



Accommodations

Students with learning disabilities face many challenges in school, however many of these difficulties can be addressed by providing accommodations. An accommodation is a change or alteration to the regular way a student is expected to learn, complete assignments or participate in the classroom. There are three types of accommodations:

- environmental accommodations; e.g., alternative seating, adaptive devices
- instructional accommodations; e.g., providing copies of notes, alternative reading materials
- assessment accommodations; e.g., extra time, oral tests.

For a list of possible accommodations, see [Sample General Accommodations](#) and [Sample Academic and Instructional Accommodations](#).

Environmental Accommodations

The classroom should be nurturing, supportive and successful for all students. To help make this true for students with special needs, teachers may need to provide various environmental accommodations. Environmental accommodations may be related to the resources and materials the student uses or to the layout and use of classroom space.

Sample environmental accommodations include:

- enlarging reading materials
- arranging for a scribe to write down what the student dictates
- allowing use of manipulatives, such as objects for counting
- providing pencil and pen grips
- providing desktop number lines and alphabet charts
- providing access to computers for word processing, spell checkers, graphics, organizers
- providing different types of paper, such as paper with grids, dotted middle lines or raised lines
- using carrels or tables for students who need a quiet spot free from distractions
- allowing a student to stand rather than sit for selected activities
- rearranging the seating plan on a regular basis until the best location for a student is identified.

Instructional Accommodations

Instructional accommodations are changes to the way information and concepts are presented or practised to ensure that each student has the opportunities and support he or she needs to learn. This may involve modifying teaching strategies or learning activities in a variety of ways.

Sample instructional accommodations include:

- varying the amount of material to be learned or practised
- breaking instruction into steps
- pairing written instructions with oral instructions
- using peer partners or tutors
- demonstrating or modelling a sample of the required task or activity
- posing questions that require different levels of thinking
- using role-playing to practise new skills
- using advance organizers.

Assessment Accommodations

Some students require accommodations that allow classroom assessments to measure and communicate student growth and achievement clearly and realistically. Some students will know what they need in order to demonstrate their knowledge in the classroom and in testing situations. It is important to provide an opportunity for students and parents to suggest or respond to proposed assessment accommodations.

Sample assessment accommodations include:

- allowing extended time
- allowing breaks during the test
- reducing the number of questions
- breaking a test into parts and administering them at separate times
- providing a taped test and making students aware that they may listen to part or all of the tape more than once
- providing a reader or a scribe
- providing opportunity to record answers
- providing more detailed instructions and confirming the student's understanding of the test process
- administering the test in a small group setting or to an individual student
- administering the test in a separate room, free from distractions
- providing noise buffers (e.g., headphones).

Assistive Technology

There is growing interest in assistive technology for students with learning disabilities. The term assistive technology refers to any item, piece of equipment or product that is used to help individuals improve their ability to perform specific tasks. Assistive technology provides tools that allow individuals with learning disabilities to work more effectively within academic and vocational settings. Computers are the most well-known form of assistive technology but there are a variety of products available to help students with learning disabilities. For a list of examples, see [Examples of Assistive Technology Adaptations](#).

Students who are experiencing significant academic difficulties should consider using assistive technology, however not every student with a learning disability needs assistive technology. The decision to try assistive technology should be made on an individual basis, after considering the student's strengths, needs and motivation.

Barriers to Effective Use of Accommodations

Teachers play a key role in helping students identify and use accommodations appropriately. Similarly, parents, students and other members of the learning team have a role in selecting, monitoring and evaluating the use of accommodations. Understanding some of the common barriers to the effective use of accommodations is an important starting point. Common barriers include the following.

Misunderstanding the purpose

- Parents, students and teachers sometimes perceive that accommodations give students with special needs an unfair advantage over other students. In reality, accommodations give the student the same opportunity to succeed as other students.
- Parents, students and teachers may also believe that accommodations replace the need to acquire or develop basic skills. Although accommodations are necessary for many students, it is important to balance the use of accommodations with the teaching and practice of basic literacy, numeracy and study skills so that students can develop these skills to their fullest potential.

