Orientation and Mobility Skills

What is Orientation and Mobility?



Learning to use the white
cane with an O&M instructor

**Orientation and Mobility (O&M)** is a profession specific to blindness and low vision that teaches safe, efficient, and effective travel skills to people of all ages:

* "Orientation" refers to the ability to know where you are and where you want to go, whether you're moving from one room to another or walking downtown for a shopping trip.
* "Mobility" refers to the ability to move safely, efficiently, and effectively from one place to another, such as being able to walk without tripping or falling, cross streets, and use public transportation.

Orientation and Mobility Specialists

An Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialist provides instruction that can help you develop or re-learn the skills and concepts you need to travel safely and independently within your home and in the community. O&M Specialists provide services across the life span, teaching infants and children in pre-school and school programs, as well as adults in a variety of community-based and rehabilitation settings.

The [Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals](http://www.visionaware.org/directory/profile/academy-for-certification-of-vision-rehabilitation-and-education-professionals/12) (ACVREP) offers certification for [vision rehabilitation professionals](http://www.visionaware.org/info/your-eye-condition/eye-health/low-vision/vision-rehabilitation-services-5983/1235#providers), including O&M Specialists. A Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) must adhere to a professional Code of Ethics and demonstrate knowledge and teaching skills in the following areas:

* Sensory development, or [maximizing all of your senses](https://www.visionaware.org/info/everyday-living/essential-skills/maximize-your-senses/123) to help you know where you are and where you want to go
* [Using your senses](https://www.visionaware.org/info/everyday-living/essential-skills/an-introduction-to-orientation-and-mobility-skills/indoor-movement-and-orientation-with-vision-impairment/1235) in combination with [self-protective techniques](https://www.visionaware.org/info/everyday-living/essential-skills/an-introduction-to-orientation-and-mobility-skills/protect-your-lower-body-from-hazards/1235) and [human guide techniques](https://www.visionaware.org/info/everyday-living/essential-skills/an-introduction-to-orientation-and-mobility-skills/how-to-walk-with-a-guide/1235) to move safely through indoor and outdoor environments
* [Using a cane](https://www.visionaware.org/info/everyday-living/essential-skills/an-introduction-to-orientation-and-mobility-skills/how-do-i-learn-to-use-a-cane/1235) and other devices to walk safely and efficiently
* Soliciting and/or declining assistance
* Finding destinations with strategies that include following directions and using landmarks and compass directions
* Techniques for crossing streets, such as analyzing and identifying intersections and traffic patterns
* Problem-solving skills to determine what to do if you are disoriented or lost or need to change your route
* Using public transportation and transit systems.

Amy Bovaird, Author of *Mobility Matters: Stepping Out in Faith* and *Cane Confessions: The Lighter Side to Mobility*

****[Amy Bovaird](http://www.visionaware.org/info/get-connected/peer-advisors/amy-bovaird/125) is a VisionAware Peer Advisor and author of [*Mobility Matters: Stepping Out in Faith*](http://amybovaird.com/mobility-matters) and [*Cane Confessions: The Lighter Side to Mobility*](http://amybovaird.com/cane-confessions), her compelling memoirs that recount her life as an international teacher and traveler, her diagnosis of [retinitis pigmentosa](http://www.visionaware.org/info/your-eye-condition/retinitis-pigmentosa/12), and her triumph at learning to travel independently once again, using her long white cane.

Says Amy, "Mobility matters. It allows me to join the rest of society, follow my interests and passions, and reconnect with my love for traveling. I don't have to stay at home fearing the dark anymore. I can live independently."

[Read Amy's personal story](http://www.visionaware.org/info/emotional-support/personal-stories/getting-around-personal-stories/amy-bovaird-mobility-matters/1235) about her journey to independence as she learns [daily living skills](http://www.visionaware.org/info/everyday-living/essential-skills/12) and [access technology](http://www.visionaware.org/info/everyday-living/essential-skills/reading-and-writing/using-a-computer/1234) and masters [travel skills and cane training](http://www.visionaware.org/info/everyday-living/essential-skills/an-introduction-to-orientation-and-mobility-skills/indoor-and-outdoor-travel-skills-for-adults-with-vision-loss/1235).

Learn more about ways to find emotional support for you – and your family members – after a vision loss diagnosis:

* [Read an interview with Amy](http://www.visionaware.org/blog/visually-impaired-now-what/amy-bovaird-interviewed-about-her-book-cane-confessions-the-lighter-side-to-mobility/1) about *Cane Confessions*
* [Support groups and the adjustment process](http://www.visionaware.org/info/emotional-support/peer-support-groups-and-other-resources/support-groups-and-the-adjustment-process/135)
* Use our [Getting Started Kit](http://www.visionaware.org/info/emotional-support/handling-the-news/getting-started-kit-for-people-new-to-vision-loss/123) for more ideas to help you live well with low vision.
* [Sign up with VisionAware](http://www.visionaware.org/MyVARegistration.aspx) to receive free weekly email alerts for more helpful information and tips for everyday living with vision loss.

Orientation and Mobility Instruction

**O&M instruction** is usually conducted on a one-to-one basis, and can take place either in the community where you live and/or work (called "itinerant O&M") or at a rehabilitation center (called "center-based O&M").

To locate an Orientation and Mobility Specialist in your home area, our [Directory of Services](http://www.visionaware.org/directory.aspx) includes information about Orientation and Mobility instruction.

To learn more about university programs and training in Orientation and Mobility, you can watch and listen to [Hunter College's YouTube video](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlWcC6pLVtE) and read Dr. Grace Ambrose-Zaken's [Orientation and Mobility Blog](http://gambrosez.wordpress.com/).

History of Orientation and Mobility

The profession of Orientation and Mobility began to develop during, and immediately after, World War II, when soldiers who had been blinded in battle were sent to recuperate at Valley Forge Army General Hospital before entering Avon Old Farms Convalescent Hospital, the U.S. Army's former experimental rehabilitation center for blind soldiers in Avon, Connecticut.

In order to better serve the large number of blind soldiers who required special training and services, the military recruited [Richard E. Hoover](http://www.aph.org/hall_fame/bios/hoover.html), an army sergeant, who was assigned to the center for the treatment of blinded soldiers at Valley Forge Army Hospital in 1944. During the same year, [Russell Williams](http://www.aph.org/hall_fame/bios/williams.html), who was blinded by enemy action in France, received medical rehabilitation at the Valley Forge Army Hospital, and in 1947, [C. Warren Bledsoe](http://www.aph.org/hall_fame/bios/bledsoe.html) joined the Hospital. Both Hoover and Bledsoe had previously worked at the Maryland School for the Blind. These three men made significant contributions to the development of a new profession: Orientation and Mobility.

The blinded soldiers were highly motivated to be successful, and Richard Hoover believed that the traditional strategies taught and used to travel independently were inadequate. In response, he developed a technique for using a cane that is lightweight and longer than support canes. This technique and cane revolutionized independent travel for blind people and are still used today.