

School Accommodations and Modifications

Some students with disabilities need accommodations or modifications in their educational program in order to be successful in school. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its regulations do not offer a definition for an accommodation or modification. However, there is general agreement as to what the terms mean.

An accommodation allows a student to complete the same assignments as other students, but permits a change in the timing, formatting, setting, scheduling, response or presentation. An accommodation does not alter what the test or assignment measures. Examples of accommodations include a student who is blind taking a Braille version of a test, or a student taking a test alone in a quiet room.

A modification adjusts the expectations for an assignment or a test. It permits a change in what a test or assignment measures. Examples include: a) a child is permitted to complete only part of a standard; b) a child is given an alternate assignment at a different level instead of the standard assignment.

Accommodations or modifications should be written into a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Some children may have a disability that is not severe enough for them to receive special education. An option for this child may be to develop a Section 504 Plan. Section 504 is a federal law that prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities. A Section 504 plan may list the changes needed in a child's educational program for him or her to be successful. Any changes must be based on the child's disability and fulfill the purpose of meeting individual needs. It's important to include the student, if appropriate, when discussing accommodations and modifications. A first step is to ask the child what would be helpful in classes where he or she is having difficulty.

Below are examples of modifications and/or accommodations. These ideas may be helpful when educating students with disabilities. Keep

in mind that any accommodation or modification an IEP team or Section 504 team chooses must be based on individual needs. Accommodations or modifications must be provided if written in the child's IEP or 504 plan.

Textbooks and Curriculum

Books

- Provide alternative books at a simpler reading level.
- Provide audiotapes of textbooks. Have the child follow the text while listening.
- Provide summaries of chapters.
- Provide high interest reading material at or slightly above the student's comfortable reading level.
- Use peer readers.
- Use marker to highlight important text sections of assignments.
- Use word-for-word sentence fill-ins.
- Provide two sets of textbooks. Keep one at home for the forgetful student.
- Use index cards to write down major themes.
- Provide the student with a list of discussion questions before reading the material.
- Give page numbers to help the student find answers.
- Provide written materials in alternative formats such as Braille or large print.

Curriculum

- Shorten assignments to focus on mastery of key concepts.
- Shorten spelling tests to the most functional words.



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- Substitute alternatives for written assignments (clay models, posters, panoramas, collections, etc.).
- Specify and review often exactly what the student will need to learn to pass.
- Modify expectations based on student needs (e.g., “When you have read this chapter, you should be able to list three reasons for the Civil War.”).
- Give alternatives to long written reports (e.g., several short reports, preview new audiovisual materials and write a short review, give an oral report).

Classroom Environment

- Review the classroom rules frequently.
- Evaluate classroom structure against the student’s needs (flexible structure, firm limits, etc.).
- Keep workspace clear of unrelated materials.
- Keep classroom quiet during intense learning times.
- Reduce visual distractions in the classroom (mobiles, etc.).
- Provide a computer for written work.
- Seat the student close to the teacher or a positive role model.
- Permit use of a study carrel. (Have more than one so that a student is not singled out.)
- Seat the student away from windows or doorways.
- Provide a clear view of the chalkboard, teacher, movie screen, etc.
- Keep extra supplies of classroom materials (pencils, books) on hand.
- Use alternatives to word puzzles or word finds.
- Maintain adequate space between desks.

Instruction and Assignments

Directions

- Use both oral and printed directions.
- Give directions in small steps and in as few words as possible.
- Number and sequence the steps in a task.
- Have student repeat the directions for a task.

- Provide visual aids.
- Show a model of the end product of directions (e.g., a completed math problem or quiz).
- Stand near the student when giving directions or presenting a lesson.

Time/transitions

- Alert student several minutes before a transition from one activity to another is planned; give several reminders.
- Provide additional time to complete a task.
- Allow extra time to turn in homework without penalty.
- Provide assistance when moving about the building.

Handwriting

- Use worksheets that require minimal writing.
- Use fill-in questions with space for a brief response rather than a short essay.
- Provide a “designated notetaker” or photocopy of other student or teacher notes. (Do not require a poor notetaker or a student with no friends to make this arrangement.)
- Provide a print outline to accompany each videotape of filmstrip.
- Provide a print copy of assignments or directions written on the blackboard.
- Omit assignments that require copying, or let the student use a tape recorder to dictate answers.

Grading

- Use daily or frequent grading averaged into a grade for the quarter.
- Weight daily work higher than tests for a student who performs poorly on tests.
- Mark the correct answers rather than the incorrect ones.
- Permit a student to rework missed problems for a better grade.
- Average grades out when assignments are reworked, or grade on corrected work.

- Use a pass-fail or an alternative grading system where the student is assessed on his or her own growth.

Tests

- Go over directions orally.
- Teach the student how to take tests (e.g., how to review, to plan time for each section).
- Provide a vocabulary list with definitions.
- Permit as much time as needed to finish tests.
- Allow tests to be taken in a room with few distractions (e.g., the library).
- Read test materials to the student, and allow oral responses.
- Divide tests into small sections of similar questions or problems.
- Use recognition tests (true-false, multiple choice, or matching) instead of essays.
- Allow the student to complete an independent project as an alternative test.
- Give progress reports instead of grades.
- Grade spelling separately from content.
- Provide typed test materials, not tests written in cursive.
- Allow take-home or open-book tests.
- Provide possible answers for fill-in-the blank sections.
- Provide the first letter of the missing word.

Math

- Allow the student to use a calculator without penalty.
- Group similar problems together (e.g., all addition in one section).
- Provide fewer problems on a worksheet (e.g., 4 to 6 problems on a page, rather than 20.).
- Require fewer problems completed to attain passing grades.
- Use enlarged graph paper to write problems to help the student keep numbers in columns.
- Provide a table of math facts for reference.

- Tape a number line to the student's desk.
- Read and explain story problems, or break problems into smaller steps.
- Use pictures or graphics.

Other

- Use Post-it notes to mark assignments in textbooks.
- Check progress and provide feedback often in the first few minutes of each assignment.
- Place a ruler under sentences being read for better tracking.
- Provide overview of long-term assignments so the student knows what to do, and due dates.
- Break long-term assignments into small steps, with daily monitoring and frequent grading.
- Have the student practice presenting in a small group before presenting to the class.
- Hand out worksheets one at a time.
- Sequence work, with the easiest part first.
- Provide study guides and study questions that directly relate to tests.
- Praise student for recording assignments and due dates in a notebook.
- Draw arrows on worksheets, chalkboard, or overheads to show how ideas are related, or use other graphic organizers such as flow charts.

Behavior

- Arrange a "check-in" time to organize the day.
- Pair the student with a student who is a good behavior model for class projects.
- Modify classroom policies that may discriminate against the student (e.g., provide frequent breaks for the student who cannot pay attention for long periods of time)
- Use nonverbal cues to remind the student of rule violations.
- Amend consequences for rule violations (e.g., reward a forgetful student for remembering to bring pencils to class, rather than punishing the failure to remember).

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- Reinforce (often) when a student displays positive behavior.
 - Develop an individualized behavior intervention plan that consistent with the student's ability and skills.
 - Increase the frequency and immediacy of reinforcement.
 - Arrange for a student to leave the classroom for a designated "safe place" when highly stressed.
 - Develop a system or a code word to let a student know when behavior is not appropriate.
 - Ignore behaviors that are not seriously disruptive.
 - Develop interventions for behaviors that are annoying but not deliberate. For example, place a small piece of foam rubber on the desk of a student who continually taps a pencil on the desktop.
 - Be aware of behavior changes that relate to medication or the length of the school day; modify expectations if appropriate.