Selecting accommodations that are not appropriate

- Deciding on appropriate accommodations is not an easy task. Many teachers, psychologists and other personnel report having difficulty translating assessment information into appropriate accommodations. As a result, there is a tendency to rely on the same basic accommodations for all students with particular kinds of special needs (e.g., learning disabilities), rather than individualizing the accommodations to match the specific learning needs and strengths of the student.

Strategies to Support Effective Use of Accommodations

Not involving the student in the process

- Teachers and other school staff often report that it is difficult to involve students in the decision-making process. However, research indicates that students benefit most from accommodations when they participate in the selection process. Often a student who would benefit from an accommodation does not make full use of it because he or she is self-conscious about doing things differently than peers. Involving students in the selection process provides opportunities for them to learn about and become comfortable using accommodations.

Using accommodations inconsistently

- When accommodations are not used consistently, it is difficult for teachers to determine if they are helping. Also, students need time and opportunities to learn how to use accommodations effectively in a variety of situations, not just on major assignments, such as tests or exams.

There are several important considerations related to the selection, implementation and monitoring of accommodations that will help overcome the barriers described above.

Base decisions on a thorough understanding of student strengths and needs.

- Use information from both formal and informal sources when selecting accommodations.
- Identify student strengths and learning preferences, and use them to determine appropriate accommodations. Understanding the student's needs is important in determining what type of accommodation is necessary; however, it is equally important to align the specific accommodations with the student's strengths and learning preferences. The chart below shows an example of how learning strengths could be used to select accommodations for students with memory difficulties.
- Consider accommodations that are more typically associated with students with visual, hearing or mobility challenges. For instance, students with learning disabilities may benefit from large print materials or the use of a FM-system to amplify sound.
- Select accommodations that are the least intrusive for students. If possible, avoid accommodations that isolate students from peers or draw unnecessary attention.

Sample accommodations for students with memory difficulties:	<i>Consider these accommodations for students who learn best by</i>		
	seeing	hearing	doing
Provide one instruction at a time.		✓	
Build routines into the day for recording information in day-timers or assignment books.	✓		✓
Provide memory aids for frequently used information such as key vocabulary and schedules.	✓		
Use visual cues, such as colour coding, photo and drawing sequences, charts and videos.	✓		
Use auditory and kinesthetic cues in combination. Combine songs with movement and dance patterns.		✓	✓
Provide regularly scheduled reviews of procedures and concepts (e.g., review previously learned skills and ideas at the start of each day; review new information at the end of the day).		✓	
Make lists of reminders regularly, and note dates and assignments on a calendar.	✓		✓

Use a collaborative process.

- Educate parents and students about the benefits of using accommodations. Be honest about the difficulties students may encounter.
- Involve relevant specialists in selecting appropriate accommodations based on their knowledge of students' strengths and needs, and the demands of the setting.
- Ask parents and students about their preferences regarding accommodations. Respect parents' and students' opinions and attitudes toward accommodations. If the student is not comfortable with an accommodation, it is important to revisit his or her strengths and supports and then brainstorm alternative accommodations that the student will commit to trying for a period of time before the next review meeting.

Use accommodations consistently and monitor student performance.

- Prioritize the introduction of accommodations if more than one accommodation is used. Let students become familiar with one accommodation before introducing another.
- Consult with students about the use of accommodations after they have tried them for a period of time. Compare student performance before and after.
- Set a time to formally review students' performance using accommodations.

- Teach students how to use accommodations, especially if they involve assistive technology or assistance from personnel (e.g., scribes or readers). Often an accommodation will be introduced as part of a student's IPP goals. For example, for students needing to build organizational skills, the correct and consistent use of a particular strategy might be the focus of a goal or objective such as "Suzanne will use a binder-checklist with her study buddy every Friday afternoon to reorganize or add any missing items in her LA binder." Once the student has mastered the use of the strategy or equipment, it will be listed as an accommodation in the IPP.

Balance the use of accommodations with the teaching of core skills

- Teach and provide opportunities to practise basic literacy, numeracy and study skills as much as possible so that students can develop their skills to their fullest potential.

