



Using Testing Accommodations and Modifications

Students with Disabilities. Some students have disabilities that might interfere with their ability to demonstrate their true achievement through standard testing procedures. Nearly all of these students would have been identified as eligible for special education services and would have an Individual Education Program (IEP), an Individual Accommodation Plan (IAP), or a Section 504 Plan. The IEP, or other plan, ordinarily indicates whether the student should receive accommodations during district-wide assessments and what the nature of those accommodations should be. In a very few other cases, students who have not been identified for receiving special education services might need alterations in their test-taking procedures to overcome the effect of a disability. Because the primary goal of using the *ITBS* and the *ITED* is to obtain information that will have value for planning and implementing instruction, aspects of testing that might provide false readings of a student's achievement should be altered so that the most accurate information can be obtained. That is the goal of providing testing accommodations to students. Of course, any changes of this type should conform to the district's policies on the use of accommodations.

English Language Learners (ELLs) or Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students. For students whose native language is not English and who have been in an English-only classroom for a limited time, two decisions need to be considered prior to testing. First, has their English-language acquisition developed sufficiently to warrant testing them? Second, should testing involve the use of any particular accommodations? In all instances, the guidelines in place in the school district (which may be dictated by state law) should be implemented in making these decisions about each student. The purpose of using testing accommodations with ELLs is to be able to measure their skills and knowledge in the curriculum without significant interference from a limited opportunity to learn English and use it in the testing process. Thus, those just beginning instruction in English are not likely to be able to answer many questions no matter what types of accommodations are used. Consequently, such students probably should not be tested until their English language skills become developed more fully. For those in their second or third year of instruction in an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) program, the use of accommodations might be warranted to reduce the effect of their limited English proficiency on test performance.

What Accommodations and Modifications Are For. A testing accommodation, as the term is used here, refers to a change in the procedures for administering the assessment. An accommodation is intended to neutralize, as much as possible, the effect of the



student's disability on the assessment process. That is, the intent is to remove the effect of the disability(ies), to the extent possible, so that the student is assessed on equal footing with all other students. Accommodations do not change the kind of achievement being measured, but they change how that achievement is measured. If chosen appropriately, an accommodation will neither provide too much nor too little help to the student who receives it.

A testing modification, as distinguished from an accommodation, involves changing the assessment itself so that the tasks or questions presented are different from those used in the regular assessment. This type of change may mean modifying the test items or the way the items are presented so that what is being measured has actually changed. A brailled version of a test modifies the questions just like a translation to another language might. Some test items might be eliminated because it is not possible to braille them, and others need to be presented in ways that make responding a much more difficult task than with the original form. Helping students with word meanings, translating words to another language, or eliminating parts of a test from scoring are additional examples of modifications. In such cases, the published norms may not be appropriate to use.

Certain other kinds of changes in the assessment or its presentation may result in the assessment measuring a different trait than was originally intended. For example, when a reading comprehension test is read to the student, we obtain a measure of how well the student listens rather than how well he/she reads. Or if the student is allowed to use a calculator on a math estimation test, we obtain a measure of "computation ability with a calculator," not a measure of the student's ability to do mental arithmetic. Neither accommodations nor modifications should be offered to students when the trait being measured will be changed so drastically. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is very clear about using testing accommodations only when these changes do not themselves change the "construct" being measured by the assessment.

Selecting Accommodations for a Student. For a student with disabilities who has been identified as eligible for special education services, an IEP is developed to spell out the conditions of the student's program. Among those conditions are the procedures that ought to be used when the student is assessed, whether with classroom assessments developed by teachers or large-scale assessments used by the school. The team of individuals that creates the plan for a student must make decisions about the potential influence of the student's disability on the assessment process. How likely is it that the student's disability will somehow interfere with getting a true indication of the student's actual achievement in any particular area assessed? What could be done to change the way the assessment is conducted so that these effects are minimized and so that the assessment is still measuring the trait it was intended to measure? These are difficult questions for team members to answer.

