

The College Board and ACT tests (SAT, PSAT, ACT, and others) are an important part of student evaluation for college readiness and college admissions. Students with Specific Learning Disabilities can be at a disadvantage when taking these tests because their learning challenges may conflict with the standardized process used in this testing. The exam administrators have a process by which certain students can receive accommodations in the testing to remove or reduce these obstacles. The most common accommodation granted is a fifty-percent extension of time for taking each test when a student's learning profile suggests that they cannot adequately convey their knowledge and skills in the usual time. Other accommodations such as use of large-print materials for those with visual limitations, special administration for hearing impairments, extended breaks for those with limitations in sustaining effort and energy, and more are potentially available.

In order to receive these accommodations, the student's specific learning challenges must be formally documented through a variety of means, depending on the disability or disabilities. Documentation guidelines are very specific and include what must be demonstrated, with what measures must be used to show this, the qualifications of the evaluators, and how recent the documentation must be. The test administrator websites offer the facts about this process:

**www.collegeboard.com/accommodations
www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/registration/accommodations.html**

It is wise to consult these sources directly as well as to speak with the appropriate school counselor or advisor regarding the school's role in this process. Be aware that receiving accommodations is not automatic and that it is the student/parent responsibility to make this request through the school counselor with ample time for the counselor to respond to deadlines. The test administrator must receive documentation at least five to seven weeks in advance of the usual test application deadline, and the school counselor will need to have documentation in full prior to that.

Qualifying for Accommodations

Public school students qualifying for accommodations usually have been identified by the school through the special education referral and assessment process. Public school evaluations are done at no expense to the family if the parent makes the request and the school has evidence that such a learning disability may exist. If the student has a current IEP, the necessary documentation may have already been done, and if not, it is usually handled through a parent request to the school counselor. However, not all students with Specific Learning Disabilities will be eligible: there must be a clear connection made between the nature of the learning disability and the demands of the test, a prerequisite that not all diagnosed students meet. Parents should work with the school counselor in charge of test administrator referrals or the student's primary Special Education teacher. Unresolved disagreements about this may sometimes be appealed through the school, directly to the administrator, or through the efforts of an independent learning specialist.

Students attending private schools who seek accommodations for College Board tests are in a different situation. If the student's Specific Learning Disability has been previously documented with a public school or private evaluation, the evaluation must be appropriately current. "Appropriately current" is based on test administrator guidelines and may vary with each student's circumstances. If the documentation is not current, it must be completed by the appropriate professional/s. It is the student/parent responsibility to notify the appropriate private school counselor of their interest in or request for accommodations and to provide the counselor with that professional evaluation. If appropriate, the counselor will submit an Eligibility Form to the test administrator. That counselor must certify that the appropriate documentation has been done. The test administrator will thoroughly review the request and make the decision about whether the requested accommodations will be granted. This all can be a time-consuming process that may require many months of lead-time.

Requests for Accommodations

Most requests for accommodations are based on a student's Specific Learning Disability, sometimes called dyslexia (a reading disability), dyscalculia (a math disability), or dysgraphia (a writing disability). Simply having a diagnosed learning disability does not simply make the student eligible for accommodations: a learning specialist must document the specific limitations, their impact on taking the tests, and a history demonstrating that such accommodations have already been shown to be effective in school over time. Accommodations are most frequently granted when the presence of a learning disability was established a year or years prior to the testing: "newfound" learning disabilities receive much greater scrutiny and are less likely to be accommodated. Diagnosis of a learning disability is based on professional evaluation of a student's aptitude for learning, the presence of a relative weakness in one or more specific learning processes, and a significant lag in the development of reading, math, or writing skills compared with the student's learning potential. An independent learning specialist and/or some child psychologists can complete such evaluations. This is usually done at the family's expense, and because it is considered an educational service and not a medical service, is not covered by insurance.

Accommodations for ADHD

Students with ADHD may in some cases receive accommodations based on that diagnosis. The ADHD must be diagnosed by a clinical psychologist, licensed educational psychologist, psychiatrist, or MD. Further, a credentialed learning specialist or public school team must fully document the impact of that diagnosis on the student's learning in much the same way as one would document a learning disability. Whether or not a student takes medication for ADHD is not relevant to the test administrator.

No Reporting to Colleges on Accommodations

The College Board and ACT do not report to colleges that accommodations were given for these tests. The use of accommodations is intended to level the playing field in the testing process for those whose learning abilities require some special consideration. Students who use such accommodations are not “flagged,” and the need for accommodations in a testing situation does not suggest that a student is less likely to do well in college than students who did not require accommodations. If a student is found eligible for testing accommodations, most colleges will also provide for similar supports once a student is enrolled. Keep in mind, however, that students needing accommodations will likely need to work harder or longer to meet certain academic goals than students without a learning disability. Families should strive to find not the “best school,” but rather the “best match” when looking toward higher education. Such students may require specific strategies for success, but they typically offer unusual strengths as well. Even the most demanding universities offer supports for students with learning disabilities because they recognize that a learning difference does not imply a learning deficit. **For more information about the evaluation of learning differences, see the QWERTY website:**

www.qwertyed.com/learning-differences-and-adhd-testing/



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**Introduction
to Accommodations for
College Entrance Exam Testing**