) – A Google Chrome extension that reads out webpages. Using this extension you can instantly highlight text on any website that you want read out loud.
- [MyStudyLife](#) – Regardless of disability, MyStudyLife is a great way to organize classes, tasks, exams and other important events. This free software is available across all platforms and is set up with students in mind.
- [MindNode](#) – If you’re looking for a new way to keep track of your ideas and notes, MindNode makes it easy for users to transform your thoughts into new visual formats that move away from traditional linear methods (like this list).

### About the Author

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