

FAQs

1. What undergraduate qualifications are useful in Orientation & Mobility (O&M)?

Anything that focuses on people: nursing, orthoptics, health, social work, psychology, teaching, disability, thinking and learning, population geography, human movement, group dynamics, adult education, etc. If you don't yet have an undergraduate degree, our advice is firstly that you choose something which you will enjoy studying in its own right. If you enjoy science, consider a health sciences degree. If your interests are more literary, consider an arts degree and choose units which have greatest relevance to work in the disability sector.

2. I don't have an undergraduate degree. Can I still apply to study O&M?

If you have no undergraduate experience and no work experience, we recommend that you undertake a degree first, before studying O&M.

If you have no undergraduate degree, but do have years of experience in the disability or vision impairment field, you will need to consider firstly whether you are ready for study at a tertiary level (research and writing skills, self-directed attitude to study, willingness to engage with disability issues at both concrete and abstract levels). The course is diverse in content and intense in delivery because of the number of hours required to develop practical skills.

3. I want to be a Guide Dog Mobility Instructor. Do I really need to study O&M?

Yes. Guide Dog Mobility is one area of specialisation within the field of Orientation & Mobility. Being a GDMI involves working with vision impaired people, assessing their mobility needs, their potential capacity for Guide Dog travel and adapting training to suit individual learning styles. It is the client who determines travel goals, the best routes to take and monitors progress along the way. The dog functions as a mobility aid, making travel happen more smoothly, but the dog does not make all the decisions. Guide Dog Mobility Instructors need to have excellent O&M skills.

4. Who is most likely to be accepted into the course?

Selection is made based on previous academic results and performance at interview.

The interviewers are interested in:

- What you know about O&M through research and observations in the field
- Your previous work experience and how it might be useful in the context of O&M
- Your ability to think on your feet, link ideas and come up with suggestions
- Your verbal skills; O&M is an intensely social job as many people with vision impairment cannot rely on body language for effective communication.

5. How do I arrange to see an O&M Instructor at work?

Contact Dean Johnson at Guide Dogs Victoria on 9854 4506, or email him at dean.j@guidedogsvictoria.com.au with your request, contact details and information about your availability. Dean will forward your details to an O&M Instructor who will contact you to arrange an observation session. O&M Instructors at Guide Dogs Victoria are mostly based in Kew, but work throughout Victoria.

Alternatively contact Vision Australia on 1300 847 466 or email them at info@visionaustralia.org. Ask to speak to an O&M Instructor in your local area. O&M Instructors at Vision Australia are based at offices in both metropolitan and regional areas.

If you live outside Victoria, contact your local provider of services to people with vision impairment and ask whether they employ Orientation & Mobility Instructors.

6. What else can I do to learn more about O&M?

Join OMAA – the Orientation and Mobility Association of Australasia. This is the professional body for O&M Instructors in Australia and New Zealand. They offer email discussion groups, networking opportunities, professional development and a regular newsletter. Find them at www.omaaustralasia.com.au

7. What career pathways lead on from O&M?

Within O&M it is possible to specialise with particular client groups such as children, elderly people, clients with acquired brain injury or deaf blind clients.

Experienced O&M Instructors can apply for a Guide Dog Cadetship. This additional training takes several years on the job.

Some O&M Instructors work in the wider disability context, for example, case management, access consultancy or service coordination.

8. Are there any O&M jobs out there?

Yes. Australia's population is aging and the need for O&M Instructors is increasing. O&M jobs are advertised frequently. O&M Instructors are desperately needed in most states, in metropolitan and regional offices.

9. How much will I earn?

The salary range, package benefits and entitlements may vary depending on what organisation and state you work in, years of experience and prior work experience. The best course of action if you wish to get specific information is to contact the HR Manager directly, in the organisation you are applying to and ask more questions.

As a general rule of thumb, if you work for a Not for Profit organisation, part of your salary will be available as tax free benefits and you may also have access to other tax free advantages. Organisations may also offer entitlements related to yearly salary increases, vehicles, superannuation, annual and long service leave, paid maternity leave, etc.

When requesting salary information from organisations, it is important to ask for 'an equivalent gross taxable wage if the maximum tax free benefits are utilised', otherwise the taxable component you are given will seem unreasonably low. As a very rough guide, a newly graduated Instructor might receive a first year salary of around \$50,000 (equivalent gross taxable wage).