



The Torch



Edition 35

Tape Aids Avid Reader's Audio Library

Tape Aids is a non-profit organisation that relies solely on donations to provide their services. They have produced talking books for blind, visually impaired and print-disabled people for over 60 years. Registered members can download talking books from the tapeaids.com website, currently they have approximately 9 000 titles available. New titles are added to the website regularly. Back-dated copies of certain magazines are also available on the website.

They have the same genres that is available in a public library as well as textbooks and study material for learners and students.

Tape Aids can send books on mp3 CD's to members via Aramex, Paxi or Postnet, and the member will be liable for the costs.

Copyright permission

Publishers, authors and copyright holders gave Tape Aids permission to convert their books into accessible human-narrated formats for the exclusive use of their blind, vision-impaired and print-disabled members.

Production

Currently they have 150 volunteer narrators and proofreaders that work from their home studios.

Cape Town Team

The team at the Cape Town Service Centre in Goodwood consists of Maritsa (National Head of Cloud Production and Education), Karen (National Head of

Library Operations and Afrikaans), and Ansie (Library Liaison Officer and Receptionist).



Back: Karen (Tape Aids) and Front from left to right: Maritsa (Tape Aids), Suritha (St Dunstan's)

The voice on the recording belongs to one of their volunteer narrators Sue Moser.

For more information, visit their [website](#) or contact them on 021-6895983.

Check your vision with WHOeyes

Visual acuity is the most common assessment of visual function. It is a simple, non-invasive measure and critical to determine the presence of vision impairment. Many people with vision impairment are unaware and accessibility of visual acuity testing is a challenge. Fortunately, most cases of vision impairment can be prevented or addressed. Regular visual acuity checks can ensure that vision impairment is identified at the earliest so that you can take action to continue enjoying your sight.

WHOeyes is a free, population-facing mobile software application (an app):

- checks near visual acuity,
- checks distance visual acuity,
- is language agnostic (uses the tumbling E chart),

- provides educational messages on how the individuals can protect their eyes.



The WHO Eyes App

The principle of WHOeyes is based on how an eye care professional would assess visual acuity using a conventional chart in a clinical setting. The accuracy and usability of the app were tested in three separate research studies. WHOeyes is suitable for anyone aged over 8 years.

WHOeyes is available for both iOS and Android mobile operating systems and is compatible with mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets. The app is available in the 6 UN languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. WHOeyes was developed in collaboration with the [Centre for Eye Research Australia \(CERA\)](#), a WHO collaborating centre.

WHOeyes does not replace the need for regular eye checks by an eye care professional, even if your vision is good.

Source: [WHO](#)

Blind mountaineer Erik Weihenmayer has new documentary 'Soundscape' that shares his journey

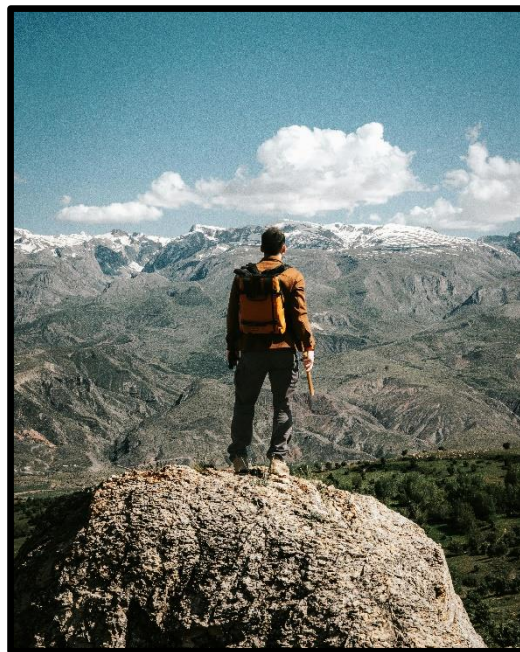
Mountaineer Erik Weihenmayer went into an active volcano with Will Smith to help install sensors.

Erik Weihenmayer lives for adventure. The professional mountaineer and rock climber has summited Denali and the Seven Summits — that's the highest point on every continent.