There are some guidelines from both research and experience that might be followed by IEP teams so that the accommodations they identify and the recommendations they make are reasonable for the student in question. Here are some of those guidelines:



1. All students with a certain disability do not necessarily need an accommodation. Decisions about the need for accommodations should be individualized and not be made just because a student has a certain type of disability.
2. Students who have the same type of disability do not necessarily need the same accommodation(s). For example, some students with a learning disability do not need extended time for taking a test, but others do. Some need a few minutes and others need 20–30, depending on the actual time limits. It would be unreasonable to use a single rule with all such students and, for example, simply double the time limits for all students with a learning disability in reading.
3. Just as an accommodation may not completely remove the effect of a student's disability, an accommodation could overcompensate and give the student help that others without an accommodation do not receive. Thus, in making these decisions, it is possible to err both ways, to give too little help or too much. IEP teams should be aware of both possible kinds of errors.
4. There are no ready rules and guidelines that make the selection of accommodations simple and fair. IEP teams need experience in examining the effects of past decisions so that future decisions might more closely fit the student's needs. Teachers should take good notes during test administrations so that it can be determined whether changes in time limits, for example, were long enough or too long. Generally, experience with classroom assessments is one good indicator of the nature of the accommodations needed for large-scale assessment situations.
5. Students change over time, so the accommodations used in one year should not be included in the IEP for the next year without review by the IEP team. In some cases, further accommodations might be needed, and in others fewer might be required.

Some Common Accommodations. There is no established list of accommodations that are permitted when using the *ITBS* or the *ITED*; each school must apply its policies on assessment and IEP development on a case-by-case basis. Here are some accommodations that are commonly used with either students with disabilities or English Language Learners (those in English-as-a-Second-Language programs):

Extended time. Extending the time limit of a test is one way to address the slower work rates some students exhibit because of a disability. Students with a learning disability, those who use a magnifier, and those with an attention deficit disorder are examples of students who might need extended time.

Individual/small group administration. Although there are no prescribed group sizes for test administrations of the *ITBS* or the *ITED*, students could be tested individually or in small groups rather than with an entire class. This kind of grouping might be helpful for students who need frequent breaks or those who need some other form of accommodation that might be distracting to other students if a larger group was used for testing.

Large-print materials. Some students with visual impairments might benefit from using large-print materials if they are accustomed to using such materials in the classroom for other learning situations. Test content and general test-administration procedures are not affected by the use of these materials.



Repeated directions. Test-administration directions given to students at the beginning of each test can be repeated as often as the teacher believes is necessary to help students understand what to do. For orally administered tests in Levels 5–8 and the Level 9 Word Analysis and Listening tests, test items are read to students. When the directions indicate that items should not be repeated, or when only one repetition is allowed, changes to these procedures would be considered an accommodation. For children with hearing impairments or short-term memory problems, such accommodations may be needed.

Tests read aloud. Students with severe reading difficulties may need to have parts of tests or complete tests read to them so that the reading demands of the test do not interfere with measuring their achievement. This accommodation should not be used with reading comprehension or vocabulary tests because the “read aloud” would change the test into a listening comprehension or listening vocabulary test. Reading the test aloud should be used when it is specified in an IEP or 504 plan and only rarely with students who do not have such plans.

Answers recorded. For students with physical impairments or fine motor skill difficulties, it might be necessary for them to give answers orally to another person. In such cases, someone will need to record their answers on the answer document for them so that the document can be scored with all the others.

Transferred answers. Student responses marked in a test booklet that is not machine-scorable, or those made with technologically assistive devices, should be transferred to a scannable answer document for scoring.

Testing out-of-level. The use of an out-of-level test does not involve changing the way the test was designed to be administered, and consequently it does not represent an accommodation as that term is being used here. However, there is not a standard definition for “accommodation,” so out-of-level testing is listed here because it is considered to be an accommodation by some educators. (See the separate section, “Out-of-level Testing” on page 54.)

Test administered by ESL teacher or other provider of language services. Selecting a test administrator who is familiar to the student and aware of the student’s language proficiency provides a particularly comfortable testing environment for the student. This arrangement may be an accommodation to the school’s normal testing procedures, but it does not itself change the way in which the test is administered.

Some Modifications. Because testing modifications are changes that affect what is being measured and how the test norms are used in score interpretation, modifications should be employed only when it is quite clear that they are needed. The user should be convinced that the modifications will allow for more accurate achievement data to be obtained and that scores will be interpretable in the end. Here are some modifications that are most often used with English Language Learners or students with disabilities:

Braille test materials. There is a Braille Edition of the *ITBS* and the *ITED* for students who use brailled materials regularly in classroom instruction. A few items from some tests have been deleted from the Braille Edition, some have been modified, and the Maps and Diagrams test of the *ITBS* Complete Battery has been deleted entirely. (The separate norms for the Braille Edition are available only through hand scoring.)



