



**Independent Educational
Consultants Association**



SAT and ACT Accommodations

Many students with disabilities will significantly benefit from securing testing accommodations on the SAT or ACT. If you have a son or daughter with a diagnosed disability and you are seeking to secure a testing accommodation, it is important that you understand the steps and timelines involved in this process.

Definition of Disability
Accommodations
Extended Timing

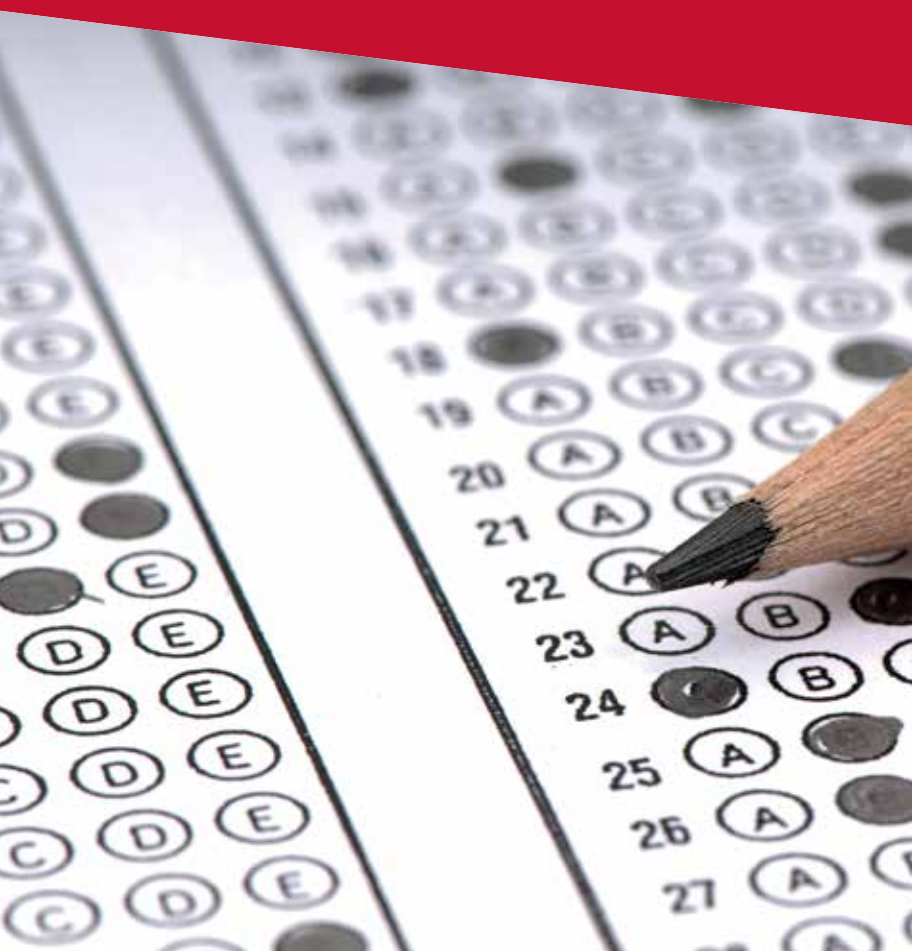
Documentation

Scores

Requests

Appealing Decisions

Practicing




Understanding the Changing Definitions of Disability

The accommodations landscape has changed significantly in the past decade. In 2008, Congress updated the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to broaden both the definition of disability and the scope of protections afforded those with disabilities. Then, in 2011, the Department of Justice ruled in a case involving LSAT accommodations that students have a legal right to specific accommodations on standardized tests.

These changes have opened the door to accommodations for many students who need them, particularly on the ACT. In 2013, ACT, Inc. approved nearly 90% of its applications for accommodation, granting special accommodations to almost 5% of students who took the test. Most (72,202 students, or 4% of all ACT test takers) received extended time. By contrast, The College Board granted accommodations to only 2.3% of SAT takers in 2013. That's a rate more than fifty percent below that of the ACT!

Choosing the Appropriate Accommodation

For students who need them, various types of accommodations are available for either the SAT or the ACT: a quiet testing room, a reader or a scribe, enlarged print test booklets and/or answer keys, the use of a computer, additional or extended breaks, and multiple-day testing on the ACT. Different clinical diagnoses may warrant the same testing accommodation. For example, students with ADHD, fine motor deficits, anxiety disorders or OCD all may receive an extended time accommodation.