And he's done it all without sight.

In 2001, he became the first blind person to reach the top of Mount Everest. And, in a new documentary called "Soundscape," he tells us how he does it — largely using echolocation — and a thirst for life that was sparked when he was a teenager, when he went blind.

His dad had him join a recreation program for blind kids. They would go on adventures — horseback riding, sailing, and one week, it was rock climbing.



A mountaineer looking at the landscape.

Full interview

ERIK WEIHENMAYER: Enough said, man, it was, it was adventure. Hanging off my fingertips and figuring out using my hands and my feet as my eyes to get myself from point A to point B to point C and like doing all these crazy moves and physical moves and leverage to figure out how to connect the dots. I was like, wow, this is, this is the adventure that I crave.

It was the week before his freshman year in high school when he lost the last vestiges of his sight. And he wondered what his life was going to be like, but he says he wasn't worried so much about actually being blind. He was more worried about missing out on life.

WEIHENMAYER: Yeah. I'm a pragmatist. You know, not being able to see beautiful pictures and scenery is, is one thing, but not being able to live fully is like the most terrifying thing in the world. And so for me it was about living, you know, like I didn't. Like I remember sitting in the cafeteria one time, and there were all these kids across the cafeteria, and they're having this massive food fight, and all I could think about was like, man, I wish I could be in the middle of that food fight. I don't want to be stuck here, you know.

So yeah, for me, it's about wanting to live a life of adventure and I didn't even know what that might look like as a blind person.

That's amazing. That's amazing. OK, so this new documentary is about the summit you made of the Incredible Hulk, and we have to stop for a moment and have you explain this for folks because this is radio, they can't see it. Like I saw it in the documentary. This is huge.

WEIHENMAYER: It's a massive face. Yeah, it's a massive vertical face, and the Sierra Nevadas, on the eastern side of the Sierras. And, and not only is there, is it a huge vertical face, but it's about a four or five hour hike up, you know, some of the worst terrain just to get to the base. So, yeah. And then my friend Timmy, who's this world class climber, he's like, let's do it in a day. And I'm like, really? OK.

I want to get to that in a moment. But describe for us first how it is that you hike now, because you use various techniques, like you hike with a partner that's helpful. You hike using two sticks that you sort of feel with. But you also use echolocation.

WEIHENMAYER: Yeah. And then my friends will walk in front of me and they'll jingle a bear bell in front of me. And that gives me a lot of feedback. And then yes, I use echolocation, which it was really made famous by this blind guy named Daniel Kish who can echolocate like nobody's business. I mean, he can ride a bike and hear trees on the side of the road, and I can do it pretty well. You know, it's the idea that sound is really comprised of sound vibrations. And so it's always

sound vibrations of different sizes of, you know, different sound waves bouncing off of objects.

And so like in the film, we talk about how when it bounces off a rock, it's a really hard crisp bounce. When it's bouncing off of a tree, it's filtered, because the sound is going through the leaves and it's partially bouncing back, but you can get the idea of the shapes of things and the density of things. You know, when I'm hiking, I can hear the slope or the cliff to my left and the giant drop off to my right.

So, yeah, it's a really helpful tool for a blind person, and most of us can do it to some degree.

That's a beautiful description. Like you can tell the difference between a rock and a tree, but when you're navigating, not just the hiking on the floor of the, of the forest, right, but like you're rock climbing up a summit like this, that is just completely vertical. How do you use it then, or is it just at that point mostly feeling?

WEIHENMAYER: I'd say that the hiking is the most vulnerable part for me because I'm, you know, I'm, I'm like an, an like a dog trying to use four legs instead of two legs, you know, leaning on those poles, making sure every step counts, that it's not, I'm not gonna break my ankle or step in a hole or off a cliff, you know. So it's a lot of work to get to the face. And once I get to the face, and my hands and feet are engaged, man. That's the fun part, right?

Because it's this physical experience of, of just using every part of your body to physically move up this vertical environment. And yeah, I'd say at that point, it becomes more about touch and about movement.

