

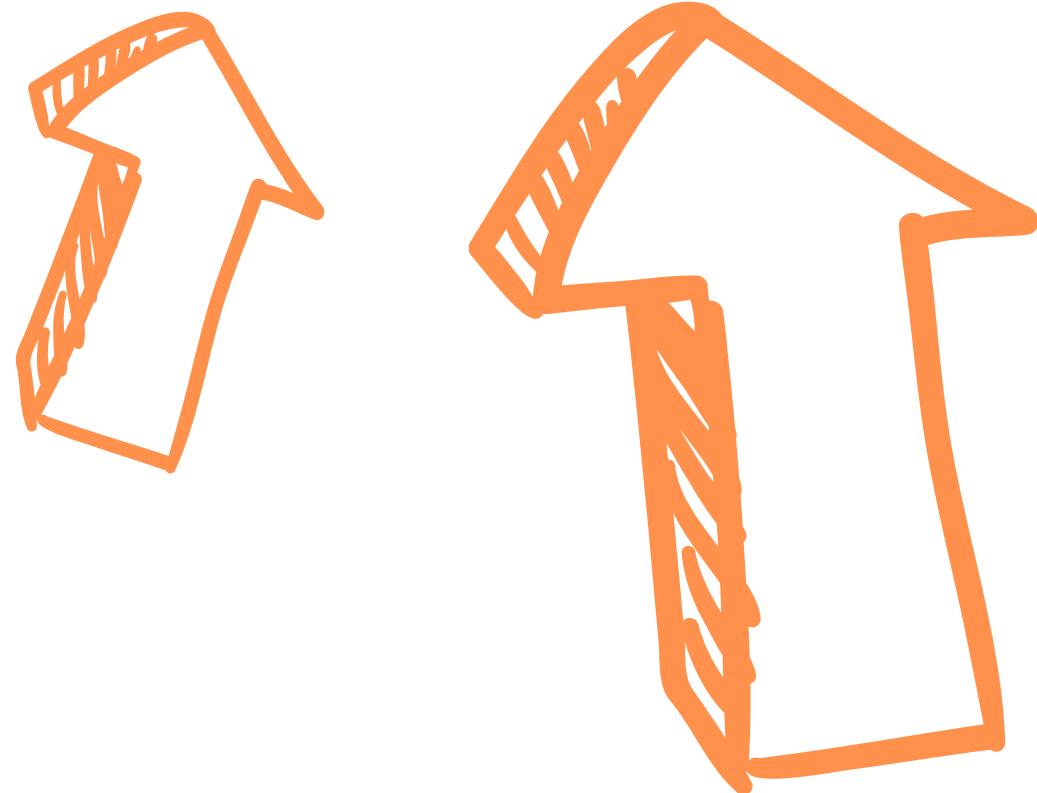
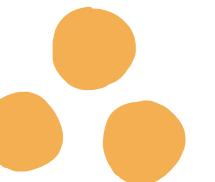


SPEAK UP!

A Self Advocacy Guide

for Students

Steps for More Effective Self-Advocacy



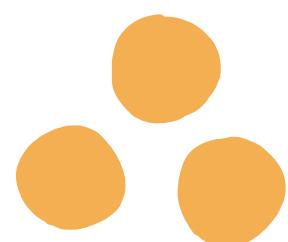
OVERVIEW OF GUIDE

01 Self-advocacy issues

02 Importance of self-advocacy

03 Steps to increase efficacy of
self-advocacy

04 Takeaways



SELF ADVOCACY ISSUES

Life with disabilities often requires a difficult balance; a balance between showing others how you are capable in spite of their assumptions, and asking for the support you need so you can be successful without exhausting yourself. Asking for help can feel like you're giving into the negative and incorrect assumptions of others. Not asking for help often leads to the burnout experienced by many disabled students. An additional consideration is that self advocacy isn't just about you as an individual but the dynamics between you and the decision makers involved. This includes power dynamics and other perceptions the decision makers have of you.



Self Advocacy Issues

You are not alone if you find advocating for yourself challenging

Research shows students often feel isolated and exhausted when asking for help. They might also not ask for help because of misperceptions of disability, the school being unreceptive to prior requests, and being busy with school work.



Source: Information from report prepared by the The Harvard Dispute Systems Design Clinic with NDLSA



Get to Know Me

I'm Katie, a law student at Arizona State University.

I've had to speak up to get the things I need.

When I started law school, navigating every aspect was uncharted territory. I reached out to my school resources for help, but most of them couldn't understand the intricacies of the disabled experience. Instead, I joined my school's DLSA and found my voice through our platform.



INCREASING EFFICACY

a.

Learn your
strengths and
pain points

[Best Self Exercise Link](#)

b.

Use your
strengths and
pain points to
empower
yourself

c.

Find who has
the power to
make the
decisions

d.

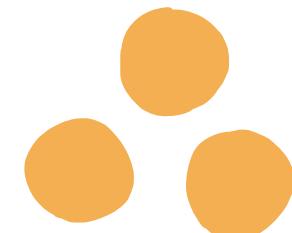
Learn to ask
good questions

[Right Question Institute Link](#)

e.

Use a process to
follow up with
decision makers

[Follow Up Checklist Link](#)



STRENGTHS AND PAIN POINTS

Recognizing your strengths is essential. It will enable clear communication of your needs (and non-needs) to others. Knowing and sharing your strengths with other people helps them understand you as a whole person, which increases their enthusiasm to collaborate with you to meet your non-strength needs

Understanding your pain points may be uncomfortable and challenging. However, understanding them can increase your targeted communication skills to share about them openly without feeling ashamed. Communicating about both can be empowering. It also helps you know when to not disclose your pain points to people in power.

