



Tech that empowers everyone

## 'I knew I was going to be a yoga teacher': the tech helping to overcome visual impairment

Jemma Ralston hasn't let visual impairment hold her back – as well as working in finance, she teaches yoga in London. Computer software is essential to her dual career, writes [Sue George](#)

Main image: Jemma Ralston uses Ease of Access at work and for her business. Photograph: Elena Heatherwick/Guardian

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"Teaching yoga, hosting yoga brunch events and doing a full-time finance contract is pretty tiring," says Jemma Ralston, "but it is so exciting because I am in control. All these things I am choosing to do. Yoga is my passion."

Ralston teaches ashtanga vinyasa yoga in classes across London and – alongside her new yoga business – she also works as an accountant.

Ralston has a condition called Hermansky-Pudlak syndrome (HPS) that leads to problems with blood clotting, causing easy bruising and prolonged bleeding. It also involves nystagmus – uncontrolled eye movements, leading to reduced vision and depth perception.

"[My condition] wasn't diagnosed until I was 10 or 11, so as a small child I was a bit blind and covered in bruises! People didn't really understand why," says Ralston, who is now 34. She grew up in an ex-mining town on the outskirts of Glasgow, very much protected by her parents. "It was a rough environment and my parents did what they could," she says.

After university in Glasgow, Ralston went to work in Jersey on a graduate training scheme. "I was thrown in at the deep end," she says. "Being a trainee auditor and visually impaired wasn't easy. A lot of my work was going through papers with a red pen." She had to pass some tough accountancy exams. "Things take me longer to read than they might for a person with 20-20 vision. Yes, things were sometimes tough. But not that bad," she laughs.

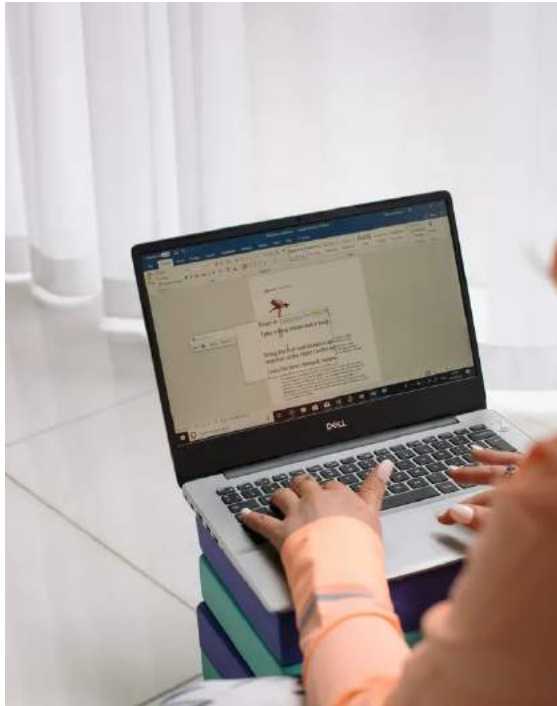
While she was working in Jersey, Ralston started yoga classes and immediately felt the impact on her stress levels and long-term anxiety. "I felt at home. As someone who grew up with a few physical ailments, I thought: 'I can do this! I feel relaxed!' I understand what the instructor is telling me and I can listen to my body."

Three years later, she was working in London as a senior-level accountant at a large corporation. After a painful relationship breakup, she travelled on her own to Thailand, where she practised yoga every day for a month. "From then on, I knew I was going to be a yoga teacher. I didn't know when. I had a successful job in the City and had worked very hard. But I knew I would when the time was right."

That time came three years ago. Her father was diagnosed with terminal cancer, and she had an incident with her blood condition where she went into cardiac arrest. "That

was when I made the decision. A couple of days later, I booked my teacher training," she says.

She qualified in October 2017 and left her full-time City job three months later. Ralston began teaching classes all over London, soon deciding the best plan was to be a contractor in the finance sector while she established her yoga business.

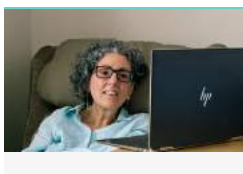


Ralston can increase the size and contrast of documents on her Dell Inspiron 14; teaching yoga was a long-term plan

"[Teaching yoga in many different studios is] a baptism of fire that builds your confidence," she says. But teaching three classes in a day in distant parts of London proved unsustainable. "Because I don't and can't drive or cycle, I have to be very practical about where my classes are."

Her corporate background is a good complement to her yoga business. "Yoga teachers don't do it for the money - we do it because we love teaching. But I would like to find a way where I can teach and live a comfortable life. I think my knowledge of finance and business models will help me on that journey."

As soon as she starts a contract in a new office, Ralston sets up Ease of Access Center in Windows 10. "I tend to 'lose' the mouse cursor, and the larger the monitor, the more space there is to lose it in. I make the mouse cursor bigger so I can follow it," she says. Ease of Access options also allow her to use the Narrator function, meaning that she can hear audio descriptions of elements on the screen, something she may need if her sight deteriorates.



The Ease of Access Center enables Ralston to increase the size of, and contrast within, documents. Working with spreadsheets for her own business, or with financial modelling for clients, she uses Excel and changes the text to be white on a black background.

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She also finds the search function helpful, rather than having to look through documents for particular figures.

Right now, she has yoga brunch events to organise, and technology can help with that. "When I am on the computer for a long time, I use the Magnifier tool because my eyes get tired, especially for things like proofreading," she says. "It's about independence. These things are here to help everyone.

"I can accept my body as not perfect - but no one's is," she continues. "We all have our limitations and have things we can excel at. It's about appreciating what you can do."

*Jemma Ralston, yoga teacher: [jemaste.com](http://jemaste.com)*

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