

Self-Advocacy

Understanding what **YOU** need to succeed
and how to ask for it effectively

Nipissing University
ATP Launch 2021



It is acting on your **own** behalf and asking for what you need.

It is learning to take charge and be more independent.

It is one way to build self-confidence.

What is Self-Advocacy?

It is using effective and appropriate communication.

It is becoming **self-aware** about such things as your...

- Learning Style
- Strengths & Weaknesses
- Interests and Preferences

Self-Advocacy
is a **skill** that
can be applied
throughout
your **life**.

SAS advocates for students with disabilities, right?

So why should you step up on your behalf?

- You know yourself better than anyone.
- In post-secondary, you're expected to be an active participant in the accommodation process.
- Life throws a lot of things at us and some of those may NOT be disability-related.
- SAS can only advocate for students when the issues are about, or a result of, a documented disability.
- Learning to take some control of a situation, even with the support of others, is an **invaluable life skill**.
- Beyond your academic journey, you will be faced with challenges that only you can address.
- Using effective strategies to address your needs, helps you engage others and foster a spirit of collaboration.

"Studies of highly successful adults with learning difficulties have identified the ability to self-advocate as an important factor contributing to success both in post-secondary education and in the workplace"

[For this and more, click on this link to the CanLearn Society's resources on self-advocacy.](#)

Barriers to Self-Advocacy

Everyone struggles with stepping up and asking for what they need. This can be a little more challenging for those with disabilities. [Here are some reasons why?](#)

- **The disability IS THE reason.** So, hesitancy about approaching a professor may fall under their limitations.
- **PAST EXPERIENCE with stigma** and/or belief that people do not understand their learning difficulties and need for accommodations.
- They have historically been **passive in having needs met**. For example, relying on others to decide on and implement accommodations.
- They may have **low self-esteem/limited confidence in their abilities**. As a result, they may be reluctant to ask questions in class or ask for help.
- They **may lack knowledge of themselves** as learners and lack the ability to clearly articulate personal strengths and needs in an appropriate way.
- They **may not know how to reach out** or even what questions to ask.
- They may be **unfamiliar with appropriate self-advocacy skills** and need help learning those.

SAS has identified scenarios students in post-secondary may face.

Check out our “Advocacy Scenarios” resource!

Tips for getting what you need

- **Be prepared to make an appointment** or follow up with an email if unable to reach them.
- **Be professional and courteous.** Everyone deserves to be treated respectfully.
- **Acknowledge your appreciation** for the opportunity to discuss your concerns.
- **Keep an open mind** and project that you're open to collaborate.

If you have booked a meeting:

- **Be on time!** Everyone's time is to be respected.
- **Give as much notice** as possible, with apologies, if you need to change an appointment.

Body language matters.

- **It's ok to admit you're nervous!** They are likely to try and put you at ease.
- **Practice making eye-contact** from time-to-time so that you look engaged.
- **Take notes and ask questions.** It will help you better understand next steps.
- **Be mindful of appearance.** No need to dress up but show you're serious about your education.
- **Say "thank you" for their time.**

Writing An Effective Email

Length matters. Get to the point.

- Context is important but keep your message relevant to the situation at hand.

Understand that there may be a delay in responding. But keep your timelines in mind.

- Be prepared to make an appointment or follow up with another email.
- If you do not get a response in a reasonable time, go back to the original email and add to the thread with a respectful reminder that you were hoping to address this issue.

STOP---DON'T SEND!

- Go over the email and review your message.
- Have someone else check your tone? Were you in the best frame of mind when writing it?

Send the email copying anyone else who needs to be involved.

- If this is an initial email, you may not need to copy SAS.
- If your concerns are not being addressed, you may need to copy an Accessibility Consultant or SAO.

So, What Else Should I know?

Your responsibilities as a student Registered with SAS are:

- Make your needs known to your Accessibility Consultant so you can work together.
- Provide documentation from an approved practitioner.
 - Indicates functional limitations and recommendations for accommodations.
- Be aware and adhere to policies, procedures and deadlines set by SAS and Nipissing University.
- Communicate with your professors in a timely manner if you require an extension, extra help or if you have concerns regarding your accommodations.

Your Individual Accommodation Plan (IAP) is a working document.

- Inform your AC if your disability status changes or you require changes to your accommodations.

Access all that Nipissing has to offer.

- Familiarize yourself with the support services on campus and **USE THEM**. These include counseling, tutoring, academic advising, gym facilities, the health centre, etc.).

Follow through on your responsibilities and obligations. **This won't work without YOU.**

Final Thoughts

Remember

Most people ARE NOT disability experts. You shouldn't assume that professors, staff, Residence Dons, roommates, etc., know your functional limitations or stressors.

When asking for help: Share as much as you can comfortably do so, about yourself, your learning style and what having a disability means for you. **This helps establish a collaborative relationship.**

You need to tell us if you need support and explain how we can help you.

We are here to help you navigate this journey.

Check out the "Advocacy Scenarios".

It will go a long way to show you how to handle specific situations.