

School accommodation ideas for students who receive Section 504 or special education services

Students with disabilities who receive Section 504 or special education services often need accommodations¹ to their educational programs. For **special education students**, accommodations help a student accomplish Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals, participate and make progress in the general curriculum, participate and be educated with students with and without disabilities, and participate in extracurricular activities. For students with a **Section 504 plan**, accommodations are used to eliminate barriers to full participation in school activities.

While the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 do not specifically define accommodations, there is some agreement as to what they are. An **accommodation**, as used in this document, allows a student to complete the same assignment or test as other students, but with a change in the timing, formatting, setting, scheduling, response or presentation. This accommodation does not alter in any significant way what the test or assignment measures. For example, a student who is blind could take a Braille version of a test or use assistive technology. Another student might take a test alone in a quiet room.

Accommodations should be discussed by the IEP or Section 504 team.² Accommodations should be chosen to fit the student's individual needs. Asking the student what would be helpful is a good first step. If the student has an IEP, team decisions are written into a student's IEP. A student covered by Section 504 may or may not have a written plan. In both cases the agreed upon accommodations must be provided by the school.

Assistive technology can be used as an accommodation. Under IDEA assistive technology is defined as, "any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain or improve functional capabilities of a child with a disability."³ There are many assistive technology products available to help students with disabilities.

The following accommodations are provided as examples, which may or may not be appropriate for an individual student.

Textbooks and curriculum

Books

- Provide summaries of chapters
- Use peer readers
- Use a marker to highlight important textbook sections
- Provide two sets of classroom curriculum materials, one for home and one for school
- Provide the student with a list of discussion questions before reading the material
- Provide books and other written materials in alternate formats such as Braille, large print, audio formats, and digital text
- Explore use of assistive technology

¹ Some students who receive special education services may also need modifications. A **modification** is an adjustment to an assignment or a test that changes the standard or what the test or assignment is supposed to measure. Examples of modifications include a student completing work on part of an academic standard or a student completing an alternate assignment that is more easily achievable than the original assignment.

² See "Questions for Parents to Ask about School Adaptations," media.pacer.org/php/php-c91.pdf

³ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Regulation 300.5.

Curriculum

- Provide a vocabulary list
- Substitute alternatives for long writing assignments (clay models, posters, panoramas, collections, electronic presentation, or oral presentation)
- Provide alternatives to reading aloud in front of the class
- Provide alternatives to crossword puzzles or word finds

Classroom environment

- Keep work space clear of unrelated materials
- Keep the classroom quiet during intense learning times
- Reduce visual distractions in the classroom
- Provide a computer for written work
- Seat the student close to the teacher or a positive role model
- Use a study carrel (provide extra carrels so that the student will not feel singled out)
- Seat the student away from windows, doorways, and radiators
- Provide a clear view of the board, teacher, and screen
- Keep extra classroom materials (pencils, paper) on hand
- Provide additional personal space between desks
- Post a visual schedule on student's desk
- Use a pass system for students needing frequent movement breaks
- Provide accessible classroom locations and accessible furniture (such as special desks, tables, chairs)
- Provide headsets to block noise
- Provide FM or sound field amplification system for listening
- Provide organizers for lockers/desk

Instructions and assignments

Directions

- Use both oral and printed directions
- Highlight key words in directions
- Give directions in small steps using as few words as possible
- Number and sequence steps in a task
- Have a student repeat directions to check for comprehension
- Provide visual aids
- Show a model of the end product (such as a completed math problem or finished quiz)
- Stand near the student when giving directions
- Allow use of tape recorder or assistive technology device to record directions

Time and making transitions

- Alert student several minutes before a transition from one activity to another
- Provide additional time to complete a task
- Allow specified amount of extra time to turn in homework without penalty
- Provide assistance when moving between classrooms or around the building
- Allow student to leave classroom 2-3 minutes early to avoid crowded hallways
- Increase wait time for responses
- Provide a visual timer

Handwriting

- Use worksheets that require minimal writing
- Provide a computer for written work
- Use fill-in questions with space for a brief response rather than a short essay
- Provide a “designated note taker” or photocopy of another student’s or teacher’s notes (do not expect student to arrange with another student for notes)
- Provide outlines for videos
- Provide print copy of any assignments or directions written on the board
- Provide photocopy materials rather than requiring student to copy from the board or text book
- Let the student use technology to record or dictate answers
- Provide access to word processing applications or software, portable note taker, tablet or similar device
- Provide adaptive writing tools, pencil grips, slanted surface
- Allow use of speech-to-text software for long written assignments
- Allow student to dictate a writing assignment for a teacher or teacher’s aide to transcribe
- Provide partially completed outlines of lectures for students to fill in the blanks
- Explore use of alternate keyboard options and writing software

Grading

- Use daily or frequent grading and average into a grade for the quarter
- Weigh daily work more heavily than tests for a student who performs poorly on tests due to the disability
- Mark the correct answers rather than incorrect ones

Tests

- Go over directions orally
- Permit extended time to complete tests
- Allow test to be taken in a room with few distractions
- Have materials read to the student and allow oral responses (for tests that don’t measure reading or writing)
- Provide study guides and study questions that directly relate to tests
- Divide tests into small sections of similar questions and problems
- Allow the student to complete an independent project as an alternative test
- Provide a sample or practice test

Math

- Allow the student to use a calculator without penalty if needed
- Group similar problems together (such as all addition in one section unless testing to see if student can determine which function to use)
- Provide fewer problems on a worksheet (e.g., 4 to 6 problems per page rather than 20 or 30 but the same total number of problems)
- Use enlarged graph paper to help the student keep numbers in columns
- Provide a table of math facts for reference (unless testing math facts)
- Tape a number line to student’s desk
- Read and explain story problems or break problems into smaller steps
- Use pictures or graphics
- Circle math computation signs
- Require the student to solve fewer problems to focus on mastery of concepts

Behavior

- Pair student with students modeling good behavior for classwork, projects, and mentoring
- Reward positive behaviors
- Create a “back pocket pass” the student can use to leave the classroom without asking permission
- Use non-verbal cues or code word to communicate inappropriate behavior
- Establish plan to manage side effects of medication (such as water bottle for thirst, extra bathroom breaks)

Other accommodations

- Check progress and provide feedback often in the first few minutes of each assignment
- Introduce an overview of long-term assignments so the student knows what is expected and when it is due
- Provide structured assignments with lists for the student to cross off when finished
- Break long-term assignments into small, sequential steps with daily monitoring and frequent grading
- Have the student practice presenting in a small group before presenting to the class
- Give student worksheets one at a time
- Sequence work with the easiest parts first
- Allow use of sensory tools
- Establish a form of communication between home and school
- Reward student for recording assignments and due dates in a notebook
- Draw arrows on worksheets or the board to show how ideas are related, or use other graphic organizers such as flow charts
- Provide locker accommodations (such as a key versus a combination lock)
- Explore use of memory organization aides (tablets, cell phone calendars, task lists, and visual schedules)
- Use color coded materials for each class