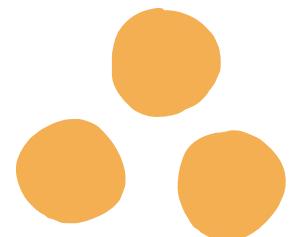


Example:

STRENGTHS AND PAIN POINTS

Jane knows their strength is transparent communication and their pain point is dysregulation

- Recognizing dysregulation is a misunderstood part of them, they used their transparent communication to educate decision makers about it. They also know to preempt dysregulation, they need to do the things they love like birdwatching.



IDENTIFY DECISION-MAKERS



Identifying who has the power to decide on your request can help reduce perceptions of power disparities. Understanding who holds the authority allows you to tailor your message and strategy effectively. You might adapt your communication by refining your questions, choosing to address a different person, or leveraging your relationships to build bridges.

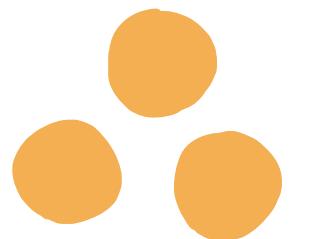


Example:

IDENTIFY DECISION-MAKERS

A professor refuses to accommodate a student's breaks

- Options: talk with: disability office, Dean, or faculty representative (consider who has the power)
- Best choice: Talk with faculty representative because they have power to determine attendance, classroom, and exam procedures



ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS

The process of asking good questions to self advocate can be generalized by framing questions based on who you are, what you need, who the decision-maker is, and what they can provide. After considering these elements, you might focus on how the phrasing of your question is likely to be answered and what information you actually need. You should prepare targeted questions before meeting with decision-makers. Doing so can clarify your needs, increase your likelihood of getting helpful information, and encourage problem solving between you and the other decision-makers. On the next page is a tool from the Right Question Institute to consider these elements in an ordered way.



QUESTION FORMULATION TECHNIQUE

Source: The Question Formulation Technique (QFT) was created by the Right Question Institute (rightquestion.org)

Brainstorm questions:

Have a clear topic for advocacy. Brainstorm as many questions as you can in a 90 second period without judging the questions. Brevity helps but take the time you need.

Organize questions:

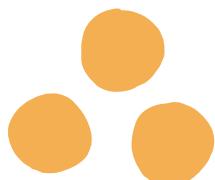
Organize the questions based on the likely response such as open or closed, and consider if that will help you get the information you need.

Improve questions

Consider how questions will be answered by the person(s) in the meeting and edit them to target info you want or need

Prioritize questions:

List the questions in their order of importance. Also consider qualities like questions that are better answered in-person vs. email.



Example:

ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS

“We don’t allow recordings of lectures”

- What are the reasons for this policy?
- What alternatives do you provide for students who need help with notes of lectures?



FOLLOWING UP W/DECISION-MAKERS

03.e

When meeting with decision-makers you are more likely to receive beneficial outcomes if you follow strategies and implementation practices to hold them accountable. Some strategies include: requesting communication in your primary language, knowing your rights and the qualifications of a program, keeping burnout away, and knowing the appeal process. Some implementation practices include saving everything, preparing questions, considering alternatives, and scheduling follow up communication with the decision-makers. Such practices are helpful in a range of situations like meeting with the disability office at your law school to request accommodations or following up with Social Security representatives about a benefit application. Even though many of these practices are intuitive to some, it is helpful to have a checklist to remind yourself of things to do during a meeting with decision-makers and after one.



FOLLOWING UP W/DECISION-MAKERS

A Dean promises to make sure all accessible door buttons are working by the end of week

- Auto-schedule follow up emails
- Save all communications with the Dean
- Ask more questions if the problem is not resolved
- Look for another decision-maker if the problem is not resolved

STRATEGIES TO FOLLOW UP

Source: the checklist was adapted from Disability Rights California (www.disabilityrightsca.org)

Primary language:

You're entitled to information in your primary language like sign languages, Braille, and other spoken, written, or signed languages

Know your rights and/or the program's qualifications

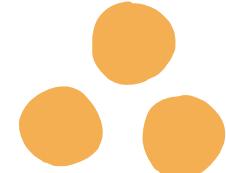
Check federal, local, and university policies. NDLSA has several guides on various issues and your P&A might too.

Keep burnout away:

Reduce burnout by auto-scheduling emails for follow-up and ask friends for support

Know the appeal process of the program/office

Ask about or check the program's appeal process. It may be on their website.



IMPLEMENTING FOLLOW UP

Source: the checklist was adapted from Disability Rights California (www.disabilityrightsca.org)

Save everything

Save all communications including emails, letters, approvals, rejections, notes etc.

Prepare questions:

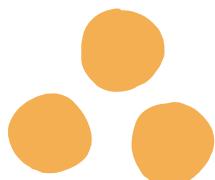
Use the Question Formulation Technique to brainstorm how you will get the information you need.

Consider alternatives:

Think of ideal solutions, acceptable alternatives, or alternative decision-makers to ask to reach your intended solutions.

Schedule follow up

Plan ahead when you will communicate with decision-makers about their decision.



TAKE-AWAYS...

Most disabled students will need to speak up for themselves at law school. We can rely on each other to increase our knowledge and share strategies.

Knowing your strengths and pain points, empowering communication, knowing the decision-makers, asking good questions, and following up are important steps

We can increase our efficacy by preparing for advocacy situations but most importantly by supporting each other.



LINKS



- <https://careercenter.lehigh.edu/sites/careercenter.lehigh.edu/files/Reflecte d%20Best%20Self%20Exercise.pdf>
- <https://rightquestion.org>
- <https://www.disabilityrightsca.org/publications/15-tips-for-self-advocates>
- <https://www.ndrn.org/about/ndrn-member-agencies/>