If you are considering applying for a testing accommodation for your child, be as specific as possible in your request regarding the type of accommodation that will be most beneficial. For example, if your child needs additional break time, you must be specific in your request whether the optimal accommodation would entail longer than standard breaks or supplemental breaks between every section of the test. At times you may request one accommodation but be offered something different, particularly on the SAT. You have the right to appeal these decisions.



Extended Timing

One of the most common testing accommodations is 50% extended time, requested frequently for students suffering from ADHD. The 100% extended time accommodation is generally reserved for students with disabilities more severe than attentional deficits, such as dyslexia or severe processing deficits. Both The College Board and ACT Inc., grant extended time accommodations, but the manner in which they do so impacts the efficacy of the accommodation.

On the SAT extended time benefits some, but not all students. While the ACT allows extended time students to self-pace through the test, the SAT forces students to remain in each discrete section until the time is exhausted. For students with attention deficits, waiting through long intervals before advancing to the next section can impair performance. Some students simply run out of steam by the conclusion of the 6.5-hour testing administration. In some cases, a better accommodation for ADHD students on the SAT is longer or additional breaks between sections.

In contrast, almost all students who receive extended time on the ACT benefit from the accommodation. The ACT privileges processing speed to a greater extent than does the SAT. Many students without learning differences find that the test is difficult, if not impossible, to finish with standard timing. Moreover, when students are granted a 50% extended time accommodation on the ACT, they are allowed to self-pace through the test and finish sections on their own schedule. This alone makes the ACT accommodation more valuable than the SAT accommodation for most students.



Receiving 100% extended time on the ACT is akin to winning the testing lottery, giving students the optimal scenario to attain their peak performance. In this format students take a single test section per school day, frequently in a quiet room, before returning to their regular classes. Students will have to sustain focus for a maximum of two hours for the math administration, followed by 90 minutes for English, and just 70 minutes each for the science and reading sections. By minimizing the time for sustained focus, this format solves for the majority of attentional issues. In this format, students also have the tremendous benefit of being able to prepare the night before each test section.

How do Accommodations Impact Scores?

Analyzing our company's dataset of 10,000+ students, it is clear that extended time is a boon for the majority of test-takers. Our SAT students who have received extended timing accommodations commence the testing process with scores that are 106 SAT points lower than those of their unaccommodated peers; however, they ultimately attain score increases that are 56 points greater than those attained by others. Likewise our ACT students with extended time start 3.2 ACT points behind but attain increases that are 1.6 points greater than their standard-timed peers. This is evidence that accommodations are in fact helping to level the playing field for our students with learning differences.

Diagnostic Testing and Documentation

To qualify for accommodations on the SAT or ACT, a student must present evidence of a professionally diagnosed disability and document how the student's limitation impacts both daily functioning and the ability to take standardized tests. The testing entities will first look to the high school to determine whether a formal accommodation plan is in place—such as an IEP, 504 Plan, Response To Intervention (RTI) plan, or other school-generated formal plan—and determine how long the plan has been in place. If a testing plan is on file at the school and there is evidence that the student has been using the accommodations over a significant period of time, accommodations typically follow without great difficulty.

In cases where there is no formal plan for accommodations, an inadequate history of use of the accommodation, or a recent diagnosis, the student will be asked to provide full documentation of the student's disability. The necessary documentation will vary based on the type of disability and accommodation requested, but may range from physician's reports to teacher's reports to neuropsychological or psychoeducational evaluations. The SAT and ACT websites clearly delineate the required documentation for each type of accommodation requested.

As parents, you can facilitate the process by maintaining organized records of your child's school, testing, and special education needs. Keep all documentation that may one day be used to make your case. Save any letters or reports from teachers who have given your child formal or informal accommodations and observed their positive impact; these can be particularly powerful in making the case for accommodations.

When formal psychological testing is mandated, the ACT, Inc. requires a professional report that is no more than three years old, while the College Board will



accept a report that is five years old. LD specialists advocate that students with disabilities update their testing at 16, using adult-scaled instruments such as the WAIS. Using adult testing forms within three years of applying to college will ensure that the updated testing will be valid both for the college assessments and for college disability offices.

Private school students will typically pursue private evaluations from licensed psychologists. Public school students may be able to secure the appropriate testing through their school system, but in some cases, they will need to supplement school testing with outside private evaluations. This will depend upon the resources and policy of the school system. If a student is close to graduation and has never requested or received any prior accommodation in the classroom, the school may deny the request, particularly if the student has performed well academically.

