Trade School: A Guide for Students With Disabilities



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When it comes to education and career preparation, disabled people often face unique challenges and barriers. However, trade schools can be a life-changing opportunity for those with disabilities to achieve financial independence.

At the heart of vocational training lies a commitment to equipping students with the skills, technical knowledge, and industry-specific expertise essential for success. From welding and automotive repair to nursing and graphic design, trade schools offer a range of career paths, ensuring that disabled individuals have access to a variety of vocational opportunities.

This guide delves into trade school for disabled students, the various career paths available, and steps to consider before embarking on your journey.

Trade School vs. Vocational Training

There is a common misconception that trade schools and vocational training schools are two different things. In reality, vocational training is a broad term that encompasses any type of education or training with a focus on a specific career path. This means that trade schools are a type of vocational training. Let's take a closer look into vocational training programs and the types of trade schools that fit in that category.

What is Vocational Training?

Vocational training, often referred to as vocational education or career and technical education (CTE), includes specialized educational programs aimed at preparing students for specific industries. Derived from the word "vocation," which denotes a person's occupation or calling, vocational training schools provide targeted instruction tailored to particular careers.

At the core of vocational training is a commitment to equipping students with the skills, knowledge, and expertise needed to excel in their field. These programs focus on hands-on learning experiences that simulate real-world environments.

Vocational training encompasses a range of industries and occupations. Careers such as welding, automotive repair, nursing, culinary arts, electrical work, cosmetology, and construction are just a few examples of fields in which vocational training plays a pivotal role. These professions demand specialized knowledge and practical skills that can be learned in targeted vocational education programs.

What is Trade School?

Trade schools are a type of vocational school that focus on specific industries. One popular type of trade school is cosmetology school. At these institutions, students receive the hands-on training necessary to get a license as a hairstylist, barber, makeup artist, nail technician, or esthetician.

There are dozens of trade schools that provide specialized and affordable education.

Here are just some of the paths you can choose:

- **Welder:** Welders use specialized equipment to join metals together, following blueprints and specifications to create structures or repair metal components.
- **Auto Mechanic:** Auto mechanics repair and maintain vehicles, including cars, trucks, and motorcycles, ensuring they operate safely and efficiently.
- **Chef:** Chefs oversee kitchen operations, including food preparation, menu planning, and staff management, to create culinary masterpieces.
- **Nurse:** Nurses provide direct patient care, administer medications, monitor vital signs, and assist with medical procedures under the supervision of physicians.
- **Phlebotomist:** Phlebotomists collect blood samples from patients for medical testing, ensuring patient comfort during the procedure.
- **X-Ray Technician:** X-ray technicians operate imaging equipment to produce diagnostic images for medical diagnoses.
- **Sonographer:** Sonographers use ultrasound technology to take images of internal organs and tissues, assisting physicians in diagnosing medical conditions.
- **AutoCAD Drafter:** AutoCAD drafters use computer-aided design software to create technical drawings and plans for architectural, engineering, and manufacturing projects.

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- **Graphic Designer:** Graphic designers create visual concepts and artwork for various media platforms, including print, digital, and advertising, to communicate messages effectively.
- **Pharmacy Technician:** Pharmacy technicians assist pharmacists in dispensing medications, preparing prescriptions, and providing customer service in retail or hospital pharmacies.
- **Plumber:** Plumbers install, repair, and maintain plumbing systems and fixtures in residential, commercial, and industrial buildings.
- **Electrician:** Electricians install, maintain, and repair electrical systems and wiring in buildings, ensuring compliance with safety regulations and standards.
- **HVAC Technician:** HVAC technicians install, repair, and maintain heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems.
- **Paralegal:** Paralegals assist lawyers in conducting research, drafting legal documents, and preparing cases for trial.
- **Home Inspector:** Home inspectors evaluate the condition of residential properties, identifying issues and providing detailed reports to clients.
- **Web Developer:** Web developers design and create websites, using programming languages and software tools to create functional and visually appealing online platforms.
- **IT Technician:** IT technicians install, maintain, and troubleshoot computer hardware, software, and networks, providing technical support to users in various organizations.

