

APPLYING FOR ACCOMMODATIONS ON GRADUATE SCHOOL ENTRANCE TESTS

Individuals with disabilities can request accommodations for taking entrance exams for graduate school programs. Although in some cases more extensive documentation is required, the procedure is similar to that followed when seeking accommodations for college entrance tests. This IDA Fact Sheet gives a broad overview of the process in order to assist individuals who are pursuing test accommodations on high stakes entrance tests such as the GRE, MCAT, and LSAT. It provides guidance about what deadlines to consider, how to submit sufficient disability documentation, and resources that might be helpful. However, each testing agency sets its own requirements for requesting accommodations.

The Application Process

- Test takers should carefully read information on the program's website about how to apply for accommodations. The guidelines are updated often, sometimes more than once per year. Many tests are administered on computer and incorporate functions such as a built-in calculator, clock, etc. For students with disabilities, there are different formats available for the test itself. Additionally, most testing agencies provide supplemental information or a handbook for test takers with disabilities.
- The Disability Services Office at the college or university will be able to assist in completing the application and acquiring the required documentation.
- Early submission of applications is important, as it's not unusual for testing agencies to request additional scores, updated testing, or clarification, which can cause delays. This is particularly true during peak application periods.
- Once the agency receives an application for accommodations, the review cycle is commonly 60 days, so it may be this long before the applicant is notified. If additional testing or an appeal is needed, this increases the review time even more. The student must plan for any re-submissions of new documentation or appeal requests to be accomplished at least 60 days in advance of the test date.
- Since testing agencies no longer "flag" scores obtained under non-standard conditions, it is important to request accommodations that are needed.

Documentation

- All required documentation should be sent in one complete packet. An application will usually not be reviewed if information is missing. The guidelines are very specific, such as an original sealed transcript or the actual SAT score report. If accommodations were granted for college entrance tests, a copy of the authorization letter should be included.
- Testing agencies require current documentation according to their individual "recency" criteria. For example, many testing agencies request documentation for learning disabilities to be dated within the last three to five years to reflect the test taker's need for specific accommodations. Test takers should review the documentation guidelines posted on the website.
- A full evaluation may be required, or in some cases, a documentation update will suffice. A documentation update is a brief report or narrative by a qualified professional that includes a summary of the previous disability documentation findings as well as additional clinical and observational data to establish the

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test taker's current need for accommodations. For example, ETS allows certain accommodations to be used during GRE administration if certification is provided attesting to the use of such accommodations in college or a work setting.

- When a current, comprehensive evaluation is needed, it must be conducted by a qualified professional. An evaluator is considered qualified if he/she has had extensive graduate level training and experience in the area of assessment being conducted (e.g. Learning Disabilities, ADHD, psychological disorders) and the administration and interpretation of the relevant tests. Documentation should be complete, dated, signed, in English, and on official letterhead.
- Disability documentation should address all of the following:
 - The existence of an impairment that substantially limits a major life activity, as compared to most people in the general population
 - A diagnosis of the disability and the current impact of impairment and how it limits the student's ability to take the test under standard conditions
 - A rationale for why the requested accommodations are necessary and appropriate. For example, if extra time is requested, the evaluation must say how much extended time should be provided and on what basis.
 - Accommodations granted in the past have to match and show precedent for all accommodations being requested for the graduate school test.
- If sufficient disability documentation is unavailable or outdated, it may take up to nine months in advance to find a qualified professional. That evaluator will need relevant historical information. This needs to include records dating back to kindergarten, when relevant. Required information usually includes the following:
 - Letters and documents verifying a history of accommodations in school, such as IEPs or 504 plans, or proof of accommodations on statewide assessments.
 - A description of tutoring or coaching services provided.
 - A comprehensive evaluation report for diagnosis of the disability and accommodation determination.
 - High school and college transcripts may provide good evidence if they showed the impact of your disability on grades (e.g., dropped classes, withdrawals, incompletes, or failing grades).
 - The college's Disability Services coordinator should indicate what accommodations were approved and the results of their implementation.
- A Personal Statement is typically required to provide personal insight into the nature of the disability and how the requested accommodations have helped to "level the playing field." It should include a discussion of the functional impairment and its effect on activities beyond test taking (e.g., time management and organization, reading or writing, or employment outcomes). It should indicate what accommodations are necessary on the high-stakes test and why the specific amount of extended time requested is needed.
- If the disability was diagnosed later in life, or there is not a history of formal accommodations, the Personal Statement should include specific examples on how the disability has impacted school and/or work performance. It can include a description of strategies used to succeed in school and work life in the absence of a formal diagnosis, treatment, or accommodations. It is also important to discuss why accommodations are necessary now.

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Types of Decision Letters

There are several types of decision letters that the testing agency may send:

1. **Approval**—This type of letter will list the accommodations that have been approved.
 - o Once accommodations have been approved, directions will be given in the letter regarding how to schedule the test and other pertinent information.
 - o Extra time may be needed to schedule the test after approval for accommodations (for example, to secure a reader or scribe).
2. **Request for Additional Information**—This type of letter is not a denial of the request, but allows for reconsideration. It specifies that the agency needs additional evidence to support the request for accommodations. It is crucial to address each specific thing requested in the letter.
3. **Denial**—If the testing agency finds the documentation insufficient to support the accommodation request, this letter will explain the decision. Each testing agency has established an appeal process to request further review of the application. The information on how to appeal a decision is typically stated in the denial letter or on the agency's website.

Preparing for the Test

Whether or not an accommodation request is approved, it is important for the student to become familiar with the upcoming test.

- Most testing agencies have a wide range of practice materials at no or low cost available to test takers. In the case of some tests, such as the MCAT, there are preparation materials designed specifically for applicants that have had accommodations approved.

- Areas of particular focus are the test format, the types of questions used, and the test directions for each type of question. This can reduce the amount of time spent familiarizing oneself with instructions on the test day. Alternate-format practice materials can be requested if this is one of the desired accommodations.
- Test sites differ, so it is a good idea to check out the location in advance.

Resources

Educational Testing Service website

- http://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/register/disabilities/?WT.ac=grehome_gredisabilities_150213

ETS Document specific to students with disabilities

- http://www.ets.org/s/disabilities/pdf/bulletins/supplement_test_takers_with_disabilities_health_needs.pdf

Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT)

- <https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/taking-mcat-exam/mcat-exam-accommodations/>

Law School Admission Test (LSAT)

- <http://www.lsac.org/jd/lsat/accommodated-testing>

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