

Accommodations & Modifications: Definitions and Examples

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Students with disabilities often need accommodations or modifications to their educational program in order to access the general curriculum in their schools and to be successful learners. These must be written into a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a Section 504 Plan. These changes must be chosen to fit the student's individual need.

Often parents are confused between these two terms-accommodations and modifications. What is the difference? What do they look like in a classroom? This article will provide a general description for each term and provide examples of what these may translate into in a school environment.

First, an *accommodation* is a technique or approach that allows a student to complete the same assignment or test as other students, but there is an adjustment in the timing, the formatting, the setting, scheduling, and response or in the presentation of some material. The accommodation does not alter what the test or assignment measures. It is simply a different approach to get to the same end point.

A *modification*, on the other hand, is an adjustment to an assignment or a test that actually changes the standard or what a test or assignment is supposed to measure. Examples of this may include the student completing work on part of a standard or the student may complete a different assignment that is more easily understood by the student or mastered by the student.

One can find many resources on the internet, in books and publications on ideas for accommodations and modifications, but that can take a lot of time and energy. This article provides easier access to those sorts of ideas that might be considered for textbooks and the curriculum, the classroom environment, instruction and assignments, and even behavior expectations that may help a student with a disability to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). Any of these ideas can be offered for discussion at a team meeting, but the team must determine which will help the student based on that individual need and be reflected in the IEP document.

Many of these ideas have been collected from professionals and other parents, from books, web sites and conferences. These are summarized by general topic area on the following pages.

Textbooks and Curriculum

Books

- ✓ Provide alternative books with similar concepts, but at an easier reading level.
- ✓ Provide audiotapes of textbooks and have the student follow the text while listening.
- ✓ Provide summaries of chapters.
- ✓ Provide interesting reading material at or slightly above the student's comfort zone.
- ✓ Use peers as readers.
- ✓ Use markers to highlight important textbook information.
- ✓ Use word-for-word sentence fill ins.
- ✓ Provide two sets of books, one for home and one for school.
- ✓ Use index cards to record major themes.
- ✓ Provide the student with a list of discussion questions prior to reading the material.
- ✓ Give page numbers to help students find the information or answers.
- ✓ Provide books and other written materials in alternative formats (i.e., Braille, large print)

Curriculum

- ✓ Shorten assignments to focus on mastery of key concepts.
- ✓ Shorten spelling tests to focus on mastering the most functional words.
- ✓ Substitute alternatives for written assignments (i.e., clay models, posters, collections...)
- ✓ Specify and list what the student needs to learn to pass.
- ✓ Modify expectations based on student need (i.e., "When you have read this chapter, you should be able to list three reasons for the Civil War.")
- ✓ Give alternatives to long written reports (i.e., write several short reports, provide short reviews of selected readings, give an oral report or a Power Point presentation on an assigned topic)

Classroom Environment

- ✓ Develop individualized rules for the student.
- ✓ Evaluate the classroom structure against his/her needs (flexible structure, set limits...)
- ✓ Keep workspaces clear of unrelated materials.
- ✓ Keep the classroom quiet during intense learning times.
- ✓ Reduce visual clutter and distractions in the classroom.
- ✓ Provide access to a computer for written work.
- ✓ Consider preferential seating (around perimeter, up front, etc.)
- ✓ Use a study carrel, as long as the student is NOT the only one using one.
- ✓ Seat student away from doorways or windows to reduce distractions.
- ✓ Provide an unobstructed view of the board, teacher, Smart Board, etc.
- ✓ Keep extra supplies of classroom materials on hand.
- ✓ Use alternatives to crossword puzzles or word finds.
- ✓ Maintain adequate space between chairs, desks, etc.

Instruction and Assignments

Directions

- ✓ Use both oral and printed directions
- ✓ Give directions in small steps and in as few words as possible
- ✓ Number and sequence the steps in a task
- ✓ Have the student repeat the directions for the task
- ✓ Provide visual aids and mnemonic devices.
- ✓ Show a model of the end product
- ✓ Stand near student when giving directions or presenting a lesson.