Communication assistance. Assistance in signing or cueing the test administration directions might be considered a form of accommodation, but when that assistance applies to test items as well, the change is best described as a modification. If the assistance involves translating words to another language or providing meanings of words used in the test, these are also modifications. Generally such assistance is needed by some ELL students or those whose language development has been slowed by certain disabilities. Of course, the amount of assistance supplied is the key to determining the extent to which the modification might interfere with score interpretations and the applicability of the published norms.

English/native language word-to-word dictionary. Students with limited experience using English may need to use a word-translation dictionary, one that gives the comparable word in their native language without providing word definitions. Whether a student can profit from this accommodation might depend on whether the student uses such a dictionary with classroom assessments or other class work. The effect on score interpretations of using such a dictionary depends a good deal on how much it is used during testing: extensive word translation can destroy the context of written communications.

Scoring, Reporting, and Interpretation Issues. When students have been tested with accommodations or modifications, should their answer documents be scored separately, or should they be included with those of other students? Should the scores of such students be included with the scores of all other students in group averages? Can the norms for the test be used? Should scores be interpreted differently? These are some of the many important questions that arise when testing accommodations/modifications have been used. Of course, school policy or state requirements may determine how each of these questions is answered in any given locale, but in the absence of such regulations, the rest of this section provides some ideas about how to resolve these issues.

To the extent that accommodations used with a student were chosen carefully and judged to be necessary, the anticipated effect is to reduce the impact of the student's disability on the assessment process. That is, the student's responses are like those we would expect the student to make if that student had no disability. Consequently, it seems reasonable to use that student's scores in the same ways we would use the scores of all other students. The student's answer document should be placed among the others for scoring, the student's scores should be included with all others in group averages, and the various derived scores (e. g., grade equivalents and percentile ranks) should be interpreted as though the student had been tested without any accommodations. This "business-as-usual" approach seems reasonable because the changes made in test administration were not expected to change what was measured or to give the student an advantage that others may not have had.

When modifications in testing are employed, the situation might be different, depending on the nature of those changes. When changes are significant or a modification is used extensively, the published norms may not be applicable, or the interpretations made in using them might need to be qualified. For example, if an ELL was given help with the meaning of a few words on a math test, the impact would be much different than if the student was given help with a few words on every item on that test. If a student must be allowed to use a calculator on the Math Computation test, certainly the score needs to be interpreted differently than it would be for other students.



Often when modifications are used, the meaning of the scores changes substantially because the norms cannot be used in typical fashion. However, in such cases, useful score interpretations still might be made. Percentile ranks can still be used to identify relative strengths and weaknesses, and growth can be estimated as long as the same modifications had been used in the previous year. What might become distorted are judgments made about the student's status among her/his grade peers, with percentile ranks, or about the student's developmental level, with grade equivalents.

Large-print and Braille Editions

The Large-print Editions of the *ITBS* and *ITED* were designed according to the most current specifications recommended for large-print materials. For example, test booklets are 10 x 13 rather than 8.5 x 11, and the standard type size is 18-point. Test booklets are available for Levels 9–14 of the *ITBS* Complete and Survey Batteries and for Levels 15–17/18 of the *ITED* Complete/Core Battery. In addition to the test booklet, the test administrator needs the *General Instructions Supplement for the Large-Print Edition* and the standard *Directions for Administration*. Because there are no large-print answer documents, students generally will mark on their test booklets, and the teacher will need to transfer the responses to regular answer documents for machine-scoring.

The Braille Editions of the *ITBS* and *ITED* were created to preserve the original test content and processes as closely as possible. Test booklets are available for Levels 9–14 of the *ITBS* Complete and Survey Batteries and for Levels 15–17/18 of the *ITED* Complete/Core Battery. The test administrator needs the following materials: one set of brailled test booklets for the test level in the battery to be administered, one copy of the print version of the test booklet, one copy of the *Supplement to the Directions for Administration*, one copy of the *Braille Administration Notes* for the test level to be given, and a copy of the standard *Directions for Administration*. Because machine-scoring services are not available for the Braille Edition, the following materials are needed for hand scoring: a *Scoring Keys* booklet for the battery given, the braille norms from the *Supplement*, and the *Norms and Score Conversions* booklet for the test form given.