Making the Request

In most cases the official request for accommodations will come from your school's disability coordinator; you, your child's teachers and evaluating psychologists may be asked to provide supporting documentation. The College Board has moved to an online application process in which your school's disability coordinator manages the official request. The ACT, Inc. continues to use a paper-based application process and requires that you collaborate with your school to complete the requisite paperwork.

Timing the Request

Students seeking accommodations for the ACT during the fall or winter of junior year should ideally apply for accommodations in June preceding junior year, once the coming year's forms are posted online. Students will be simultaneously registering for a specific test date and applying for accommodations for that test. Students planning to wait for the spring ACTs can register and apply for accommodations in September.

The ACT typically processes requests in four weeks. Once the accommodation is granted, your child will receive a letter containing a reference number from the ACT which will allow him or her to register online for future ACT tests with accommodations. You may need to locate an alternative testing site that offers the specific accommodation your child has been granted, as all sites do not offer all possible accommodations.

If you are seeking accommodations for your child's junior PSAT or fall SATs, you should submit the request in the spring of sophomore

year. The College Board will respond seven weeks from the last piece of documentation submitted. The clock resets if a single document is submitted late. If an accommodation is granted, your child will receive a Services for Students with Disability (SSD) number from the College Board, good for accommodations on all College Board tests, including the PSAT, SAT, and AP exams.

If you are able to secure accommodations for the sophomore PLAN or PSAT, you will have a greatly expedited process of securing accommodations for the SAT or ACT.

Appealing a Decision

Frequently your initial request for accommodation will be answered with a letter requesting additional documentation on the grounds that submitted files provide insufficient evidence for the accommodation. The testing organization will generally explain what new information is required. This may consist of a more detailed letter from your school's disability coordinator explaining why the request is reasonable, or the reviewers may request additional testing. At other times the reviewers may find conflicts or inconsistent findings from the psychological testing. In these cases, your child's evaluating psychologist will need to address those issues and write a letter emphasizing how the disability affects your child and why the accommodation is necessary. A well-crafted response from the psychologist will often make the difference in whether the appeal is successful.



The odds of a preliminary rejection are higher if your child's disability was diagnosed later in his or her academic career. If your child has a late-diagnosed disability, you may need to provide additional supporting evidence to justify why the disability wasn't picked up earlier or how your child was able to perform effectively in school in light of this disability.

The primary challenge with the appeals process is working within the time constraints of junior year. If you need to schedule an additional round of testing with a psychologist, await the results and then resubmit the request, precious time will have elapsed. I have seen parents go through several rounds of appeals, and sometimes the clock simply runs out. Begin the process early to build in time for an appeal.

Should your child seek SAT or ACT accommodations?

If you want to determine whether to apply for a testing accommodation for your child on the SAT or ACT or both tests, there are two principal approaches you can take. You could apply for accommodations from both the College Board and ACT Inc., and then evaluate the differences in granted accommodations to determine which test will best serve your child. Alternately, you could use practice tests to gauge the impact of the accommodation on your child in advance of going through the application process. Your





child could take a timed practice SAT or ACT test with the desired accommodation to determine the degree to which the accommodation positively affects the scores. By comparing the results from an extended time practice ACT and SAT, you can quickly make an evaluation regarding the better assessment for your child.

Preparing for the Official Tests

Once granted an accommodation, your child should approach all preparatory activities in light of that accommodation. If your daughter will receive 50% or 100% extended time on the assessments, she should carry out all homework and practice tests replicating the testing conditions that she will experience on the official test.

Concluding Thoughts

If you are contemplating securing accommodations for your child, it is important that you commence the process as soon as possible. Advocate for necessary testing and be sure to save all educational records going back through the years. This process may be time and resource intensive, but I've seen firsthand the profound impact of a student receiving the proper accommodations. It can be life-changing, and it's well-worth the investment.

*Written by Jed Applerouth, Applerouth Tutoring Services, LLC,
for the Independent Educational Consultants Association*

An IECA member educational consultant can help find the college that will meet your child's unique learning profile. IECA members have extensive knowledge of colleges and their available support services. They visit and evaluate hundreds of options in order to provide appropriate recommendations.

To learn more and to find an IECA member near you, contact the IECA national office at 703-591-4850 or go to www.IECAonline.com and click on 'Find an Independent Educational Consultant'



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