Traditional Education vs. Trade Schools

Below, we will compare traditional college programs and trade schools for students with disabilities.

Traditional College Programs

- **Pro:** Broad focus of the program offers more options for career paths after graduation.
- **Pro:** Certain industries may require traditional degrees.
- **Pro:** Traditional programs provide on-campus living and a variety of student activities.
- **Con:** College is expensive. The average cost of tuition in the United States ranges from $10,000-$42,000 per year.
- **Con:** The broad focus of traditional degrees can cause issues for disabled students, which often leads to a decrease in student retention.

- **Con:** College degrees usually take four years to complete.

Trade Schools

- **Pro:** Trade schools often provide hands-on education led by industry professionals.
- **Pro:** Trade school programs are short. Some students may receive their certification in as little as 6 months.
- **Pro:** Trade schools are much less expensive than traditional higher education programs.
- **Pro:** Students typically have an easier time finding a well-paying career after trade school.
- **Con:** There may be a limited number of trade school options in rural areas.
- **Con:** Some trade education programs may not be accessible to home-bound students.
- **Con:** Certifications can be very specific, so students who want to switch career paths may need to restart their education journey.

Benefits of Trade School

Traditional colleges, while offering a plethora of opportunities for academic and personal growth, present unique challenges for disabled students. Navigating the complexities of higher education can sometimes feel like an uphill battle. Traditional academic settings may discourage disabled students by highlighting their limitations.

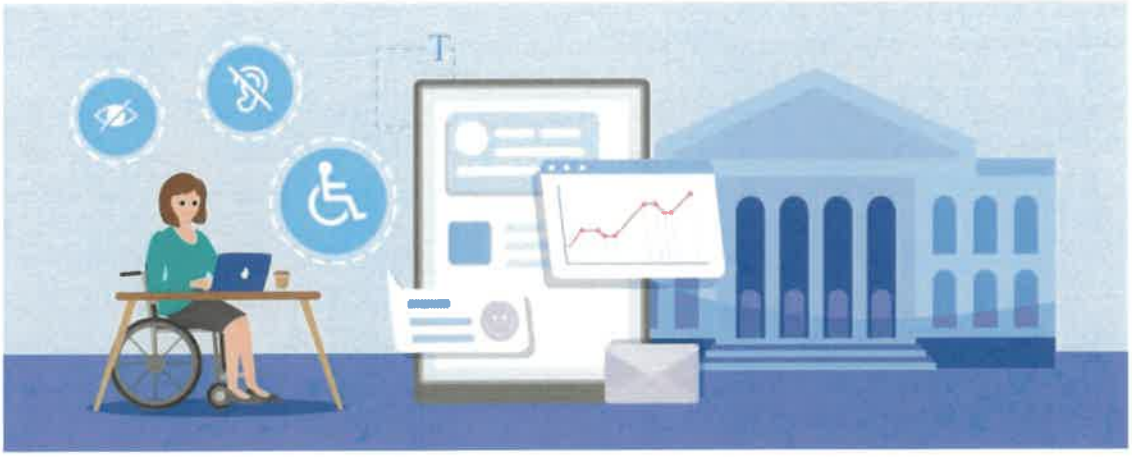
Trade schools, however, offer a refreshing alternative. By honing in on specific trades and skill sets, they provide a clear pathway for disabled students to explore careers that align with their strengths and interests.

In addition, instead of being bombarded with a broad range of subjects, trade school curriculum is tailored to the requirements of each job.

Disabled students should consider trade schools because they offer a different perspective: rather than dwelling on limitations, trade schools empower disabled students to embrace their abilities and chart a course toward a fulfilling and rewarding career.

