



Standards of Practice

The Orientation and Mobility (O&M) profession is committed to empowering people with blindness or low vision to achieve optimal function and wellbeing. O&M specialists provide education and support in the home and in the community in partnership with family, caregivers and other professionals.

The Orientation and Mobility Association of Australasia (OMAA) Standards of Practice serve as a benchmark of exemplary performance for the O&M profession in Australasia. They can be used to develop position descriptions, manage the performance of O&M personnel, guide professional development and communicate the business of the O&M profession to the wider community. The OMAA Standards of Practice should be used in conjunction with the OMAA Code of Ethics.

An exemplary O&M Specialist demonstrates competence in communication, O&M knowledge, O&M practice, community education and professionalism. O&M personnel are encouraged to review the OMAA Standards of Practice regularly, to actively develop expertise in each of these domains as they mature in the profession, and encourage colleagues to do the same.

1. Communication

1.1 When building rapport with others, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- demonstrates courtesy and respect
- initiates contact and conversation
- identifies the other person's interests
- elicits relevant parts of the other person's narrative
- shares information with discretion
- offers affirmation and encouragement
- demonstrates empathy
- demonstrates insight into underlying issues

Orientation and Mobility Association Australasia Inc. (A0039419Z)

PO Box 324 Ashburton VIC 3147 Australia

www.omaaustralasia.com ABN: 86044510235 info@omaaustralasia.com

Doc #: QF04	Version: 2.0 Uncontrolled when printed	Date: May 2024	Authority: Executive	Author: PSC	Review: 2026
-------------	--	-------------------	-------------------------	-------------	--------------

- takes responsibility for maintaining healthy, open communication

1.2 When speaking and listening, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- listens actively and repeats back what has been heard and understood
- reads and interprets body language
- uses accurate vocabulary
- gives clear instructions and specific feedback
- checks that own communication has been understood
- asks well-defined questions
- verbalises actions and body language
- offers audio-description of graphics, pictures and other visual information
- adapts speech, language, content and communication to different audiences, including use of alternative and augmentative communication strategies
- recognises and responds sensitively and wisely to unsettling information
- redirects inappropriate conversation

1.3 When writing, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- maintains objective documentation of individual interventions
- uses correct spelling, punctuation and grammar
- demonstrates understanding of style differences between genres (e.g., file note, email, letter, report, PowerPoint presentation, journal article)
- uses established referencing styles (e.g., APA) when citing others' work
- uses a range of media, including accessible formats
- identifies and uses another's preferred communication format

2. O&M Knowledge

2.1 The exemplary O&M Specialist:

- understands typical human development, including gross and fine motor development, mobility and gait, language, spatial and environmental concepts, social skills, cognition, vision and hearing
- understands the impact of congenital or adventitious vision issues on development and

functioning

- understands the impact of congenital neurological issues and acquired brain injury on development and functioning
- recognises the O&M issues which typically arise at different stages of the lifespan, and the importance of supporting the individual through transitions
- recognises the factors which contribute to an individual's sense of wellbeing and quality of life (e.g., self image, mental health, social networks and support, competence with activities of daily living, leisure options, meaningful employment and education)

2.2 When assessing an individual's needs and making decisions about intervention, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- recognises that mobility skills need to be considered in the whole context of life
- recognises the different environmental risks and challenges for people with low vision or blindness
- creates appropriate opportunities for the individual to demonstrate their range of mobility skills
- sources information about the individual which is relevant to O&M intervention
- monitors the individual's balance, gait, posture and travel techniques
- employs effective strategies to assess functional vision and hearing
- evaluates the individual's safety at steps and drop-offs and recognises when use of a primary mobility aid is indicated
- evaluates the individual's cognitive status, including body, spatial and environmental concepts, problem solving and decision making skills, and level of insight into safety and risk
- chooses observational positions and distances which facilitate unobtrusive assessment
- identifies gaps in the individual's travel skills or concepts, and strategies for addressing these gaps
- makes a confident assessment of the individual's mobility status and communicates this assessment with clear recommendations if intervention is indicated
- recognises when O&M intervention is not required
- explains the reasoning behind his/her/their decisions

2.3 When teaching and employing effective guiding techniques, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- makes efficient, unobtrusive physical contact with the individual
- monitors the individual's safety at all times

- assists the individual being guided to feel at ease and confident
- responds promptly to indicators of stress
- travels at a pace that is suitable to the individual
- selects the most appropriate guiding techniques for different circumstances, changing fluidly from one technique to another
- uses gestures and body language while guiding to communicate intentions non-verbally
- equips the individual to teach guiding techniques to others

2.4 When teaching and reinforcing effective independent travel skills, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- encourages the individual to exercise best use of his or her senses during travel
- assesses and makes recommendations regarding straight-line travel skills
- demonstrates knowledge of self-protective techniques to the individual
- demonstrates knowledge of independent navigational strategies (e.g., trailing, squaring off, traversing and moving through doorways, 90° turns, stairs, dropped objects)
- facilitates the development of self advocacy skills, soliciting and refusing aid
- demonstrates and promotes initiative, problem solving and decision making, equipping the individual to manage in unexpected circumstances

