

# Iowa Guidelines for the Use of Accommodations during Instruction and District Wide Assessments for Students with Disabilities (adapted from the CCSSO Accommodations Manual)

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**Introduction** These guidelines describe a process to be used to select, administer, and evaluate the effectiveness of instructional and assessment accommodations used by students with disabilities.

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**Guidelines Audience** The process described in this document is designed to be used by:

- Individualized Education Program teams;
- general education teachers;
- special education teachers;
- administrators; and
- district level assessment staff.

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## Five steps

Step	Action
1	Expect students with disabilities to achieve grade-level academic content standards.
2	Learn about accommodations for instruction and assessment.
3	Select accommodations for instruction and assessment for individual students.
4	Administer accommodations during instruction and assessment.
5	Evaluate and improve accommodation use.

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**Guidance provided by manual** The guidance in this manual pertains to students with disabilities who receive district standards-based instruction and participate in large-scale districtwide assessments.

This guidance does not pertain to students with significant cognitive disabilities who are assessed according to alternate achievement standards.

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**Step One** **Expect students with disabilities to achieve grade-level academic content standards.**

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**Rationale** Both the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) require the

participation of students with disabilities in district standards-based instruction and district wide assessment initiatives.

“In the school year 2000-2001, the categories of students that did not have cognitive impairments totaled **86.5%** of children identified as being eligible for special education under IDEA.” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, as quoted in Wright’s Law: Children with Disabilities Under No Child Left Behind: Myths and Realities – a Position Paper from NAPAS)

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**NCLB**

A basic education reform principle within NCLB is the requirement for stronger accountability for results for all students.

Academic content standards (what student should learn) and academic achievement standards (how well students should learn) in reading/language arts and mathematics (science added in 2007-08) form the basis of a state’s accountability system.

State assessments are the mechanism for checking whether students have attained the knowledge and skills defined by the district’s content standards and benchmarks.

A state’s accountability system is defined in terms of adequate yearly progress (AYP). This is a way to measure the improvement in achieving district standards and benchmarks for all students and designated subgroups each year. Districts, area education agencies and the state are required by law to report AYP each year.

The Iowa Department of Education holds schools, districts, and area education agencies accountable on an annual basis for making AYP. The United States Department of Education holds Iowa accountable for making AYP. Ultimately sanctions are put in place if a school, a district, an AEA, or the state do not make AYP.

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**IDEA 2004**

Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004)

Accountability for individuals is provided through the Individualized Education Program (IEP) developed on the basis of each child’s unique needs. IEPs are a written legal document for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with federal and state special education laws. The IEP includes a statement of any individual accommodations to be used during instruction and the administration of districtwide assessments.

IDEA requires the participation of students with disabilities in state and

districtwide assessments. Children with disabilities are to be included in general state and districtwide assessment programs. Accommodations are to be provided during instruction and the administration of districtwide assessments as documented on the student's IEP.

“The Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) is very clear about using testing accommodations only when these changes do not themselves change the “construct” being measured by the assessment.”  
(Testing Coordinator Guide for The Iowa Tests)

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**Including all students**

Both federal and state laws require that all students with disabilities participate in assessments. Schools, districts, area education agencies and the state are held accountable for the academic performance of all students.

IEP team members must actively engage in a planning process that addresses the:

- Assurance of the provision of accommodations to facilitate student access to the general education curriculum, grade level instruction and state assessments, and
  - Use of alternate assessments to assess the achievement of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.
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**Equitable Access**

Equitable access to the general education curriculum and grade level instruction on the district's content standards and benchmarks for all students must be ensured.

To accomplish this, IEP team members must be familiar with:

- The district's content standards and benchmarks; and
  - Appropriate methods of collaboration/consultation between general and special educators.
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**Achieving grade level academic content standards**

Approximately 86.5% of students with disabilities are able to achieve grade level academic content standards when the following three conditions are met:

- Instruction is provided by teachers who:
  - are qualified to teach in the content areas addressed by district standards and benchmarks; and
  - know how to differentiate instruction for diverse learners.
- IEPs for students with disabilities are developed to ensure the provision of specially designed instruction (e.g. specific reading skills, strategies for “learning how to learn”).

- Appropriate accommodations are provided to help students access grade level content.
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**Assessment and instructional accommodations**

Accommodations provided to a student during districtwide assessments must be the same as the accommodations provided for classroom assessment, a new accommodation is not to be introduced solely for the use during districtwide assessment.

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**Step Two**

**Learn about accommodations for instruction and assessment.**

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**What are accommodations?**

Accommodations **do not** reduce learning expectations.

