Testing Accommodations: Questions and Solutions from the Simple to the Complex

Individuals with disabilities can have many different types of limitations that affect their abilities to take tests. These individuals may need accommodations when taking classroom exams, standardized tests, and licensure exams.

The following is a starting point in the accommodation process and may not address every situation. Accommodations should be made on a case by case basis, considering each student’s individual limitations and accommodation needs.

The following questions are typical testing accommodation questions.

What is alternative format?
Alternative format is any format that is different from the existing test. Alternative format may be: large print, Braille, color-coded text, audio (reader, tape/cd, or computer).

What is extended time?
Extended time means allowing the test-taker extra time to complete the test. The amount of extended time should be correlated to the test-taker’s disability or limitations. Common examples of extended time include: time and a half, double time, and unlimited time.

What is a reader?
A reader is a person who reads the test to the test-taker. This person should be familiar with the terminology or language used on the test. A reader does not interpret, re-word, or explain the test. A reader reads the test directions, questions, and answer choices to the test-taker.

What is a scribe?
A scribe is a person who writes down, or otherwise records, the test-taker’s responses. The scribe does not create answers for the test-taker or help the test-taker identify correct answers. The scribe simply writes the test-taker’s answers down on the test or answer sheet.

What type of tests will people need accommodations for?
A person with a disability can ask for an accommodation on any exam. Some examples of exams are: exams in college or technical school, teaching license exams, driver’s license exams, employment tests, and typing tests.
Who can ask for accommodations in testing?

Individuals with disabilities that inhibit their abilities to take tests can ask for an accommodation.

How does a person with a disability ask for a testing accommodation?

A person with a disability can ask for an accommodation when registering for campus disability services. Oftentimes, in the case of standardized tests and licensure exams, the testing company provides testing accommodation forms to submit. The individual can also make a request verbally or in writing. The person with a disability is responsible for providing documentation of a disability, and the individual can describe the type of accommodation that will be effective.

Do testing accommodations cost the test-taker extra money?

No. The test-taker needing an accommodation pays the same cost as any person taking the same test.

Will test scores or standards be lowered/changed/alartered for a person with a disability?

Generally, no. If all test-takers must obtain a certain “passing score,” so must the test-taker with a disability. The test-taker with a disability may need an accommodation to help meet the standard, but the standard does not have to be lowered, changed, or altered.

One exception to this rule is a situation where the test standard is arbitrary or is not related to the educational or employment requirements. For example, an employee must be able to type 40 words per minute to pass an employment test, but typing is not an essential function of the job.

Will a person with a disability be granted a “test exemption” as an accommodation?

Generally, no. If the test is a requirement of the class or program, application process, the job, or licensing credentials, the test-taker with a disability will probably have to take the test. The test-taker with a disability may, however, ask for an accommodation to assist with the taking the test.
Accommodations

Note: People with disabilities may experience limitations in cognitive abilities, motor abilities, and sensory abilities that can affect test-taking performance. People who have disabilities may have some or all of the limitations listed below. The degree of limitation will vary from individual to individual along with accommodation(s) provided.

Limitations in Cognitive/Neurological Abilities

Test-takers who may need the following accommodations include people with: TBI, MS, MR, fibromyalgia, LD, ADD or ADHD, cancer, and psychological impairments.

Memory: Test-takers may have difficulty remembering events or activities on the day of the test.

• Post or announce: reminders, location of the testing room, location of bathrooms, time remaining, materials to put away or to keep out during testing
• schedule one test per test day during test session
• allow extended time/flexibility (example: take math section on Monday, reading section on Tuesday, and writing on Wednesday.)