2.5 When teaching and demonstrating a range of orientation skills, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- uses senses to establish position, location and direction in relationship to the travel environment
- identifies clues, landmarks and nearby considerations
- reinforces body concepts, spatial concepts and environmental concepts with the use of accurate language (e.g., left, right, parallel, perpendicular, in front, behind, adjacent to, bollard, down-ramp)
- uses the language of compass directions when describing aspects of the environment
- uses available numbering and naming systems in the environment
- develops awareness of distance using timing, as well as kinaesthetic, visual and auditory information
- identifies which orientation strategies work best for the individual
- employs a problem-solving approach when the individual is disorientated

2.6 When teaching and reinforcing long cane skills, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- discusses mobility cane options, explaining the difference between primary and secondary aids, different cane tips and the value of updating skills periodically
- introduces the long cane, identifying parts of the cane, folding and storage, grip, standing and use with a human guide
- discusses the safety implications of poor long cane skills in relation to drop-offs, and the need to make safe techniques automatic through practice
- discusses the social implications of long cane use, specific to the individual's context
- demonstrates a knowledge of cane techniques for fluid travel (e.g., diagonal, stairs, doorways, touch, touch and slide, continuous touch, escalators, lifts, turnstiles, revolving doors, congested areas)
- demonstrates a knowledge of cane techniques for exploration searching and maintaining orientation (e.g. clearing, contacting and negotiating obstacles, touch and drag, three-point touch, two-point touch)
- troubleshoots issues which arise in long cane use (e.g., veering, changes in gait and posture, fatigue, concentration, safety and social concerns)
- accepts responsibility for the staged, long-term development of long cane skills in children
- supports the individual to make informed choices about how, when and where to use the long cane in relation to level of available vision and travel goals

2.7 When recommending and teaching the use of secondary aids, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- discusses the relative merits of different secondary mobility aids, including electronic aids
- equips the individual with sufficient information and experiences to make an informed choice about which aids will best meet his or her needs
- identifies the factors which might influence an individual's decision to accept or reject a mobility aid
- equips the individual to access resources available in the public domain (e.g., technologies, information kiosks, public transport options) to aid independent mobility

2.8 When preparing an individual for dog guide mobility, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- recognises when a dog guide might be an appropriate mobility aid for the individual
- explains the difference between a dog guide and other mobility aids, including advantages and disadvantages
- identifies the O&M skill set and personal qualities which support dog guide mobility
- demonstrates knowledge of referral and training procedures

- informs the individual of available services and supports referral when the individual is ready

O&M Practice

2.9 When working with an individual, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- treats every individual with respect and dignity
- responds sensitively to the individual's cultural context, family, beliefs, values, limitations and economic circumstances
- recognises the impact of other stakeholders in the individual's life and works to connect the individual with his or her community
- considers O&M in the whole context of the individual's life
- assesses individual needs in collaboration with the individual served
- develops realistic, measurable goals in collaboration with the individual served
- designs interventions which are tailored to meet the individual's goals, which build on prior knowledge and which support progressive development of skills
- respects the right of the individual to participate in decisions regarding training
- identifies the individual's unique learning style, literacy skills, intellect, age, stage of development, cultural background and personal interests, then accommodates these preferences during intervention
- makes decisions and recommendations in the best interests of the individual, promoting health, safety and wellbeing
- supports dignity of risk (the right to choose to take some risks and consider possible consequences, when engaging in life experiences) and documents contentious decisions
- seeks informed consent for any intervention

2.10 When promoting independence, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- recognises if and when the individual is ready for greater autonomy
- encourages free exploration of the environment, with and without assistive devices, particularly with children
- supports the integration of sensory information, motor skills and language in specific contexts
- uses the sequence of exploration, accompanied travel, semi-solo and solo travel, then transfer of skills to new environments to build independent travel skills
- allows sufficient time for the individual to undertake independent problem solving, before offering assistance
- recognises and commends initiative

- equips the individual with sufficient skills and recovery techniques to manage unexpected circumstances with resilience
- teaches and fosters skills for self-determination (e.g., identification of needs, goals and resources, problem solving and decision-making skills, self evaluation of travel skills)
- teaches the individual to anticipate possible problems which may occur during independent travel, and consider possible solutions
- utilises unforeseen, challenging circumstances to extend the individual's mobility skills
- encourages self-advocacy in the community
- respects different cultural values regarding independence including the choice to travel accompanied

2.11 When designing and approaching O&M intervention, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- demonstrates realistic optimism
- considers whether an individual approach or group program might best serve the individual's needs
- recognises that the learner always brings prior knowledge to the situation
- clarifies long-term and short-term goals, building flexibility into program design
- acknowledges that the learner constructs his or her own knowledge through first-hand experience, information and reflection
- plans for successful learning by previewing and selecting training venues appropriate to the individual's skills and confidence, and preparing appropriate activities, maps, information and resources
- finds a balance between giving direct instruction and facilitating discovery learning
- allows adequate time for exploration and comprehension
- creates safe, supportive learning environments
- employs a multi-strategy, multi-sensory approach
- incorporates learning goals from other domains of life

