

Testing Accommodations

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Understanding the problem...

Often, students with disabilities may have ample knowledge of the information you are assessing but be unable to demonstrate that knowledge due to the manner in which the assessment is taking place. Consider, for example, a student with ample knowledge of the causes of the Civil War who also experiences difficulty decoding when reading.

This student may perform poorly on a social studies exam about the causes of the Civil War not because she does not know the information, but rather because she cannot read the test. Likewise, consider another student with writing problems who also knows a great deal about the topic being assessed. If the test required the student to respond to an essay question, the result would likely be a distorted picture of what the student actually knew about the topic due to inability to express knowledge when writing.

A key to the solution...

Testing accommodations are intended to correct distortions in scores caused by a disability, thus allowing the true competence of a student to be measured accurately. Accommodations are provided in order to minimize the effects of a student's disability and are not meant as a substitute for knowledge and abilities that the student has not attained.

The purpose of accommodations is not to artificially inflate grades. The challenge is to make testing equitable and inclusive while maintaining validity and reliability. In determining a student's need for accommodations, emphasis must be placed on the necessity of the accommodation, not merely the potential benefit.

Tips for using test accommodations

The four common forms of testing accommodations for students with disabilities are: providing alternative timing, allowing a non-standard setting, and allowing changes in presentation and changes in response.

Alternative Timing

When to use alternative timing

Providing extended time is useful to slow readers. The amount of extra time given should be enough to compensate for the extra time a student may need to read the test items. Research has

Examples:

- Extend the time allotted to complete a test
- Alter the time of day that a test is administered
- Administer a test in several sessions or over several days
- Allow frequent breaks during testing

demonstrated that the use of extended timing is of particular benefit *when the standard time limit is less than one hour and when the test measures skills requiring low cognitive complexity.*

Allowing frequent breaks or administering a test over several days is useful to students with attention deficits. They are also useful for students who require extended time beyond the threshold that the student may become fatigued.

Alternative Setting

When to use alternative settings:

Students with attention deficits or are easily distracted often perform better in alternative settings.

Research has demonstrated that students with learning disabilities, particularly minority students, perform significantly better when tests are administered by familiar examiners and in small groups. Research has also shown that many students with ADHD perform better when background music is played during the test administration. Background music may help focus a student's attention and prevent distractions.

Examples:

- Small group administration
- Administration in a study carrel
- Separate room administration
- Test administered by a familiar examiner
- Background music during administration

Alternative Presentation

When to use alternative presentations:

Students with deficits in reading comprehension may benefit from having a test read to them by a teacher or an audio-cassette player. However, students with deficits in listening comprehension may not benefit from this type accommodation.

Examples:

- Use audio-cassette to read test items
- Have a teacher read test items
- Large print
- Allow the use of graphic organizers

Research has also shown large print to be of benefit not only to students with visual impairments but also to students with LD. Large print may be easier to read and having less material on a page may help students organize and focus their thoughts.

Alternative Response

When to use alternative response:

Students with writing deficits or motor problems that prevent functional writing ability can benefit from alternative response accommodations such as dictating answers to a teacher or using an audio-cassette recorder. Severe deficits in motor control may require word processors or augmentative communication devices to communicate and record answers.

Examples:

- Have student dictate answers to a teacher
- Answers recorded on an audio-cassette
- Use of a word processor to record answers
- Recording answers directly on the test instead of an answer sheet.

Research has demonstrated that answering questions directly on a test instead of an answer sheet may be of benefit to students with LD. Avoiding the use of answer sheets and allowing students to mark directly on the test allows students to focus on the test instead of the confusion of transferring answers to an answer sheet.

Linking Accommodations to Specific Disabilities

There is no set list of accommodations that will meet the needs of all students with any specific disability such as LD, MR or ADHD. Accommodations need to be based on the individual learning characteristics of the student, not a generalized label.

Possible accommodations for slow readers

- Extend the time allotted to complete a test
- Alter the time of day that a test is administered
- Administer a test in several sessions or over several days
- Allow frequent breaks during testing
- Use audio-cassette to read test items
- Have a teacher read test items

Possible accommodations for students with poor reading comprehension

- Use audio-cassette to read test items
- Have a teacher read test items

Possible accommodations for students with attention deficits

- Small group administration
- Administration in a study carrel
- Separate room administration
- Test administered by a familiar examiner
- Background music during administration

Possible accommodations for students who have trouble organizing their thoughts

- Recording answers directly on the test instead of an answer sheet.
- Large print tests
- Allow the use of graphic organizers

Possible accommodations for students with poor motor skills or writing skills

- Have student dictate answers to a teacher
- Answers recorded on an audio-cassette
- Use of a word processor to record answers

When Students Continuously Fail Despite the Accommodations

Students who try hard, yet lack the intellectual capability to succeed on tests in an inclusive classroom, can quickly lose hope and stop giving their best effort. In such cases, alternative grading is an option for teachers. Any alternative grading plan must be discussed with the parents and the student in order to communicate clear expectations. The alternative grading plan should be based on the accomplishment of IEP objectives and should not be a subjective decision by the teacher.