



# Testing Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

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The issue of accommodating students with disabilities during testing has generated a great deal of concern. When students with disabilities take standardized or minimum competency tests to earn high school diplomas or when they apply to post-secondary training institutions, it is necessary to consider whether and how these tests should be modified to accommodate for their special needs. This dilemma arises because these tests require specific procedures, which create fair and ethical testing environments. These procedures often do not account for the special needs of students with disabilities and could put them at a distinct disadvantage. This discussion is focused on the alteration of testing or application processes to place students with disabilities on equal footing with their peers. While this issue deals primarily with standardized testing procedures, it also can be applied to other situations such as credentialing exams and employment testing.

Although wide ranges of accommodations are possible, a single set of guidelines that outline acceptable testing accommodations for individuals with disabilities does not exist. Both constitutional and statutory law, however, have shaped policy concerning testing students with disabilities. The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) all play a fundamental role in policies and guidelines regarding students with disabilities and testing. These federal laws are designed to prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

Achieving reasonable accommodations for testing students with disabilities requires shared responsibility between students, parents (of young children), educators and test administrators. All of these people need to know not only what the law requires and what accommodations are reasonable, but also have disability awareness and be familiar with available resources. Students and/or parents must identify the concerning disability to the appropriate student support services, provide documentation of the disability and request necessary accommodations, preferably in writing. It is very important to request testing accommodations in advance to ensure they can be made in a timely manner.

In addition to constitutional and federal laws, a wide range of state policies on testing accommodations exists. State guidelines on accommodations and current practice vary from providing no accommodations during testing to providing numerous types of accommodations. Furthermore, accommodations recommended in one state may be prohibited in others. Luckily, guidelines by state assessment programs on acceptable testing accommodations are changing and advancing.



Some standard accommodations may include extended time for test administrators, readers for tests, separate testing locations, alternate testing formats, assistive devices, large print, scribes, calculators, interpretation of directions, oral responses and/or additional breaks during testing. When these accommodations are granted, many individuals taking the tests with modification are unaware that the score reports for such testing usually are sent to the score recipients with a “flag” or other designation indicating that the test was given under nonstandard conditions.

The use of flagged scores on admission, credentialing and employment tests presents a troublesome problem for students with disabilities, educators, admissions officers and advocates. While students with disabilities and their families desire equal evaluation of their skills, the placement of a flag on a test score results in an opportunity for unfair and discriminatory treatment. Although organizations legally are barred from discriminating against persons with disabilities, flagged test scores could create potential opportunities for discrimination against persons with disabilities. This creates a clear conflict for test companies that feel they have an ethical obligation to alert score recipients when a test was given under non-standard conditions and for persons with disabilities who may be unfairly discriminated against.

It becomes apparent that the creation of reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities during standardized testing procedures represents a difficult task. A tradeoff is created between the avoidance of discrimination and the creation of fair testing procedures. It also becomes clear that special procedures for students with disabilities might generate grounds for discrimination. The resolution of these concerns has not yet been agreed upon. No coherent and consistent set of guidelines at the federal or state level exists.

Since the individual cases and the types of disabilities vary, parents and educators should gather as much information on the local guidelines. Of course, the accommodations will depend on the type of disability. All people involved should bear in mind that a tradeoff exists. Each case should be decided on an individual basis, in order to best fit the characteristics and desires of those involved. These following resources may be further sources of information regarding education for students with brain injury and other disabilities:

- National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY)  
P.O. Box 1492  
Washington, DC 20013  
(800) 695-0285 or (202) 884-8200  
Website: <http://www.nichcy.org>
- ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Children  
(703) 620-0285 or (800) 328-0272  
Website: <http://www.ericec.org>



- Lash and Associates  
L & A Publishing and Training  
708 Young Forest Drive  
Wake Forest, NC 27587  
(919) 562-0015  
Website: <http://www.lapublishing.com>
- Learning Disabilities Association  
4156 Library Road  
Pittsburgh, PA 15234-1349  
(412) 341-1515  
Website: <http://www.ldanatl.org>