I wonder if you can describe for us what it feels like to get to the top of a summit like that. A lot of people would probably say like, why hike it if you can't see the view at the top, right? But that's not what it's about for you, it sounds like.

WEIHENMAYER: And that's really why we made this film because people say like, hey, if you can't see, why would he, what does he get out of the mountains? And the view is spectacular. The view, the feeling of the rock. The way when I my hands and feet touch the rock, it lights up in my brain. Just because I'm blind, it doesn't mean I'm not a very visual thinker.

So whenever I'm getting information through my hands, through my ears, through my sense of smell, that's all being translated to a visual image in my mind. The world lights up. But I just need to get the information into my brain so that my brain can then see the world in its own way.

When I get to the top, yeah, it's, you can hear the sound vibrations moving out through space in this beautiful, infinite kind of scary way because the sound vibrations aren't bouncing off of a lot of things.

They're just moving out through the universe. And so you feel like this tiny little speck in this massive sea of sound, and it's a great view.

That's a very different way of describing a view, but it's certainly a view. Wow. In the documentary, there's this beautiful scene, and it sounds like this is common for you when you're hiking, but your hiking partner takes your hand and traces it along the mountain tops in the distance so that you can visualize what this looks like. What does that look like in your mind?

WEIHENMAYER: What it looks like is when, I love to draw, when I could see till I was 14. And I would draw all kinds of landscapes and mountains and, and all the things that I could see out of my limited vision. So when Timmy takes my finger and runs it over these serrated ridges of the mountains, as he's running my finger over that landscape, it's like a drawing coming into focus in my brain. And it, and, and it is funny because it's been a long time since I've actually seen the world.

So I'm sure in my brain it's kind of like a weird cartoon image, but it's still visual image, you know.

Yeah, that's really interesting. When you're on the side of the mountain like that, you're hanging on. I mean, you have ropes and helmets and such, but those are life defying kind of moments. Do you think because you can't see the drop, you're more fearless in a way?

WEIHENMAYER: I can hear the drop. But you know, so I can, I can hear the sound of it. You know, like when I climbed Everest and I was crossing over the Khumbu Icefall, I was on these ladders over these giant crevasses and you could hear the echo below you, but I don't know, falling into what you can see or falling into the unknown, which is scarier. They're both pretty scary actually.

But for me, the challenge of rock climbing, which is the fun part of it, as well is that when I lock off on my hand and, and, try to get my other hand as high as I can, I'm scanning across the face and, you know, and I, I don't, you know, I can't find that hold that's out of reach. It's all what I'm feeling under my hands. And so I'm having to figure out how to make it work, you know.

So I don't always use the best hold or the hold that, that sighted person next to me is using, but somehow I figure it out and, and make it work, because if you just keep scanning for the perfect hold, you're going to run out of energy. So you just have to, you just have to make do. And it's a for me, it's a really fun process and it's so engaging to be able to like problem solve your way up this vertical environment.

It's such a connection between your mind and your body and your spirit.

It's, it's when I feel the most connected.

Yeah, do you think if you had not lost your sight, you would still do this?

WEIHENMAYER: It's such a hard question. I've been asked that before, and I don't know, because at some point, like my life diverged from a sighted person's life. You know, like, so maybe if I had been able to see, I would have loved basketball, it would have been a, like, tiny bit above average basketball player and, and I would have lived this very traditional life.

I, I always think that I'd like to think of myself that I'd be adventuresome. But I, I don't know. You know, I think when, when you go blind, and you have that moment in the cafeteria where, like, what is my life gonna look like? It pushes you to search. And in that process of searching and accepting adventure into your life, you discover a lot of great stuff that you might not have otherwise found.

Source: [KJZZ](#)

Let's start an Accessible Document Revolution

It's time to start a movement. An Accessible Document Revolution, if you will.

The inaccessible mindset

Working for a [document accessibility company](#), we hear all sorts of reasons why organizations think they don't need to provide accessible documents.

The excuse we get most often is that they don't have blind customers. They think none of their customers have visual disabilities.

You and I know that's untrue.