Before Applying To Trade School





Before you take the leap and apply to trade school, there are a few considerations.

Most importantly, you need to think about your career goals. Where do you see yourself in five years? Which type of career will fulfill you emotionally and support you financially? In what ways might your disability affect your success?

Once you have an idea of your career goals, it's time to start doing some research on trade schools in your area and the certifications they offer.

Trades for People With Disabilities

Depending on your limitations, you might want to consider a specific type of career. For instance, someone with hearing loss may not excel in a dispatch or air traffic control role. Similarly, someone with mobility issues may struggle with something like watch repair, where intricate movements are required.

Let's take a look at some of the best career choices for the most common disabilities.

Vision Impairment

Finding a career as a person with a visual impairment may feel difficult, but many technical and trade positions rely on little eyesight or can easily accommodate a visually impaired person:

- web developer
- transcriptionist
- paralegal
- dental assistant

Hearing Impairment

There are dozens of options for those with a hearing disability:

- carpentry
- automotive mechanic
- sonographer
- IT technician

Mobility Impairment

Most trade positions can be made accessible to those with mobility impairment. Some trades to consider include:

- cybersecurity analyst
- lab technician
- pharmacy technician
- veterinary assistant
- cosmetologist

Cognitive or Learning Disabilities

A cognitive disability can make it difficult to succeed in fields that require memorizing large amounts of complex data and techniques. However, there are positions that could be suitable:

- carpentry
- landscaping
- digital drafting
- data entry

Keep in mind that students with disabilities shouldn't limit themselves based on others' perceptions. Talk with your student advisor and members of the disability services team at your school to determine the best career path for you. You can also find resources in your state to help you find the right trade school and career.

12 Questions to Ask Student Admissions

Before you decide on a trade school, ask your admissions counselor these important questions:

- **"How accessible are campus facilities, including classrooms, restrooms, and common areas?"** Ensuring physical accessibility is crucial to navigate campus comfortably and independently.
- **"What disability services and accommodations are available to students, and how do I request them?"** Understanding the support systems available ensures that you have the necessary accommodations.
- **"Are there specific programs or resources to support disabled students in their academic and vocational pursuits?"** Access to specialized programs or resources can enhance your overall experience.
- **"Can I meet with someone from the disability services office to discuss my needs and concerns?"** Direct communication with disability services personnel allows for personalized assistance and helps you determine how easy it will be to work with the department in the future.
- **"Is there assistive technology or adaptive equipment available on campus to assist students with disabilities?"** Access to assistive technologies can increase graduation rates.
- **"How flexible are class schedules and formats? Are there online or hybrid learning options available?"** Flexible learning options accommodate a range of needs and preferences, allowing students to customize their educational experience.
- **"How do I request accommodations for exams, assignments, and other academic activities?"** Understanding the process ensures that students can fully participate in all activities.
- **"Are there support services available for career guidance, job placement, and transitioning into the workforce?"** Access to career support services is essential for disabled students post-graduation.
- **"Can I speak with current or former disabled students about their experiences?"** Hearing firsthand accounts provides valuable insight into the accessibility and inclusivity of the campus environment.
- **"How does your institution promote a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion, particularly for students with disabilities?"** A commitment to diversity and inclusion fosters a supportive and welcoming community for all students.
- **"Are there scholarships or financial aid opportunities specifically for dis**SNAPPYWORDS.COM
  Access to financial assistance can alleviate the economic burden of education and make attending trade school more feasible.

- **"How does the trade school address concerns related to transportation and parking for students with disabilities?"** Accessible transportation options and parking accommodations are essential to ensure equal access.

Retention and Graduation Rates for Disabled Students



Many studies have explored the success of disabled students in college. These studies tend to focus on retention and graduation, and they've shown an interesting change over the years.

A 2000 study found that students with disabilities were far less likely to attend college, let alone graduate. However, as anti-discrimination laws have evolved, there has been a noticeable improvement.

