

APPLYING FOR ACCOMMODATIONS ON COLLEGE ENTRANCE TESTS

The application process for individuals planning to enter college can be a daunting experience. For individuals with disabilities who are requesting testing accommodations, this can be even more challenging, as it often requires assembling necessary documentation, completing additional paperwork, and anticipating deadlines. This IDA Fact Sheet gives a broad overview of the process in order to assist individuals who are requesting test accommodations on high stakes tests such as the SAT and ACT. It provides guidance about what forms to submit, how to provide sufficient disability documentation, and how to gather supplemental information if needed to support accommodation requests. Keep in mind that each testing agency sets its own requirements for requesting accommodations.

The Application Process

- Test takers should read the test information on the program's website. Many tests are administered on computer and incorporate functions such as a built-in calculator, clock, etc. Additionally, most testing agencies provide supplemental information or a handbook for test takers with disabilities.
- The testing agency website will give specific information about how to apply for accommodations. This should be read carefully to determine which accommodations are necessary (e.g., additional testing time, or breaks, separate room, a reader, etc.).
- Special Services and/or counseling staff in the student's high school or district may be able to assist in completing the application and acquiring the required documentation.

- Early submission of applications is important, as it's not unusual for testing agencies to request additional scores, updated testing, or clarification, which can cause delays. This is particularly true during peak application periods.
- Once the agency receives an application for accommodations, it may be two months before the applicant is notified. If additional testing or an appeal is needed, all this must be accomplished and submitted at least 60 days in advance of the test date.
- Since most testing agencies no longer "flag" scores obtained under non-standard conditions, it is important to request accommodations that are needed.

Documentation

- Typically, all documentation should be sent in one complete packet. This pertains to supporting documentation (IEP, transcripts, letters re: past accommodations).
- Testing agencies often require current documentation according to their individual "recency" criteria. For example, many testing agencies request documentation for learning disabilities to be dated within the last three to five years to reflect the test taker's need for specific accommodations. Test takers should review the documentation guidelines posted on the website.
- Often, a current, comprehensive evaluation is needed, as an adult version of some tests may be required. For example, most testing agencies will not accept a handwritten prescription-pad note from a doctor. Documentation should be

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complete, dated, signed, in English, and on official letterhead. Disability documentation should address all of the following:

- The existence of an impairment that substantially limits a major life activity, as compared to most people in the general population
 - A diagnosis of the disability and the current impact of impairment and how it limits the student's ability to take the test under standard conditions
 - A rationale for why the requested accommodations are necessary and appropriate. For example, if extra time is requested, the evaluation must say how much extended time should be provided and on what basis.
 - The accommodations that are requested should generally match those provided in the past.
- Some accommodations may not require prior approval, such as braces or crutches, eyeglasses, insulin pump, etc. Lockers that can be accessed during breaks are typically provided for storage of food, water, and/or medication, if applicable.
 - If sufficient disability documentation is unavailable or outdated, it may take up to nine months in advance to find a qualified professional with a qualified professional with experience and expertise in diagnosing and documenting the disability in question. That evaluator will need relevant historical information, including:
 - Letters documenting a history of accommodations in school, such as IEPs or 504 plans, or proof of accommodations on statewide assessments.
 - A description of tutoring or coaching services provided in the past.

- A comprehensive evaluation report for diagnosis of the disability and accommodation determination.
- Additionally, school records from elementary and high school as well as teacher comments will help support a history of a disability. High school transcripts may provide good evidence if they showed the impact of the disability on grades (e.g., dropped classes, withdrawals, incompletes, or failing grades). It is not always the case that accommodations in the past will automatically continue. An ongoing need for accommodations can be described in a personal statement.
- Many colleges and universities with strong school psychology programs perform evaluations at a reduced fee if a private evaluation is not feasible.

Types of Decision Letters

There are three basic types of decision letters that the testing agency sends:

1. **Approval**—This type of letter will list the accommodations that have been approved.
 - Once accommodations have been approved, directions on the approval letter regarding how to schedule the test and other pertinent information.
 - Be aware that extra time may be needed to schedule the test after approval for accommodations. For example, extra time may be needed to secure a reader or scribe.
2. **Request for Additional Information**—This type of letter is not a denial of the request. It specifies that the agency needs more information to complete the review.

3. **Denial**—If the testing agency finds the documentation insufficient to support the accommodation request, this letter will explain the decision and will include options for requesting further review.
 - **Appeal Process:** Each testing agency has established a procedure to allow an appeal of its decision. The information on how to appeal a decision is typically stated in the denial letter or on the agency’s website. When the requested information is submitted, the request will be reconsidered.

Preparing for the Test

Whether or not an accommodation request is approved, it is important for the student to become familiar with the upcoming test.

- Most testing agencies have a wide range of practice materials at no or low cost available to test takers.
- Areas of particular focus are the test format, the types of questions used, and the test directions for each type of question. This can reduce the amount of time spent familiarizing oneself with instructions on the test day. Alternate-format practice materials can be requested if this is one of the desired accommodations.
- The sample test questions can be practiced with and without the requested accommodations. The goal is to increase the number of questions correctly completed within the time limit. As you practice, try to increase the number of questions you can complete correctly within the time limit.
- Test sites differ, so it is a good idea to check out the location in advance.

Resources

- **AHEAD** (Association on Higher Education and Disability) This is a professional association committed to full participation of persons with disabilities in postsecondary education. www.ahead.org
- **Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities** www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transit/transition.html
- **Rights and Responsibilities of College Students with LD** (Learning Disabilities Association of America) <https://ldaamerica.org/rights-and-responsibilities-of-college-students-with-learning-disabilities-ld/>
- **Educational Testing Service** <http://www.ets.org/disabilities>
- **ACT Test** website <http://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/registration/accommodations.html>

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