Lack of Concentration or Organization: Test-takers may be distracted or disorganized when taking a test. Possible accommodations include:

• testing in a private room
• providing extended time
• providing a reader
• providing the test on tape
• reducing/eliminating distractions
• allowing breaks
• seating test-taker away from doors or windows, and other distractions

Time Management/Performing or Completing Tasks: Test-takers may be unable to complete or perform tasks in a timely manner or meet timelines. Possible accommodations include:

• testing in a private room
• providing extended time
Testing Accommodations: Questions and Solutions from the Simple to the Complex

- having proctor announce time in intervals
- using a clock or watch
- allowing test-taker to maintain written task-list
- allowing test-taker to use watch or timer programmed to alarm or vibrate at set intervals

Reading Print Material: Test-takers may be unable to read test materials. Possible accommodations include:

- providing a reader for the test-taker
- providing test on tape/CD-ROM
- providing extended time
- administering test in private room
- giving instructions in bold print
- allowing the use of a line guide or ruler to keep place in test book or answer sheet
- testing on computer with voice output
- using symbols or pictures where appropriate
- color-coding test by sections or subjects
- putting multiple choice in bold

Writing words, sentences, or paragraphs: Test-takers may be unable to construct written responses as required on the test. Potential accommodations include:

- allowing test-taker to write draft first
- providing a scribe
- allowing verbal responses instead of written responses
- allowing use of graphic organizer
- allowing use of scratch paper
- allowing use of dictionary or thesaurus
- allowing use of computer word processing to create written response: assisting with grammar, assisting with spelling, assisting with time management

Performing Mathematical Calculations: Test-takers may be unable to “do math” as required on the test. Possible accommodations include:

- allowing the use of a calculator (including talking calculator)
- allowing the use of other counting devices (fingers, toes, pencils, beans, etc.)
Testing Accommodations: Questions and Solutions from the Simple to the Complex

- allowing the use of written formulas
- allowing the use of scratch paper
- using flash cards
- allowing the use of times table list/multiplication chart
- allowing the use of pictures/graphics with word problems

Limitations in Motor Abilities

Test-takers who may need the following accommodations include people with TBI, MS, MD, fibromyalgia, paraplegia, quadriplegia, amputations, cancer, CP, back conditions, people of small stature, and people who are obese.

Sitting: Test-takers may have difficulty sitting for long periods of time while taking a test. Test-takers may also have difficulty sitting in a traditional chair or desk. Possible accommodations include:

- providing space at table instead of desk
- allowing for frequent breaks
- providing extended time
- allowing test-taker to alternate sitting/standing
- using an alternative chair, cushion, or footrest

Writing: Test-takers may have difficulty physically writing responses or recording answers as required by the test. Possible accommodations include:

- using any writing product (not just a #2 pencil)
- allowing additional time
- allowing verbal response
- using a scribe
- providing writing aids
- allowing frequent breaks
- using a clipboard to hold paper while writing
- using line guide, writing template, or ruler

Turning Pages: Test-takers may have difficulty turning pages of the test booklet, or holding the test booklet open. Potential accommodations include:

- having a proctor turn pages
- providing page-turning devices
Testing Accommodations: Questions and Solutions from the Simple to the Complex

• providing reader(s)
• providing test on tape/CD
• unstapling booklet and laying flat
• using table instead of desk

Typing: Test-takers may have difficulty typing responses. Possible accommodations include:

• allowing practice on test device or unit
• using speech recognition
• using one handed-keyboards
• using alternative input devices: alternative keyboards and alternative mice

Limitations in Sensory Abilities

Test-takers who may need the following accommodations include people who are deaf or hearing impaired, blind or visually impaired, have TBIs, Expressive Language Disorders, or Auditory Processing Disorders.

