



INDEPENDENT
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**This resource
is designed to
help students
who learn
differently and
their advocates
navigate the
process.**

TESTING ACCOMMODATIONS

Students who learn differently often need to be tested differently as well. Both the College Board and ACT, Inc. allow for students with diagnosed learning differences to apply for accommodations on standardized tests that will allow them to demonstrate their potential. However, applying for those accommodations can be as complicated as some of the hardest questions on the exams themselves! This resource is designed to help students who learn differently and their advocates (like parents, counselors, and independent educational consultants) navigate the process. We will take you step-by-step through the current state of standardized testing accommodations and give you guidance on when and how to apply for accommodations, what to do if an initial application is denied, and what to expect on test day itself. We hope this resource will provide the information students need to do their best on test day, so that they can achieve the academic and professional goals they have set for themselves.

Testing Accommodations: What's Changed

The story on everyone's mind during 2019 was the college admissions scandal, and it's not surprising why. It had every hallmark of a crowd-pleaser: famous faces, high stakes, and millions of dollars. But in the midst of the tabloids and celebrity gossip lies a more serious truth: many of the families involved used the accommodations process to facilitate exam fraud.

In response to the scandal, both the College Board and ACT, Inc. vowed to do more to keep their exams secure and fair, but parents and student advocates voiced concern that these bad actors might make it more difficult for students who genuinely need accommodations to get them granted. In this environment, it's more important than ever that parents know how to advocate for their children, and understanding the process is the first step.



Applying takes time, and it's important to budget for that time on the front end.



In the Accommodations Process, the School Remains Central

In 2016, the Department of Justice published a set of guidelines detailing how testing companies must comply with the amended Americans With Disabilities Act. These guidelines led the College Board and ACT, Inc, to streamline and standardize their accommodations request process in order to better serve students with disabilities. The most significant change to the process placed students' schools as the central nervous system of the accommodations process. Essentially, students who have an IEP (Individualized Education Plan), 504 plan, or other formal accommodations plan in place at their school—and who use said plan for schoolwork and tests—are likely to be approved for those same accommodations on the SAT or ACT.

Both testing agencies pushed the accommodations request process online, on platforms that can only be accessed by recognized testing coordinators at students' schools (these are usually guidance counselors or disability coordinators). Often, families don't even have to provide documentation (apart from what they submitted to the school to get the accommodations plan in place in the first place) unless they need to appeal a denial.

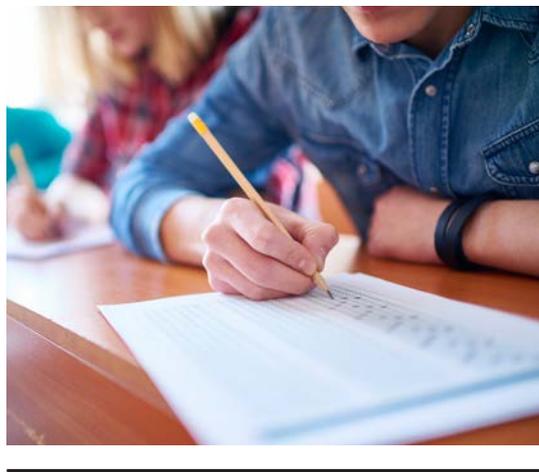
Students who are homeschooled or who wish to apply for accommodations without the help of their school have to do so with a paper form, available for download from either the College Board's or the ACT's website, depending on the test. In these cases, the burden of documentation does fall on the family, so it's important to have recent psychoeducational testing and to make sure everything is documented. This is a good rule of thumb for all students, whether they are homeschooled or not, but parents of homeschooled students will need to be particularly thorough.

The most important thing that parents can do is to be aware of their student's educational needs and consistently advocate that those needs are met. Do not wait until sophomore or junior year to address learning differences that might require testing accommodations. Any student who needs accommodations on the SAT and ACT would also benefit from utilizing accommodations in school as well. Parents of students who get informal accommodations in school—such as extended time on tests—but who don't have a formal IEP or 504 plan should work with their students' school to document these accommodations.

Make Time for the Process

Applying for accommodations takes time, and it's important to budget for that time on the front end.

For College Board exams (the SAT, PSAT, SAT Subject Tests, and AP Exams), it's a good idea to get started as soon as possible, because parents can apply for accommodations at any time during their student's high school career. When a student is approved for accommodations on a College Board exam, the accommodations follow them to any type of College Board exam¹ and are good for a year after their high school graduation (with the exception of temporary accommodations for illness or injury, which have a stated expiration date). It can take up to 7 weeks for the College Board to return a decision, which is another reason it's a good idea to start early.