Accommodations are intended to reduce or even eliminate the effects of a student's disability.

Accommodations are practices and procedures in the areas of:

- presentation,
- response,
- setting, and
- timing/scheduling

“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.” (Test Coordinator Guide for The Iowa Tests)

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**Presentation**

**Presentation Accommodations** – Allow students to access information in ways that do not require them to visually read standard print. These alternate modes of access are auditory, multi-sensory, tactile and visual.

Examples of Presentation Accommodations:

Visual:

- Large Print
- Magnification Devices
- Sign Language

Tactile

- Braille
- Tactile Graphics

Auditory

- Human Reader

- Instruction or Assessment on Audiotape or Compact Disk
- Recorded Texts
- Audio Amplification Devices
- Books on Tape

Multi-Sensory

- Videotape and Descriptive Video
- Screen Reader
- Visual Cues
- Notes, Outlines, and Instructions
- Talking Materials

**Who Benefits** – Students who benefit most from presentation accommodations are those with print disabilities, defined as difficulty or inability to visually read standard print due to a physical, sensory, or cognitive disability.

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**Response**

**Response Accommodations** – Allow students to complete activities, assignments, and assessments in different ways or to solve or organize problems using some type of assistive device or organizer.

Examples of Response Accommodations:

- Scribe and Note Taker
- Computer with Word Processing Program
- Speech to Text
- Braille
- Tape Recorder
- Responding in Test Booklet (rather than on the answer sheet)
- Calculation Devices
- Spelling and Grammar Devices
- Visual and Graphic Organizers

**Who Benefits** - Students who benefit most from response accommodations are those with physical, sensory, or learning disabilities (including difficulties with memory, sequencing, directionality, alignment, and organization.)

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**Setting**

**Setting Accommodations** – Change in the location where a test is administered or an assignment is completed or a change in the conditions of the assessment setting.

Examples of Setting Accommodations:

- Sound blocking headphones

- Different room
- Study Carrell

**Who Benefits** - Students who benefit most from setting accommodations are easily distracted in large group settings and who concentrate best in a small group or individual setting.

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**Timing and Scheduling**

**Timing and Scheduling Accommodations** – Increase the allowable length of time to complete an assessment or assignment or a change in the way the time is organized.

Examples of Timing and Scheduling Accommodations:

- Extended Time
- Multiple or Frequent Breaks
- Change in the order of activities

**Who Benefits** - Students who benefit most from timing and scheduling accommodations are those who need more time than generally allowed to complete activities, assignments, and assessments.

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**Modifications vs. accommodations**

Accommodations do not reduce learning expectations, accommodations provide access.

Modifications refer to practices that change, lower, or reduce learning expectations.

Examples of Modifications:

- Requiring a student to learn less material (e.g., fewer objectives, shorter unites or lessons, fewer pages or problems),
- Reducing assignments and assessments so a student only needs to complete the easiest problems or items,
- Revising assignments or assessments to make them easier (e.g. crossing out half of the response choices on a multiple-choice test so that a student only has to pick from two options instead of four), or
- Giving a student hints or clues to correct responses on assignments and tests.

It is important to note that when modifications are used what a student learns is different because the learning expectations for the student is changed, lowered or reduced. The use of accommodation does not change the learning expectations for the student, accommodations change the way the student accesses or demonstrates learning not what is learned.

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## Step Three

### Select accommodations for instruction and assessment for individual students.

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#### Selection of accommodations

Effective decision-making about the provision of appropriate accommodations begins with making good instructional decisions.

Making decisions about accommodations is one in which members of the IEP team attempt to **“level the playing field”** so that students with disabilities can participate in the general education curriculum.

Making good decisions is facilitated by gathering and reviewing good information about the student’s disability and present level of academic achievement and functional performance in relation to district content standards and benchmarks.

The IEP team must remember that accommodations should level the playing field so the student can acquire, store and demonstrate grade level skills and knowledge, not give an unfair advantage to a student with disabilities.

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#### IEP meetings

There are potentially three times during the process of developing a student’s IEP when accommodations should be addressed.

