Students with disabilities often need accommodations—adjustments in the way that instruction is presented—in order to successfully participate in the general curriculum. But while such accommodations allow students with disabilities to participate on an equal footing with other students, they are not intended to alter the content of assignments or to give them an unfair advantage.

According to the Learning Disabilities Association of America, there are many different ways in which teachers can use accommodations to help students with disabilities learn more effectively. For example:

• Providing tape-recorded versions of texts and other materials as supplements for students who have difficulty reading;
• Assigning a “note-sharing buddy” or providing a lesson outline for students who have difficulty taking notes;
• Arranging for the use of spell-checking software for students who have difficulty with spelling;
• Using visual organizers and word webs to assist students who have difficulty building vocabulary and comprehension skills; and
• Allowing sufficient “wait time” for answers from students who have difficulty processing auditory information.

While there is no universally approved list of accommodations, there are some commonly accepted categories (LD Online, n.d.):

**Presentation** includes providing materials in large text format, reducing the number of items per page or line, or using a designated reader to read the material to the student.

**Response** includes allowing for answers to be given verbally, dictated to a designated scribe, or provided via computer.

**Timing** includes allowing for frequent breaks or additional time to complete an assignment or test.

**Setting** includes providing adjustments in seating arrangements, lighting, or acoustics.

**Assessment Accommodations**

Accommodations also can be used to assist students with disabilities in assessment situations. An assessment accommodation is simply an alteration in the way a test and/or assessment is administered. (Note that care must be taken to ensure that the accommodation does not change what is being measured.) Many such accommodations are nothing more than sound instructional practices that effective teachers use with all students (Reed, Warger, Jeffs, Walser, & Zabala, 2007; ASPIRE, 2000). Here is a quick overview:

**Scheduling accommodations** affect when the assessment will take place—over several sessions or at a particular time of day, for example. They may be needed because a student takes medication that affects performance at certain times of the day, to allow a student to recover from physical exertion following a physical education class, or because the student is easily frustrated.

**Timing accommodations** are changes in the duration of the testing, including the amount of time allowed for the test or how that time is organized.

**Setting accommodations** affect where the assessments are given—whether in a small-group setting, a special location in...
the classroom, or even in a separate room. These accommodations are generally provided for students who have trouble maintaining their focus in a group situation.

**Presentation accommodations** affect how an assessment is given. They typically address such considerations as the student's primary mode of communication, whether or not the student can listen and follow oral instructions, and whether or not the student can read and follow written instructions.

**Response accommodations** are designed to address physical and sensory disabilities that limit the student's ability to respond. They also can address the needs of students with other difficulties related to memory and sequencing.

Many of the accommodations associated with assessment are considered to be assistive technology, defined by the United States Assistive Technology Act of 1998 as any “product, device, or equipment, whether acquired commercially, modified or customized, that is used to maintain, increase, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.”

The Technology and Media (TAM) Division of the Council for Exceptional Children has developed some special tools—TAM Technology Fans—that are designed to provide a quick reference when considering assistive technology devices. For more information about the TAM Technology Fans, visit [www.tamcec.org](http://www.tamcec.org).

**References**


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