2.12 When timing interactions, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- recognises the learning moment
- recognises the teaching moment
- makes appropriate rescue/risk judgements to balance safety with learning
- understands the value of silence in observation, problem solving and learning
- accommodates the need for rest
- evaluates readiness for new or more complex information

- stages the introduction of increasingly complex content

2.13 When conducting an O&M session, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- begins each session with a plan, clarification of objectives and a review of prior learning
- chooses learning experiences which will help the individual to meet objectives
- creates or utilises opportunities for the individual to learn through first-hand experience wherever possible
- employs specialised instructional media, as well as readily available resources to facilitate learning
- organises learning experiences in a sequential and practical manner
- demonstrates the flexibility to modify sessions in response to the individual's performance, spontaneous learning opportunities and unforeseen circumstances
- asks the individual to rephrase instructions and concepts in his or her own words
- recognises when conversation is not required or appropriate
- provides timely, specific feedback to the individual regarding skills and progress during the session
- invites questions and checks whether clarification is needed
- seeks suggestions about modifications to instructional style which may improve the learning experience
- closes each session with an evaluation of skills gained and recommendations for future action

2.14 When documenting interventions, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- provides sufficient detail (e.g., who was present, what was undertaken, where, when, why and how) that another O&M specialist could interpret or continue the program if need be
- makes explicit the difference between the individual's comments and decisions, observed behaviours and the O&M specialist's considerations
- ensures that any events or decisions of a contentious nature are clearly documented

2.15 When managing a caseload, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- responds promptly to referrals and communications
- manages referrals equitably
- offers a variety of service delivery options
- anticipates the individual's future O&M needs and works with the individual towards meeting these needs

- supports the individual during times of transition
- recognises the influence of other stakeholders and equips these people to support the individual's mobility goal
- evaluates interventions and reviews own practice accordingly
- recognises own professional limitations and refers the individual to others as necessary

3. Community Education

3.1 When analysing a community's profile, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- identifies socio-economic characteristics of the community
- identifies the local political and educational frameworks, gatekeepers and opportunities for influence (e.g., participation in media, marketing, advocacy, access, or policy development)
- identifies support services available
- analyses service gaps and opportunities for transformation
- identifies limiting community attitudes which need to be addressed

3.2 When developing community networks, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- develops and maintains healthy professional relationships with other healthcare providers
- engages in strategic planning with other healthcare providers
- develops effective partnerships with community organisations
- engages confidently with members of the public

3.3 When facilitating community events and activities, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- recognises and seizes community education opportunities
- plans and manages effective community education events (e.g., workshops, interviews, community festivals)
- uses available resources economically
- liaises effectively with media and marketing personnel
- communicates O&M effectively to groups and individuals, both personally and through formal presentations
- involves people with low vision or blindness in planning and delivering community education

3.4 When advocating, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- educates the community about O&M, low vision and blindness through modelling and conversation
- promotes O&M services and generates referrals
- conducts environmental assessments
- consults on access issues
- trains community groups and individuals to support independent mobility
- works to remove barriers to service access and equity

4. Professionalism

4.1 When practicing ethically, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- complies with the OMAA Code of Ethics
- respects confidentiality in all aspects of work
- maintains professional boundaries
- knows and promotes compliance with OMAA Standards of Practice
- knows and promotes compliance with legal requirements
- is sensitive to differences in power and avoids exploitation

4.2 When pursuing personal development, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- practices self care
- seeks regular supervision and mentoring
- reflects critically on own performance, identifying strengths and aspects which could be improved
- welcomes critique and feedback from others
- engages in peer review and evaluation
- stays abreast of current publications and issues in the O&M field
- actively seeks professional development opportunities
- contributes to professional teams outside the O&M field

4.3 When contributing to the workplace, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- is punctual and reliable

- maintains healthy relationships and actively supports peers
- values the contribution of every worker
- practices conflict resolution
- analyses and critiques current practices
- proposes and generates improvements

4.4 When contributing to the wider O&M community, the exemplary O&M Specialist:

- is affiliated with, and contributes to O&M and related professional bodies
- attends and presents at professional conferences
- plans and runs O&M professional development activities
- engages with and contributes to current research, including submission to peer-reviewed journals
- contributes to the development of new O&M personnel
- acts as supervisor/mentor to colleagues
- generates collaboration in the O&M profession

The OMAA Standards of Practice were ratified by the OMAA AGM in November 2013. Documents which influenced their development included the ACVREP O&M Specialist Certification Handbook, assessment schedules from Australian tertiary O&M programs, guidelines used by O&M employers for performance review of personnel, and standards from teaching and allied health professional bodies. See www.omaaustralasia.com for more information.