1. Consideration of Special Factors (Special considerations to be addressed in developing this IEP. – Page B of the Iowa’s State IEP) It is during this time that the IEP team discusses the appropriateness of communication and assistive technology supports.
  2. Supplementary Aids and Services (Special Education Services – Page F of the Iowa’s State IEP) This is the time when the IEP team discusses the services, activities and supports that will be provided in general education classes and other education-related settings which allow the student to be educated with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate.
  3. Participation in Assessments (Special Education Services – Page G of the Iowa’s State IEP “Indicate how this individual will participate in district-wide assessments”) – During this part of the IEP meeting the team will document the accommodations that are needed to facilitate the participation of the student in state and district-wide assessments.
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#### Involving Students

It is critical for students with disabilities to understand their disabilities and learn self-advocacy strategies for success in school and throughout life.

Teachers and other IEP team members can play a key role in working with

students to advocate for themselves in the context of selecting, using, and evaluating accommodations.

The more students are involved in the selection process, the more likely the accommodations will be used, especially as students reach adolescence and the desire to be more independent increases.

Students need opportunities to learn which accommodations are most helpful to them, and then they need to learn how to make certain those accommodations are provided in all of their classes and wherever they need them outside of school.

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**Guidance from  
the Iowa  
Testing  
Program  
Website**

When selecting accommodations for a student with disabilities to use during the Iowa Test of Basic Skills or the Iowa Test of Education Development it is important to look at the guidance provided by the Iowa Testing Program.

“The primary goal of using the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and Iowa Test of Education Development (ITED) should be to obtain information that will have value for planning and implementing instruction.”

“Occasionally, however, the standardized test administrations procedures must be changed so that the best possible information can be obtained for particular students... Under such circumstance, it is reasonable to change the standard administration procedures in ways that will permit meaning achievement information to be obtained.”

A student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) should be the guide to the provision of accommodations.

“The purpose of an accommodation is to reduce entirely, or in part, the influence of a student’s disability on his or her test performance. The goal of successful accommodation is to interpret the student’s test results as though there was no disability at all. Such interpretation requires decisions by the IEP team that neither gives an advantage nor a disadvantage to the student during testing.”

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**Iowa Tests  
Guidance for  
Test  
Coordinator**

“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." (Test Coordinators Guide for The Iowa Tests)

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**Iowa Tests  
Guidelines for  
IEP Teams**

"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 certain disabilities 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 did 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." (Test Coordinator Guide for The Iowa Tests)

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**Guiding**

Selecting accommodations for instruction and assessment is the role of a

**Questions**

student's IEP team.

The following questions are provided as a guide to the selection of appropriate accommodations for student receiving special education services as well as reviewing the accommodations for students are currently using.

- What are the student's learning strengths and areas of further improvement?
- How do the student's learning needs affect the achievement of grade-level content standards?
- What specialized instruction (e.g., learning strategies, organizational skills, reading skills) does the student need to achieve grade-level content standards?
- What accommodations will increase the student's access to instruction and assessment by addressing the student's learning needs and reducing the effect of the student's disability? These may be new accommodations or accommodations the student is currently using.
- What accommodations does the student regularly use during instruction and assessments?
- What are the results for assignments and assessments when accommodations were used and not used?
- What is the student perception of how well and accommodation "worked"?
- Are there effective combinations of accommodations?
- What difficulties did the student experience when using accommodations?
- What are the perceptions of parents, teachers, and specialists about how the accommodation worked?
- Should the student continue to use an accommodation, are changes needed, or should the use of the accommodation be discontinued?

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**Other Considerations**

Of the accommodations that match the student's needs, consider

- The student's willingness to learn to use the accommodation,
- Opportunities to learn how to use the accommodation in the classroom settings,
- Conditions for use on state assessments, and
- Those different accommodations that may be appropriate in different content areas.

Plan how and when the student will learn to use each new accommodation. Be certain there is ample time to learn to use instructional and assessment accommodations before an assessment takes place. Finally, plan for the ongoing evaluation and improvement of the student's use of accommodations.

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**Do's of Selection**

**Do...**

- Make accommodations decisions based on individualized needs.
  - Select accommodations that reduce the effect of the disability to access instruction and demonstrate learning.
  - Be certain to document instructional and assessment accommodation(s) on the IEP.
  - Be familiar with the types of accommodations that can be used as both instructional and assessment accommodations.
  - Be specific about the “Where, When, Who, and How” of providing accommodations.
  - Refer to state accommodations policies and understand implications of selections.
  - Evaluate accommodations used by the student.
  - Get input about accommodations from teachers, parents, and students, and use it to make decisions at IEP team meetings.
  - Provide accommodations for assessments routinely used for classroom instruction.
  - Select accommodations based on specific individual needs in each content area.
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**Don'ts of Selections**

