

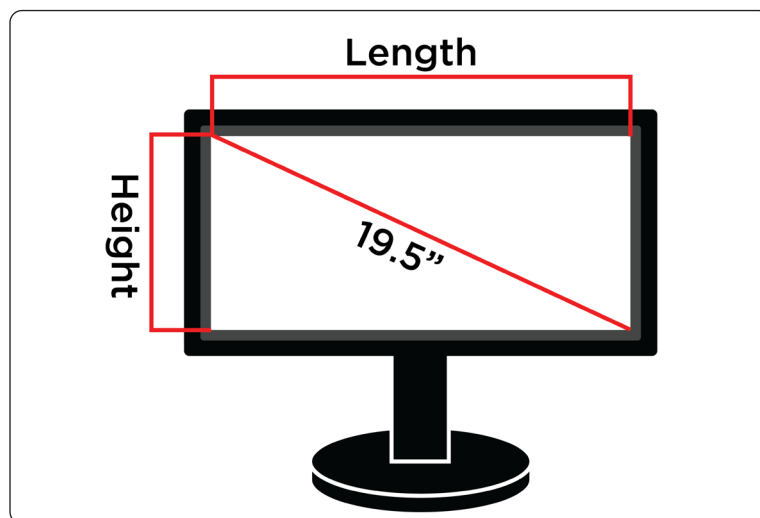
Customizing Windows for Low Vision

Helpful Hardware

Most of the workshops in this series have explored various settings that make the computer easier to see. But using the right computer hardware also lets you use your computer more effectively.

Monitors

The first piece of hardware to consider is your monitor. You might think connecting your computer to a large monitor would make the computer easier to see. But that's not always the case. The size of a screen is the length of its diagonal, which is the distance between opposite corners. Typical sizes are 15 to 19 inches for a laptop and 22 to 34 inches for a desktop computer.



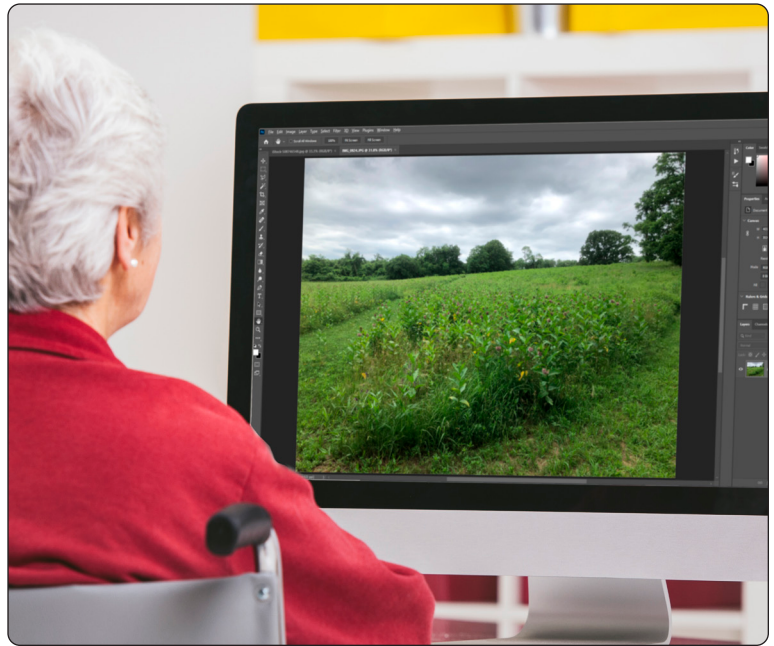
Big monitors, 25 inches and larger, do display a larger image, but the bigger the screen, the further away from you it needs to be.

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So the distance between the image and your eyes is greater, and you have to move your head back and forth or side to side to see the entire screen.

This can result in eye and neck fatigue—in effect, cancelling out the benefit of the larger image. While some may benefit from having a large monitor, it really only allows you to increase your viewing distance by an inch or two.

There is no perfect or ideal monitor size for a person with low vision. What may work for one person may not work for you. Whenever possible, it's best to try out different-sized monitors at your local computer store.