Whether they believe their excuse or not, we need to raise our voices so organizations are painfully aware of the need to provide accessible formats.



Someone making use of a laptop.

Steps to take

Raising awareness is crucial.

I challenged my friend to dig deeper and come up with an answer we could share to help others.

Here's where their brainstorm led.

1. Ask

This step may seem obvious, but it's the most important. If you don't start by asking for accessible documents, you'll never get them.

Your initial ask will likely be to a "front line" employee who has no power. If the organization incorporates accessibility into its business plan, this person may know how to help. Sadly, that's often not the case.

2. Get the manager

If the first person you ask says no or doesn't know, ask to speak to the manager. Employees receive so much information in their orientation with the company that there's a chance the first person you speak to won't remember the company's protocol.

3. Take it to corporate

If the manager is no help, or if you're denied a manager, ask for the phone number and email to the corporate or main office.

Ideally, you'll get the name of a VP or compliance officer to contact. That may not be possible so start with anyone at the corporate level.

Once you have that information, reach out until you get through to someone who can help. It may take several calls and emails. You may never get through. But, it's important to continue requesting your accessible documents.

When reaching out, ask about their process for documenting accessibility complaints. Chances are they don't have one. Bringing it up may push them to finally implement one.

Message inspiration

If you're not sure what to say, that's ok! We've put together a standard request that you can customize to fit your situation.

To Whom It May Concern:

I am inquiring about receiving my account information, monthly statements

and/or customer care materials that your company provides in an accessible format. I have a visual disability, and the documents I currently receive are in a format that I cannot read. Please send all of my materials in the following format:

[Braille, Large print, Accessible PDF, Audio]

Please contact me at [your preferred contact method such as email address, phone number, or mailing address] if you have any questions about my specific accessible document needs.

Thank you in advance for complying with the federal laws that grant me equal access to information in an accessible format that I can read.

Please send the materials to my address.

[Your address]

Sincerely,

[Your name]

4. Enlist help

At some point in your efforts, enlist friends and family to help. They can express their dissatisfaction with an organization that's excluding people with disabilities.

I've heard of sighted friends writing letters to organizations after embarrassing and frustrating experiences in which their blind counterpart was denied accessible versions of their written information. Having your friends with sight chime in shows organizations that these accessibility issues affect more people than they thought.

Whether a letter, phone call, or social campaign, your friends and family can spread the word about the need for accessible documents.

What works for you?

These ideas are just one person's. We know you have your tried-and-true methods and we'd love to hear them to share with others.

Source: [Braille Works](#)

How Do Blind People Identify Money

Money - Distinct Shapes & Raised Patterns On Our Coins & Notes

In South Africa and in many other countries around the world, both Coins and Bank Notes have been designed and made to include distinct features so Bank Notes that Persons who are Blind are able to tell the different coins and notes apart. The South African National Council for the Blind was fully consulted by the South African Reserve Bank in the process for creating the new Mandela Series bank notes to ensure that the notes were made to be accessible to persons with Visual Impairments. A team from the Reserve Bank also held a workshop to ensure that all sectors of the visually impaired community received training and information regarding the new notes. The new notes are the same size and colouring as the old notes (just brighter) , so the Money Sticks which are used by some persons with Visual Impairments, will still work accurately.



The South African Bank Notes

Bank Notes

The South African Bank Notes are different lengths and have: one, two, three, four or five raised diamond shapes in the middle of the bottom half of the notes to enable blind people to identify them as R10, R20, R50, R100 and R200 respectively. For the benefit of the partially sighted, the Reserve Bank has also introduced geometric shapes on the front of the banknotes. The R10 note features a diamond, the R20 a square, the R50.00 a circle, the R100.00 a 'flat' hexagon and the R200.00 a 'honey comb' hexagon.

For quick and easy reference money templates are also used to measure banknotes, these money templates come in various styles, including an aluminium device and a cardboard one, which can also be used to store the banknotes. Money templates are available to purchase from organizations such as the Guide Dogs Association of South African, Blind SA, or the South African National Council for the Blind. Contact them to receive a quote, or visit Blind SA to see how to use the Cardboard Template.