In 2009, a group of Indiana professors and education professionals studied a large group of students over the course of 8 years. They separated the students into three observational groups: students with no apparent disability, students with non-visual disabilities, and students with apparent disabilities. Students with apparent disabilities had similar rates of retention and graduation in 2-year degree programs as the other groups. The numbers began to shrink for 4- and 8-year degrees. However, students with apparent disabilities (who were more likely to access disability services) were just as likely to graduate as students without disabilities.

At the time, the noticeable standout was the group with "invisible" disabilities. These students had higher dropout rates.

An even more recent study by the National Center for College Students With Disabilities in 2021 showed that disabled college students struggled more when they didn't report their disability.

Disabled students who take advantage of campus services are more likely to graduate and have a more enjoyable experience.

When you apply for trade school, consider the accommodations and services the school provides. An institution with a dedicated disabled student resource center can make your pathway to gradu-

ation easier.

Grants for Disabled Students

Paying for education can be intimidating, especially for those with disabilities. The cost of trade school often creates a barrier to achieving career goals. However, students can overcome this by applying for government education grants.

These grants, offered by various agencies and departments, aim to alleviate the financial burden of education, making trade school accessible to disabled individuals on limited incomes. Many of these grants are open to all students, including disabled students.

Many of these grants are available on the US Department of Education's website, and students can apply with minimal effort.

There are government and private grants that focus on providing access to education for disabled students. CollegeScholarships.org provides a list of these educational awards.

These grants can be competitive, so apply early to increase your chances of receiving the financial support you need to begin your education.

After Trade School: Finding Work With a Disability



After you have completed your trade school education, it's time to look for work. Depending on your field, you may be seeking an apprenticeship or a traditional position. Either way, the process isn't much different than it is for a non-disabled person. This is because disabled Americans are protected by laws aimed at maintaining their rights and dignity in the workplace. In short, if you are properly certified and can perform a job with or without reasonable accommodations, employers must treat you equally.

Know Your Rights

Understanding your rights as a person with disabilities is one of the most important aspects of entering the workforce. This knowledge can empower you in a world that may not always recognize your full potential.

While the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and US employment rights provide crucial protections, it's important to realize they don't guarantee job opportunities. Let's break down some of the details of ADA.

Are You Protected by the ADA?

To be protected under the ADA, you must meet the following criteria:

- You must have a record of a substantial impairment. By government standards, a substantial impairment is one that "significantly limits or restricts a major life activity." This includes hearing, seeing, speaking, walking, breathing, performing manual tasks, caring for oneself, learning, or working.

- You must be qualified through training or education to do the job in question. For trade work, this usually means earning appropriate licensing through an accredited course or completing a required number of apprenticeship hours.

- You must be able to perform the job with or without reasonable accommodation.

The last requirement is one of the most important to consider. There is a common misconception that a company cannot turn down a job candidate based on a disability, but that is not entirely true.

When you apply for a job, consider the role's requirements. Companies are required to provide reasonable accommodation to help you perform your duties. If your disability makes it impossible to perform those tasks even with reasonable accommodations, the company can legally reject your application. This is because employers are not required to provide accommodations that are considered unreasonable. For examples of reasonable accommodations, check out this guide provided by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

International Employment Rights

If you live outside of the US, you may be wondering if your home country offers employment protection for disabled people. In many places, this is available.

In the UK, anti-discrimination laws for disabled people are very similar to those in the US. Employers are required to provide reasonable accommodation for disabled employees. You can find more information on UK anti-discrimination laws.

According to EuroDev, a prominent business development company in Europe, Employment Equality Directive mandates that companies make reasonable accommodations for their disabled

workers." This applies across Europe.

In fact, most nations have protections for disabled people in the workforce.

Countries like Mexico, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand all have laws in place to protect disabled workers and help them find compensation if they are discriminated against for their disabilities. Some African countries have also begun building a legal framework to protect disabled workers.

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