

Accessibility and Hospitality in the Rijksmuseum

Do's and don'ts

General

- Act normally and greet disabled visitors the same way you greet any other visitor; use a natural conversational tone and never address someone in a childish or patronising manner.
- Speak directly to the person, not to his or her companion or interpreter.
- Focus on what is possible rather than what is not.
- Speak naturally and don't be nervous; feel free to use vision-related words when talking to a person who is blind or has low vision, or to use the words 'walk' and 'walking' when speaking to someone in a wheelchair.
- Never ask about the nature of the visitor's impairment.
- Always ask someone if they require physical assistance. Do not seize their arm.
- Never make decisions concerning someone in a wheelchair on his or her behalf.

Tips for visitors with mobility impairments

- Communicate at eye level.
- When interacting with visitors in wheelchairs, come out from behind the information counter.
- Remember that wheelchairs, canes and rollators are all an important part of helping people maintain their independence. Unless specifically asked, do not touch mobility aids.
- If you or the visitor engage in conversation with others, position yourself so that the wheelchair user does not have to strain his or her neck to join in.

Tips for visitors who are blind or who have low vision

- Introduce yourself using your name and position.
- Explain what you are going to do; don't walk away without saying so.
- If you are going to hand something to the visitor, announce what you are going to do.
- Remember that someone with low vision won't be able to see you smile, so express yourself in words.
- Never separate a guide dog from a person who is visually impaired; service dogs have a job to do.
- If you want to gain someone's attention, approach them and address them by name. If you don't know his or her name, address them as 'Ms', or 'Mister'. To avoid startling him/her, get their attention first, before touching his/her arm.
- Never assume someone needs assistance; always ask. This ensures that the person feels respected and welcomed.
- Provide clear directions using directional language, such as '5 metres to the right', rather than 'over there on the right'.

Tips for visitors who are deaf or hard of hearing

- If you want to say or show something, draw attention to yourself by waving or tapping the person gently on the shoulder.
- Maintain eye contact when talking to visitors so that they can see your face clearly and lipread if necessary. Keep your hand away from your mouth. Remember that not everyone can lipread and that often, only 20-40 % of what you say will be picked up. The rest is pure speculation.
- Always speak directly to the visitor who is deaf or hard of hearing, even if an interpreter is present. The interpreter's job is to serve as the deaf person's voice; the interpreter is not a participant in the conversation.
- Do not raise your voice; speak slowly and articulate clearly, but don't overexaggerate. Make sure only one person speaks at a time.
- Use facial expressions and gestures.
- If it is obvious that the visitor did not understand what was said, write it down.
- Do not stand with your back to a window or with the light behind you. People will have difficulty seeing your face clearly.
- Be patient; if you cannot understand what the visitor is saying, just say so. Don't act as if you understand them.

Tips for visitors with a learning disability

- Smile warmly; your facial expression is an important part of communication.
- Don't be nervous. Break the ice and greet visitors by saying something like: 'Hello and welcome to the Rijksmuseum'.
- Use simple language and short sentences, but do not address visitors as if they were children.
- Listen to what the other person is saying; give them time to finish what they're saying, and summarise their remarks.

Tips for visitors with autism spectrum disorders

- Use simple language and communicate your message clearly.
- Make sure your sentences aren't too long, and be clear.
- Introduce yourself and tell your visitors who they can speak to if they have any questions.
- Avoid touching him/her.
- Explain which parts of the museum are quiet and which are busier.
- Understand that visitors who do not return your smile or look at you, are not being rude.
- Understand that for people with autism spectrum disorders, friendliness is 90% clarity and predictability.