

C. Frequently Asked Questions

Question: I thought attention disorders are a childhood problem that disappears with age. So wouldn't my students who had ADD or ADHD as children already have outgrown it?

Answer: People with attention disorders have them throughout their lifetimes. However, with age, those with ADHD may be more able to control inappropriate levels of activity. And students often learn compensatory strategies to deal with focusing problems as they get older.

Question: Aren't attention disorders really just character flaws or a failure to mature?

Answer: When it comes to taking in information, those with ADHD have neurological differences.

Question: Will the same accommodations that worked for one student with ADHD work for another with ADHD?

Answer: Some students with ADHD have a problem staying focused. Others with ADHD not only have problems focusing, they also may find it hard to sit still or be silent during classroom discussions. So while sometimes these students will require some of the same accommodations, you should always treat those with attention disorders as individuals. Ask each student what accommodations have worked best in the past and why.

Question: Students with ADHD have trouble getting organized, right? So can the way I teach a course help?

Answer: It's not fair to generalize any disability. However, it's true that most students with ADHD don't know how to get organized. Professors can help by imposing as much structure on the class as possible. Use overheads, outlines and advance verbal and visual organizers.

Question: What do you mean by organizers?

Answer: Verbal and visual advance organizers are brief explanations of why the material to be covered is relevant, what your purpose is and what the goals for the lesson are.

Question: Isn't that unfair to the other students for me to spend class time helping a student with ADHD to get organized?

Answer: Not really. Organizers are universal accommodations because they help all students.

Question: Should I grant extended test time for assignments?

Answer: Many students with ADHD will request extra time for assignments, but this accommodation should not be given out *carte blanche*. Work with your disability services office to ensure that extended assignment time is an appropriate accommodation. Meanwhile, ensure that your instructions on the assignment, including the due date, are absolutely clear. Due dates should always be in writing.

Faculty Training Tips

Question: A student asked me if she could take the test in a “noise-free” environment. Isn’t a classroom with students quietly taking a test quiet enough? And does any campus truly have a room that is noise-free?

Answer: Students with ADHD are easily distracted. Many do need an environment more quiet than the typical classroom. Work with your DS office to find a suitable location. That location should NOT be in the hallway with a lapboard or in someone’s office with the phone ringing. It’s also not acceptable to sit a student in an empty classroom for the first part of a test, then move him to another place when the room is needed. The move itself becomes a distraction.

As for the “noise-free” request? Yes, it’s pretty hard to fulfill. Stick to the term “distraction-reduced environment.” You can tell the student that you cannot ensure that the testing environment will be absolutely quiet the whole time. Find the student a location that is secure for testing purposes, but also is most likely to have limited distractions.

Question: I have a student who is tape-recording my lectures. I think she should be taking notes, too. Am I right?

Answer: Absolutely. Students should even take notes if they have a note-taker. This will help them understand and focus on the material. The student should leave space and go back and fill in anything their note-taker or the tape recorder had that they missed.

Question: I just received a letter from my DS office that states that one of my students needs a note-taker. We don’t have a note-taker office. What do I do?

Answer: Promptly and enthusiastically announce to the class that a volunteer note-taker has been requested. Do not name the student. Find out from your DS office if note-takers get any perks. For instance, some institutions list volunteer credits on students’ transcripts.

Question: Won’t the students — at least the note-taker — know who has ADHD?

Answer: No. That shouldn’t be the case. At most institutions, the note-taker will drop off the notes after classes (many times at the DS office), and they’re held until the student picks them up.

Question: Since she received a note-taker as an accommodation, a student with ADHD has not been showing up for class. What should I do?

Answer: Hold her accountable as you would any other student. If a student with ADHD skips a class, you might want to keep her from getting those notes. Discuss this problem with your DS office to see if the institution has any policies already in place.