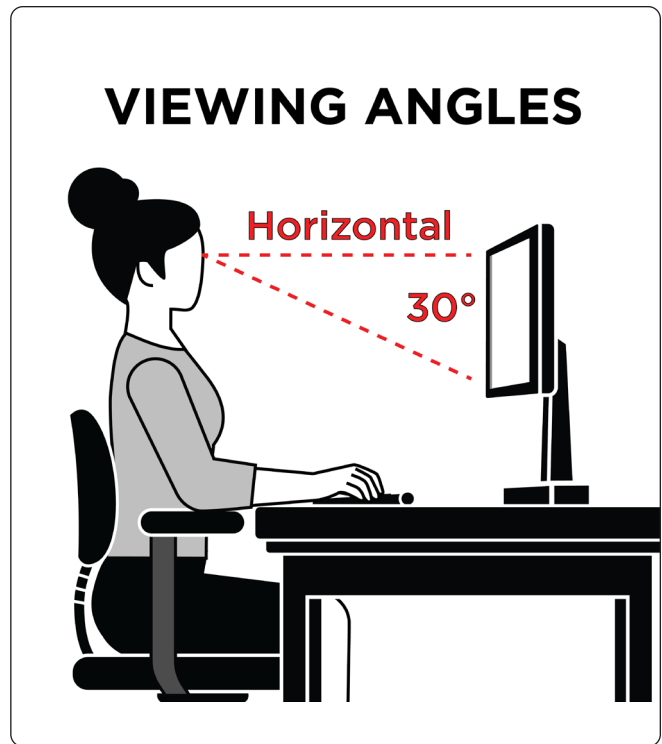


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Another important factor when considering a monitor is positioning. The monitor should be positioned so that the top of the screen is not above eye level. Positioning the display so that you're looking downward reduces eye strain in close-up ranges.

Another benefit of positioning below eye level is that the eyelid covers more of the eye when looking down and therefore prevents your eyes from drying out.

Whenever possible, position your monitor so that windows or glass doors are to the sides instead of in front of or behind the screen. This reduces glare and helps reduce visual fatigue. You might have to angle your monitor so extra light isn't bouncing off your screen.



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When that's not possible, shades or blinds that block daylight can prove quite helpful.

Some people with low vision change the brightness and color themes on their monitors to reduce glare and increase contrast. For more information, check out the Color Filters and High Contrast workshops in the Customizing Windows for Low Vision series.

Some users with low vision use hinged swivel-arm or flex-arm monitor mounts to adjust their monitors to the right height and position. These helpful tools allow you to move the monitor to where you see it best.



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Being able to position your monitor this way also helps you sit in a comfortable position. Instead of leaning forward to view the monitor, you can bring the screen close enough to read text or view images. You can purchase flex-arm



mounts at office supply stores and online. They come in both desktop and wall-mounted versions.

Lighting

The right type of lighting can make a huge difference in viewing your computer. Overhead florescent lighting, like the type used in offices and schools, is one of the worst for glare and shadows.



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Low-level ambient lighting is the best choice for overhead lights. When you need task lighting, such as reading a paper document, it's best to choose an adjustable, low-glare table or floor lamp.



A good example is a bendable gooseneck lamp, placed to the side of your computer screen. This diffused light can be focused on the task instead of your monitor and will help prevent glare and visual fatigue. Check out Hadley's Lighting series for more information about lighting choices for a variety of tasks.

If you're interested in more advanced lighting options, consider bias lighting. The concept is simple. A string of LED lights is placed around the back of the monitor to provide ambient light around the screen.



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the back of the monitor to provide ambient light around the screen. This raises the surrounding light without shining it directly into your eyes. Bias lighting also increases the contrast, making your screen easier to see. Contact a Hadley learning expert for more information about selecting bias lighting.



Keyboards

Another piece of hardware for low vision users is adapted keyboards. Large print keyboards or stick-on large print labels can be very useful to help find the desired keys. The high-contrast



keys are great for helping you find less-used keys, like the backslash. Some adapted keyboards have larger keys that can make typing easier. If you would like more information about adapted keyboards, be sure to check out Hadley's Keyboarding series.

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As always, if you need more information or you've got your own tips to share, contact a Hadley learning expert.

Of course, as with anything new, give yourself time, patience, and practice, and you'll get there.