Sample General Accommodations

Name _____

Date _____

Completed by _____

Environmental

- Seat student near teacher
- Seat student in an area with minimal distractions
- Seat student near a positive peer model
- Stand near student when giving instructions
- Provide access to study carrel
- Use a desk top easel or slant board to raise reading materials
- Allow student to move around the classroom
- Modify text materials by adding, adapting or substituting information
- Make materials self-correcting
- Highlight important concepts and information and/or passages
- Prepare recordings of reading/textbook materials, tasks
- Provide an extra textbook for home use
- Provide graph paper or large spaced paper for writing
- Allow use of personal word lists, cue cards
- Increase use of pictures, diagrams, concrete manipulators
- Increase print size in photocopying
- Provide a visual summary of the daily schedule
- Other _____

Instructional

- Vary amount of material to be learned
- Vary amount of material to be practised
- Vary time for practice activities
- Use advance organizers and graphic organizers
- Provide an outline or study guide
- Use assignment notebooks or homework checklists
- Repeat directions or have student repeat directions
- Shorten directions
- Highlight instructions
- Pair written instructions with oral instructions
- Reduce number of tasks required in assignments
- Break long-term assignments into shorter tasks
- Use strategies to enhance recall; e.g., cues, cloze

Sample General Accommodations (continued)

Instructional (continued)

- Accept dictated or parent-assisted homework assignments
- Provide extra assignment time
- Provide models of written work or other assignments to guide students (e.g., sentence, paragraph, book report, short story, poem, essay)
- Permit student to print
- Provide a student buddy for reading
- Provide access to peer or cross-aged tutoring
- Provide time with a teacher assistant
- Provide nonverbal reminders for student to stay on task
- Provide immediate positive reinforcement for behaviour (e.g., verbal praise, tangible reinforcers, notes home, progress charts)
- Implement self-monitoring systems so student takes responsibility for own behaviour
- Other _____

Assessment

- Adjust the test appearance; e.g., margins, spacing
- Adjust the test design (T/F, multiple choice, matching)
- Adjust to recall with cues, cloze, word lists
- Vary test administration, e.g., small groups, individual
- Record test questions
- Reduce number of test items, or select items specific to ability level
- Give extra test time
- Permit breaks during tests
- Adjust readability of test
- Allow alternative formats such as webs or key points in place of essays or long answers
- Read test questions
- Allow use of a scribe or a reader
- Allow oral exams
- Practise taking similar test questions
- Other _____

Sample Academic and Instructional Accommodations¹

Name _____

Date _____

Completed by _____

Reading Difficulties	Written Expression Difficulties	Fine and Gross Motor Difficulties
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Use less difficult/ alternative reading material <input type="checkbox"/> Identify/define words prior to reading <input type="checkbox"/> Reduce amount of reading required <input type="checkbox"/> Allow alternative methods of data collection (dictation, interviews, fact sheets) <input type="checkbox"/> Set time limits for specific task completion <input type="checkbox"/> Enlarge text of worksheets, reading material and tests <input type="checkbox"/> Limit words on a page <input type="checkbox"/> Extend time to complete assignments <input type="checkbox"/> Read directions several times at start of assignments and tests <input type="checkbox"/> Provide additional repetition and guided practice of directions, skills and concepts <input type="checkbox"/> Use assistive technology (optical character recognition system, books on tape/CD, screen readers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Reduce volume or requirements for written work, e.g., by accepting an outline or point-form notes <input type="checkbox"/> Break long-term assignments into manageable tasks <input type="checkbox"/> Extend timelines for completing assignments <input type="checkbox"/> Offer alternative assignments <input type="checkbox"/> Allow student to work on homework at school <input type="checkbox"/> Allow alternative methods of data collection (dictation, interviews, fact sheets) <input type="checkbox"/> Permit use of scribe or word processor for answers <input type="checkbox"/> Waive spelling, punctuation and paragraphing requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Use assistive technology (word processor, spell-check device, grammar-check device, text to speech software) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Use assistive and adaptive devices (slant boards/desktop easels to display written material) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – pencil or pen adapted in size or grip diameter – alternative keyboards – portable word processor <input type="checkbox"/> Set realistic and mutually agreed-upon expectations for neatness and organization <input type="checkbox"/> Reduce or eliminate the need to copy from a text or board <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – providing copies of notes – permit student to photocopy a peer's notes – provide carbon/NCR paper to a peer to allow a duplicate copy of notes to be made <input type="checkbox"/> Extend time to complete assignments <input type="checkbox"/> Alter the size, shape or location of the space provided for answers <input type="checkbox"/> Accept keyword responses instead of complete sentences <input type="checkbox"/> Allow student to type answers or to answer orally instead of in writing