Hearing: Test-takers may have difficulty hearing in the testing environment. Possible accommodations include:

• having proctor/administrator use microphone (FM loop)
• putting test-taker in private room
• putting test-taker in front of room
• facing student who reads lips
• posting time prompts in writing
• providing interpreter for sign language

Seeing: Test-takers may have difficulty seeing the test or test materials, or other visuals in the testing environment. Potential accommodations include:

• announcing time prompts
• providing test on tape
• providing reader
• providing alternative format
• providing magnification
• allowing use of talking calculator
• providing test in alternate foreground or background colors
Using screen readers (voice output)
allowing test-taker to get familiar with test environment
allowing for use of assistance dog (care for animal during test time)

Communicating: Test-takers may have difficulty communicating in the testing environment. Possible accommodations include:

- providing interpreter for sign language
- communicating in writing
- providing extended time
- communicating use of symbols instead of words
- communicating via auxiliary device such as:
  - speech board
  - communication cards
  - alpha-numeric pager
  - TTY
  - email

Other Limitations

Panic Attacks: Test-takers may experience panic attacks during test administration. Test-takers who may need the following accommodations include people with ADD and psychological impairments. Possible accommodations include:

- allowing frequent breaks
- extending time
- providing a private room
- providing a regular room – sit in back of room so test taker can leave if necessary
- allowing test-taker to become familiar with test environment
- allowing test-taker to choose own seat
- test administrators have plan of action to deal with emergencies such as passing out, having seizure, or conduct problems

Diarrhea/Vomiting/Nausea: Test-takers may have difficulty managing bodily functions. Test-takers who may need the following accommodations include people with psychological impairments, MS, MD, intestinal disorders, and cancer. Possible accommodations include:
Testing Accommodations: Questions and Solutions from the Simple to the Complex

- allowing frequent breaks
- providing extended time
- providing a private room
- providing regular room – sit in back of room so test-taker can leave discreetly

Headaches: Test-takers may experience mild to severe headaches during the testing administration. Test-takers who may need the following accommodations include people with migraines, vision impairments, and psychological impairments. Potential accommodations include:

- allowing frequent breaks
- allowing use of sunglasses or ball-cap
- turning off fluorescent lights if in private testing room
- using a glare guard
- using a flicker free computer monitor

Fatigue: Test-takers may experience mild to severe fatigue during the testing administration. Test-takers who may need the following accommodations include people with fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, MS, and cancer. Possible accommodations include:

- allowing frequent breaks
- providing extended time
- providing private room
- scheduling one test per day on test day
- allowing extended time/flexibility
- providing space to lay down during breaks

Temperature Sensitivity: Test-taker may get hot or cold during testing administration. Test-takers who may need the following accommodations include people with fibromyalgia, cancer, MS, MD, and circulatory disorders. Possible accommodations include:

- allowing use of blanket or jacket
- adjusting temperature in room
- using a cool vest
- using a fan
- placing individual by window
- placing individual away from vent
Testing Accommodations: Questions and Solutions from the Simple to the Complex

- allowing test-taker to bring gloves, socks, etc.

Chemical Sensitivity: Test-takers may experience mild to severe reactions to chemicals, fragrances, or perfumes. Test-takers who may need the following accommodations include people with multiple chemical sensitivity, asthma, and migraine headaches. Potential accommodations include:

- having proctor wear no perfume
- testing in a private room
- placing individual by window
- having the individual use a mask
- using a fan
- providing HEPA filter in room – turn on prior to start of test

Dietary needs: Test-takers may need to eat, drink, or take medications during the test administration. Test-takers who may need the following accommodations include people with diabetes, cancer, intestinal disorders, and psychiatric impairments.

- providing extended time
- providing private room
- allowing test-taker to eat during test
- allowing test-taker to drink during test
- allowing time to administer medications to self

Resources

The Galvin Group wishes to acknowledge that content in this document has been taken in entirety from the Job Accommodations Network (JAN)’s Accommodation and Compliance Series, with minor editorial changes. For more information visit JAN’s Searchable Online Accommodation Resource (SOAR) at http://askjan.org/soar.

For test accommodations and test proctoring policies, procedures and forms, please go to Section Four of the Galvin Group website.

For more information on examinations or courses, read the Department of Justice’s Title III Technical Assistance Manual, Chapter 4.6 online at http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/taman3.html.