Overcoming Barriers and Assessment Accommodations

Field Guides to RtI Prepared by

Wayne County RtI/LD Committee

2007

Table of Contents

Assessment of Achievement Skills: Barriers to Performance

It is important that assessment methods measure the student's skills and not the student's disability. When students do not perform well on classroom assessments, it is important to consider the barriers to performance that may stem from the assessment design.

What are the barriers to success presented by the screening and assessment tools?

Review the demands of the assessment relative to the individual student with the following considerations in mind:

TASK DIFFICULTY	RESPONSE REQUIREMENTS	SETTING REQUIREMENTS
Task difficulty refers to the difficulty of the test items and the curriculum content sampled. It will be important to consider if the prompt or test design is appropriate to the grade and age of the student. Tasks that are too easy will make a student look more capable than the student would perform in an objective environment. Tasks that are too difficult will make the student frustrated and provide data that makes the student appear to be unskilled when the assessment was not appropriately leveled to the instructional context and child.	All tests require a response from the student. Most tests are either oral or written. For students with disabilities, the demands of the response may interfere with the ability of the student to demonstrate proficiency. For example, a child with a motor deficit may not be able to write quickly or legibly. A child who stutters may be at a disadvantage if asked to orally respond within time limits. A child's test performance must be reviewed relative to what is known about the child's ability to or opportunity to provide his/her best answer.	Assessments are just a snapshot of student's abilities. The time of day and simple room arrangements can facilitate or interfere with student performance. Make certain that students are relaxed and comfortable with the tester and the testing environment. Students with physical conditions may require accommodations in seating, lighting, table arrangement, or other adaptations to physically participate in the testing.

"It is important that assessment methods measure the student's skills and not the student's disability."

Barriers to Performance—continued

LANGUAGE DEMANDS

Children of poverty and children from multi-lingual homes may be challenged in testing and assessment situations due to the language demands of the test. It is important to consider language demands of assessments in analyzing student performance. For students who are English Language Learners (ELL), is important to assess the child's language proficiency skills and the language of instruction before making conclusions about learning needs based on the content or screening assessment of academic skill.

Further, tests have language components in the directions and content that may cause a child to have difficulty demonstrating mastery or understanding. For children of poverty and ELL students, be careful that the choice or words in tests are not misleading. For example, middle school students recently encountered the Science MEAP item that instructed them to "Draw a conclusion." Many children drew a picture to represent their understanding of the concept. They later learned that they were given a score of "0" because the intent of the item was for the children to write a short essay. Be sensitive to the language you use in your test and assessment design. Make sure you are testing the skill, not the acculturation of the student.
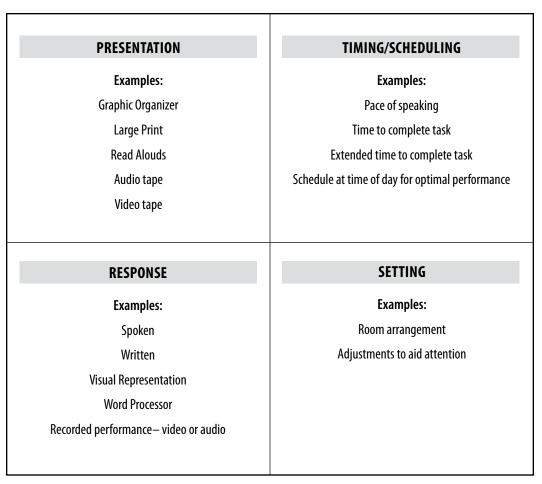
TIMING DEMANDS

Timed tests can place demands on children to perform quickly. For some children, the time pressure can be fun and motivating. For others, timed tests can induce anxiety. Some children may have motor or other deficits that interfere with their ability to respond quickly and accurately. For ELLs, remember that the student may be processing more slowly because they must translate the item into their first language, figure out the answer, then translate back into English before replying. When analyzing the results of screening tests that are timed, consider the possibility that child characteristics may have interacted with the timing to impact student performance.

PATTERNS OF ERRORS

The overall score is a great general index of where the child is performing but important information is gained by looking at error patterns. The types of errors that children make can inform the teacher as to where to focus the intervention.

Four Dimensions of Accommodations

Typically, testing accommodations are designed based on the four dimensions of Presentation, Response, Timing/Scheduling, and Setting. Assessments may be modified in the format and/or method of presentation of the assessment activity. The purpose of an accommodation is not to create an unfair advantage to the student. Rather, due to barriers such as those described above, accommodations to the conditions of the assessment serve to create access for the student by removing barriers to performance. Both high stakes tests, such as the MEAP, and low stakes assessments, such as classroom tests and projects should be accommodated for students to remove barriers to meaningful participation in learning and assessments.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS

PRESENTATION	TIMING/SCHEDULING
Examples:	**Examples:**
Graphic Organizer	Pace of speaking
Large Print	Time to complete task
Read Alouds	Extended time to complete task
Audio tape	Schedule at time of day for optimal performance
Video tape	
RESPONSE	**SETTING**
Examples:	**Examples:**
Spoken	Room arrangement
Written	Adjustments to aid attention
Visual Representation	
Word Processor	
Recorded performance– video or audio	

Assessment accommodations may not be used if they will change what the test is intended to measure. For example, if the purpose of the assessment is to measure how many words a child can read in one minute, it would not be appropriate to change the timing of the test as an accommodation.

Check with the developer of the assessment to make sure the accommodations used in testing will remove barriers and preserve the integrity of the test.

References

Assessment Accommodation Summary Table (2006) Michigan Department of Education. http://www.mi.gov/documents/Exhibit_B_Accommodations_Table_127886_7.pdf

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Thanks also to Kate de Fuccio, Graphic Designer, and the Wayne RESA Print Shop for the layout and production of this document.

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