Time/transitions

- ✓ Alert student several minutes prior to a transition from one activity to another.
- ✓ Provide additional time to complete a task.
- ✓ Provide additional time to pass between classes.
- ✓ Allow extra time to turn in homework without penalty.
- ✓ Provide assistance or cues when moving about the school building.

Handwriting

- ✓ Use worksheets that require minimal writing.
- ✓ Use fill-in questions with space for brief response rather than a short essay.
- ✓ Provide a “note taker” or photocopy of teacher notes (or another student’s notes)
- ✓ Provide a print outline with videotapes, DVD’s or movies.
- ✓ Provide a print copy of any assignments or directions written on the board.
- ✓ Omit assignments that require copying.
- ✓ Let the student use a tape recorder to dictate answers.

Grading

- ✓ Provide a partial grade based on individual progress or effort.
- ✓ Use daily or frequent grading averaged into a grade for the quarter.
- ✓ Weight daily work higher than tests for a student who performs poorly on tests.
- ✓ Mark the correct answers rather than the incorrect ones.
- ✓ Allow a student to rework missed problems for a better grade.
- ✓ Average grades out when assignments are reworked, or grade on corrected work.
- ✓ Use a pass/fail or an alternative grading system when the student is assessed on his or her own growth.

Tests

- ✓ Go over directions orally and in print.
- ✓ Teach the student how to take tests (review and planning required)
- ✓ Provide a vocabulary list with definitions.
- ✓ Allow as much time as needed to finish tests.
- ✓ Allow tests to be taken in a room with few distractions.
- ✓ Have test materials read to student, and allow oral responses.
- ✓ Divide tests into small sections of similar questions or problems.
- ✓ Use recognition tests (true-false, multiple choice, matching) instead of essays.
- ✓ Permit student to complete an independent project as an alternative test.
- ✓ Give progress reports in lieu of grades.
- ✓ Grade spelling separately from content.
- ✓ Provide typed test materials, not tests written in cursive.
- ✓ Allow take-home or open-book tests.
- ✓ Provide possible answers for fill-in-the-blank sections.
- ✓ Provide the first letter of the missing word.

Math

- ✓ Permit student to use a calculator without penalty.
- ✓ Group similar problems together.
- ✓ Give fewer problems on a worksheet.
- ✓ Require fewer problems to attain passing grades.
- ✓ Use enlarged graph paper to write problems to help student keep numbers in line.
- ✓ Provide a table of math facts for reference.
- ✓ Tape a number line to the student's desk.
- ✓ Read and explain story problems, or break problems into smaller steps.
- ✓ Use pictures or graphics.

Other Ideas to Consider

- ✓ Use Post-it notes to mark assignments in textbooks.
- ✓ Check progress and provide feedback often in the first few minutes of each assignment.
- ✓ Place a ruler under sentences being read for better tracking.
- ✓ Introduce an overview of long-term assignments so the student knows what is expected and when it is due.
- ✓ Break long-term assignments into small, sequential steps, with daily monitoring and frequent grading.
- ✓ Have student practice presenting in a small groups before presenting to the class.
- ✓ Hand out worksheets one at a time; sequence work, with the easiest part first.
- ✓ Provide study guides, study questions related to tests.
- ✓ Reward student for recording assignments and due dates in a notebook.
- ✓ Draw arrows on worksheets, board or overheads to show how ideas are related, or use graphic organizers and flow charts.

Behavior

- ✓ Set aside a “check-in” time to organize the day.
- ✓ Match the student with another who is a good role model for class projects.
- ✓ Modify school rules that may discriminate against the student.
- ✓ Use nonverbal cues to remind the student of rule violations.
- ✓ Amend consequences for rule violations.
- ✓ Minimize the use of punishment; provide positive as well as negative consequences.
- ✓ Develop an individualized behavior intervention plan that is positive and consistent with the student’s ability and skills.
- ✓ Increase the frequency and immediacy of reinforcement.

References

United State Department of Education (www.usdoe.gov)
Families and Advocates Partnership for Education (www.fape.org)
National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities www.nichcy.org
PACER Center (www.pacer.org)