1. Adapted from Calgary Learning Centre (Calgary, AB: 2002).

Sample Academic and Instructional Accommodations (continued)

Attention Difficulties	Memory Difficulties
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Provide alternative seating <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – near teacher – facing teacher – at front of class, between well-focused students, away from distractions <input type="checkbox"/> Provide additional or personal work space (quiet area for study, extra seat or table, “time-out” spot, study carrels) <input type="checkbox"/> Permit movement during class activities and testing sessions <input type="checkbox"/> Provide directions in written form <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – on board – on worksheets – copied in assignment book by student <input type="checkbox"/> Set time limits for specific task completion <input type="checkbox"/> Extend time to complete tests and assignments <input type="checkbox"/> Use multiple testing sessions for longer tests <input type="checkbox"/> Use place markers, special paper, graph paper or writing templates to allow student to maintain position better or focus attention <input type="checkbox"/> Provide cues; e.g., arrows, stop signs, on worksheets and test <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a quiet, distraction-free area for completing assignments and tests <input type="checkbox"/> Allow student to wear noise buffer device such as headphones to screen out distracting sounds <input type="checkbox"/> Provide checklists for long, detailed assignments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a written outline <input type="checkbox"/> Provide directions in written form (on board, on worksheets, copied in assignment book by student) <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a specific process for turning in completed assignments <input type="checkbox"/> Provide checklists for long, detailed assignments <input type="checkbox"/> Read and discuss standard directions several times at start of exam <input type="checkbox"/> Provide cues; e.g., arrows, stop signs, on worksheets and test <input type="checkbox"/> Allow student to use reference aids such as dictionaries, word processors or vocabulary cue cards

Examples of Assistive Technology Adaptations²

Disability	Adaptations	Description
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tape-recorded material • Semantic mapping software • Electronic word recognition and definition • Closed-circuit television • Speech synthesizer/screen reader software • Optical character recognition (OCR)/scanner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio recordings of textbook material and answers to chapter or workbook questions • Software that enables readers to comprehend narrative stories or expository writing elements through graphic depiction • Presents definitions of words • Magnifies reading material; limited reading presented at once • Computerized voice reads material on computer monitor • Text is scanned into computer and OCR system computerizes text so it can be read by speech synthesis
Written expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pencil grip • Alternative-hardware input devices • Semantic mapping software • Tape recorder • Word prediction software • Speech recognition • Electronic spell checkers • Word processing/spell check option • Speech synthesizer/talking software 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Piece of plastic that is attached where the pencil is grasped • “Stickie keys,” touch screens, trackballs, customized keyboards • Software for outlining and organizing writing • Standard tape recorder for dictation of written products • Software that assists with sentence structure and syntax • Voice recognition enabling dictation of written content • Devices that speak and display (or just display) words and definitions • Standard spell check option • Speech synthesis with word processing program

2. Adapted from “Using Assistive Technology Adaptations to Include Students with Learning Disabilities in Cooperative Learning Activities” by D. P. Bryant and B. R. Bryant, 1998. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 31, 1, p. 48. Copyright (1998) by PRO-ED, Inc. Adapted with permission.

Disability	Adaptations	Description
Mathematics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graph paper • Calculators • Talking clocks • Timing devices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centimetre squares for aligning numbers • Devices for checking answers, talking calculators, large-keyed calculators • Specially designed clocks that tell time verbally • Various devices for monitoring time