**Don't...**

- Make accommodations decisions based on whatever is easiest to do.
  - Select accommodations that are unrelated to the student learning needs documented on the IEP and give students an unfair advantage.
  - Use an accommodation that has not been documented on the IEP.
  - Assume that all instructional accommodations are appropriate for use on assessments.
  - Simply indicate an accommodation will be provided “as appropriate” or “as necessary.”
  - Check every accommodation possible on a checklist simply to be “safe.”
  - Assume the same accommodations remain appropriate year after year.
  - Make decisions about instructional and assessment accommodations without input from students, parents and teachers.
  - Provide an assessment accommodation for the first time on the day of a test.
  - Assume certain accommodations, such as extra time, are appropriate for every student in every content area.
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**Step 4**

**Administer accommodations during instruction and assessment**

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**During**

Students must be provided the selected accommodations during instructional

<b>Instruction</b>	<p>periods that necessitate their use.</p> <p>An accommodation may not be used solely during assessments.</p> <hr/>
<b>During Assessment – Planning for Test Day</b>	<p>Once decisions have been made to meet individual student needs, the logistics of providing the actual accommodations during state and district assessments must be mapped out.</p> <p>It is essential for all IEP team members to know and understand the requirements and consequences of district and state assessments, including the use of accommodations.</p> <p>Prior to the day of the test, be certain test administrators and proctors know what accommodations each student will be using and how to administer them properly.</p> <hr/>
<b>Administering Assessments and Accommodations.</b>	<p>State and local laws and policies specify practices to assure test security and the standardized and ethical administration of assessments.</p> <p><i>The Code of Professional Responsibilities in Educational Monitoring</i> states that test administrators and others involved in assessments must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take appropriate security precautions before, during, and after the administration of the assessment;</li> <li>• Understand the procedures needed to administer the assessment prior to administration;</li> <li>• Administer standardized assessments according to prescribed procedures and conditions and notify appropriate persons if any nonstandard or delimiting conditions occur;</li> <li>• Avoid any conditions in the conduct of the assessment that might invalidate the results;</li> <li>• Provide for and document all reasonable and allowable accommodations for the administration of the assessment to persons with disabilities or special needs; and</li> <li>• Avoid actions or conditions that would permit or encourage individuals or groups to receive scores that misrepresent their actual levels of attainment.</li> </ul> <hr/>
<b>Definition of Testing Practices</b>	<p>Ethical testing practices must be maintained during the administration of a test.</p> <p><b>Standardization</b> refers to adherence to uniform administration procedures and conditions during an assessment.</p>

**Test security** involves maintaining the confidentiality of test questions and answers, and is critical in ensuring the integrity and validity of a test.

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## Step 5

## Evaluate and Improve Accommodations Use

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### Evaluating Accommodations

Accommodations must be selected on the basis of the individual student's needs and must be used consistently for instruction and assessment.

Collecting and analyzing data on the use and effectiveness of accommodations are necessary to ensure the meaningful participation of students with disabilities in state and district-wide assessments.

Data on the use and impact of accommodations during assessments may:

- Reveal questionable patterns of accommodations use;
  - Support the continued use of some accommodations;
  - Rethink the use of some accommodations;
  - Indicate areas in which the IEP team and test administrators need additional training and support.
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### Types of Data collected

The collection of data that can be used to guide the formation evaluation process include:

- Observations conducting during test administration;
  - Interviews with test administrators;
  - Talking with students after testing sessions.
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### Evaluation at the student level

These questions will guide the evaluation of accommodations from the viewpoint of the student:

1. What accommodations does the student use during instruction and assessments?
2. What are the results of classroom assignments and assessments when accommodations are used versus when accommodations are not used?
3. If a student did not meet the expected level of performance, is it due to not having access to the necessary instruction, not using the accommodations delineated in the IEP, or using accommodations that are ineffective?
4. What is the student's perception of how the accommodation worked?
5. What combinations of accommodations seem to be effective?
6. What are the difficulties encountered in the use of accommodations?
7. What are the perceptions of teachers and others about how the accommodations appear to be working?

These evaluation questions can be used to formatively evaluate the

accommodations used at the school, district, and student level as a whole.

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**Sources of  
Information**

The August 2005 Edition of The Council of Chief State School Officers Accommodations Manual was the primary source of information for this document.

Additional information in regard to accommodation use with the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED) was gathered from the Iowa Testing Program Website and the Iowa Testing Program Technical Assistance Manual.

U.S. Department of Education, 2002, as quoted in Wright's Law: Children with Disabilities Under No Child Left Behind: Myths and Realities – a Position Paper from NAPAS

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