For the ACT, parents have to act within a very specific time frame: *after* registering for a specific test date, but *before* the late registration deadline for that date. When registering their student, parents must indicate the need for accommodations; the ACT registration portal will then provide

¹Please note that these accommodations do not carry over into the PSAT 8/9, CLEP or ACCUPLACER exams; families will have to apply for accommodations on those tests separately.

them with information and next steps. They should immediately contact their student's school to get the process started. The ACT accommodations decision process can take up to 2 weeks.

Families whose requests are denied by either testing agency can appeal the decision with the help of their testing coordinator; however, the appeals process also takes time and must be completed before the deadline for a given test date.

Changes to ACT Accommodations

Prior to 2018, students with standard extended time (time-and-a-half) on the ACT were allowed to self-pace; this allowed students to spend as much time as they needed on certain areas and less on others. Needless to say, the self-pacing feature made the extended-time ACT far more accessible to a number of students than its SAT counterpart. That all changed in 2018, when ACT, Inc, changed its self-paced extended time to a rigid, time-and-a-half per section format. Students currently taking the ACT with extended time should be aware that **they will no longer be allowed to move within the test at their own pace**: they will be moved from section to section by their proctor.

In the wake of the Varsity Blues scandal, ACT, Inc has made some additional changes to its special testing accommodations to shore up security and prevent abuse. For students taking the test with multi-day or other special testing accommodations that can't be given on a National Test Date, the testing window has been shortened from three to two weeks. In addition, ACT, Inc has increased its monitoring of special testing locations and requests for individual testing.



ACT Changing Again

In September 2020, ACT, Inc will be rolling out new features: superscored reports, online testing, and section retesting. The second two features reflect a major step in the move toward computer-based testing, which has been the ACT's standard in international testing for several years.

ACT, Inc, predicts that the change to computer-based testing will not affect the accommodations request process. Many accommodations, such as time and a half extended time, small group testing and preferential seating, *should* carry over to online testing and section retesting on National Test Dates. In addition, ACT, Inc predicts that some accommodations will be made easier with online functions built into the testing platform, like magnifiers or text-to-speech add-ons. Students with special testing accommodations will likely still use a paper test, because they will not be able to test at online-equipped national testing sites.

It's important to note that ACT, Inc's responses to accommodations questions have been speculative; it is impossible to know *exactly* what impact these changes will have on the test-day experience of students with accommodations until September and beyond.

Final Thoughts

The testing landscape is in a state of flux right now. Some of the changes were long planned; others are coming in the wake of scandal. However, the most important aspects of the accommodations process remain the same. Documentation is vital, as is school support. The final—and perhaps most vital—key to success is adequate time for the process to play out (building in a cushion for appeal if necessary). These three tools will allow parents to position themselves as advocates for their students' educational needs on the college admissions tests. Your independent educational consultant can be a valuable ally in helping you to navigate this changing, and at times, confusing process. ■

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ACCOMMODATIONS FAST FACTS

	SAT	ACT
Where are requests submitted and managed?	Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) Online Dashboard	Test Accessibility and Accommodations (TAA) Online System
Who can access the online system?	Schools only (work with your school's "SSD Coordinator" to submit)	Schools only (work with your school's ACT "Test Coordinator" to submit)
Do I have to register for a test before I request accommodations?	No	Yes
I have a learning disability. How recent does my psychoeducational evaluation need to be?	Within the last 5 years	Within the last 3 academic years
How long do I need to have had and used formal school accommodations before submitting a request?	Four months (Note: in our experience, the College Board is more likely to grant requests for students who have used accommodations for at least one school year.)	One year (Note: Overall, the ACT is more skeptical of a recent diagnosis and plan.)
Once I submit my request, how long will it take to receive a response?	Up to seven weeks	Up to two weeks (often much faster if the first request includes all the right documentation)
How long do my accommodations last? Do I need to submit a new request for each test I take?	Generally speaking, accommodations remain in place until one year after high school graduation and apply to any PSAT, SAT Subject Test, AP Exam you take during that time. You do not need to submit a new request through SSD online.	ACT accommodations apply to the specific test you registered for when you made your initial request. To apply the accommodations to future tests, you'll need to request them again, and your TAA Coordinator must approve them.
How do I contact the testing company?	Contact SSD Email: ssd@info.collegeboard.org Phone: 212-713-8333 Fax: 866-360-0114 College Board SSD Program P.O. Box 7504 London, KY 40742-7504	Call ACT, Inc. at 319-337-1332