Coins - distinct features

A coin for example has six distinct features by which it can be identified. These include the: size; thickness; shape, as they are not all are entirely round; pattern of grooves round the edge; the sound it makes when dropped onto a table and the raised picture on the face.

We have 9 coins in South Africa:

The 1; 2; 5 and 10 Cents are almost never used now.

The 20 cent and 50 cents are all identifiable by continuous serration on the edges. These are called "copper" coins and have a different feel from the "silver" rand value coins.

There are two types of 5 Rand coins, the latest and preferable one is unique in that it is thicker and has an interesting edging which includes complete serration as well as a groove running around it; it feels like two coins joined together.

The 1 Rand, 2 Rand and the old 5 Rand coins are distinguishable from Cent coins in that their serration around the edge is broken by smooth edging as well.

Size is also important:

The 10 Cent and 1 Cent are the smallest while the 5 Rand coin is the largest

The 50 cent coin is slightly larger than the 1 Rand but can easily be told apart by the difference in serration, which has been mentioned above.

Equipment is also available to help persons who are Blind to store their coins and distinguish between them, this equipment includes: Coin Selector

Plastic Coin Selectors: are also used for quick and easy reference, as the plastic unit has places for South African coins which enables you to handily store your coins in one unit. These plastic coin selectors are available from organizations such as South African National Council for the Blind. You can contact them to find out more or to receive a quote.

Source: [Disability Info](#)

Call to aid the blind to enter workforce

It is for commerce and industry to shift their focus from disability to how blind and visually impaired people can bring change to society and make a contribution to the economy.

This according to League of Friends of the Blind (Lofob) as the world observed International Day of Persons with Disabilities on Sunday.

The organisation said about 97% of all blind and partially sighted people in South Africa were unemployed.

Lofob executive director Shahiemah Edwards said: "It has always been Lofob's firm belief that blind and visually impaired people should be employed in the open economy.



Computer Training

“There is really no reason why they could not be considered for employment as Lofob would support the placement of a visually impaired person in the workplace and assist potential employers with identifying jobs in a business that blind people can effectively do. Our country needs to do more to ensure the economic empowerment of people who are blind and visually impaired.”

Lofob said it assisted 19 blind and visually impaired people to prepare for the matric exams this year in its educational support programme as the stepping stone to further qualification for gainful employment.

Lofob’s orientation and mobility practitioner, who is also living with blindness, Tsheko Tlou, 42, added: “The employment situation in our country is dire. Many blind and visually impaired people have the qualifications, yet they are not employed.

“There appears to be a misplaced distrust of competencies and capabilities.”

Provincial director of DeafSA and TV presenter Jabaar Mohamed said there needs to be an “ongoing celebration of disability every day, 365 days a year, 24 hours a day”.

“We need to remind (the world) that we are able to do anything as we are human. We the deaf community in SA still need more access to all public service (social, health, education, jobs) it is still a barrier for some of our deaf

community where not all understand what is the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities.

(There is a) need to train every sector in South Africa to internalise and understand how it needs to implement those documents,” Mohamed said.

Meanwhile, the provincial Department of Social Development (DSD) said it had allocated R164 million to support NPOs that provide therapeutic and support services.

“I was greatly moved by the passionate staff working at DSD’s Sivuyile Residential Facility, where significant upgrades are currently under way to ensure the children and adults who receive care there are extra comfortable, and those working at our NGO partners, the Carel du Toit Centre and the League of the Friends of the Blind, and not forgetting the clients at these facilities” said Western Cape Social Development MEC Sharna Fernandez.

“It is all about inclusion. If we as a society can do more to create accessible spaces free of discrimination, we would have the benefit of the many wonderful talents, knowledge and skills of these individuals.”

Source: [IOL News](#)

Farewell Mrs Mafu



Mrs Mafu

Mrs Mafu was called to her eternal resting place on 29 January 2024. Her family was always by her side during the challenging moments. Our sincerest condolences to all the loved ones she left behind.

THE END