

C. Frequently Asked Questions

Question: Do I have to change my teaching style if a student with LD tells me that she is a “visual learner” and that my lectures are too difficult for her to process?

Answer: Not really. Rather than lecturing less, provide the student with a copy of your notes before or after each class. Also, consider putting an outline of the points you will cover in each lecture on a Web site before class to give all students an organizational framework to follow when you lecture. Whenever possible, incorporate visual aids in your lecture presentations. These will help drive the lesson home for all students.

Question: If a student with a learning disability tells me a few days before a term paper is due that he can’t write it, but has done the research, do I have to excuse him from doing the paper?

Answer: No, but you could give him some suggestions for getting started. Some students with learning disabilities have a real fear they’re going to write something that will make them look dumb. That causes them to have a difficult time writing essays that are clear, well argued and convincing.

Here are some accommodations that may help the student get started:

- Refer him to an appropriate writing help center if one is available on your campus. Give him the phone number and a specific person to ask for.
- Provide him with a proofreader.
- Remind the student to use spell check and grammar check.
- Suggest that the student talk to the disabled student services office about possible computer software. For example, a software program called Inspiration, which sells for less than \$100, helps students organize their thoughts. It’s important to note, however, that the computer software may be an accommodation of a personal nature, which is not required under the ADA.

Question: A student with LD wants me to give him tests that use only essay exams or permit him to orally respond to the questions. Is this a legitimate request?

Answer: Remember that each accommodation must be considered on a case-by-case basis. The first thing you should do is contact your disability services office to make sure the student has provided the office with documentation and that a DS officer has suggested those particular accommodations.

The more appropriate question here is whether you need to alter your exams for the students. The answer is: It depends.

It depends on what you’re trying to measure with your test. The Office for Civil Rights and courts have generally held that an institution can refuse a student’s request, even when supported by documentation, to change an exam *if the changes would defeat the purpose of the exam.*

Question: I’m told I have a reputation as not being a good instructor for students with LD. It’s not an image I want. What are some things I can do to get change that perception?

Answer: The following guidance from the University of Connecticut’s LD Center provides tips for best ways to work with students with disabilities:

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- *Keep it confidential.* Don't expose the student if he wants to keep the disability private. Don't frequently ask him to stay after class in front of others, or ask others in the class to help him "with his problem."
- *Put a statement on the syllabus regarding accommodations and modifications.* Give specific times when students can meet with you and discuss accommodations.
- *Be mindful of the handouts, overheads and other teaching materials to be used in class.* If they are of poor quality, it makes it even tougher on students with LD.
- *Plan ahead.* If you approve a student's request for accommodations, make arrangements prior to the test.
- *Do not work with a changing syllabus.* It can be difficult for a student with a learning disability to change material in mid-semester. Textbooks and assignments based on a changing curriculum can pose a real problem. Students with LD may have to work harder to compensate for changes.
- *Don't make it personally harder on the student.* When a student comes in to pick up a copy of his test, don't tell him how much of a problem it was to put together. This only adds undue stress to a person already under a lot of it.

Question: Does a student have the right to insist that the institution provide paid note-takers instead of voluntary and unpaid note-takers?

Answer: OCR has ruled definitively on this issue. There is no requirement under Section 504 that the university pay for auxiliary aids or services. Indeed, Appendix A to the regulation implementing Section 504 specifically discussed a postsecondary institution's ability to assist students in using existing resources, such as state vocational rehabilitations agencies. If a university can provide effective note taking with volunteers, then it can do so.

Question: Are institutions required to provide tutoring for students with LD?

Answer: An institution has no obligation to provide tutoring except, according to OCR's ruling in *Hood College* "to the extent that it is provided to students without disabilities."

Question: The term *reasonable* accommodation is well known. But what makes an accommodation unreasonable?

Answer: An accommodation is not reasonable if it necessitates modifications of the essential nature of a program or activity. Professors should carefully consider exactly what components of their courses are essential for learning the material and be able to justify what they require of students. Think about factors such as, attendance, field trips, projects, class participation, etc.

Question: If a student says he has a disability and will need extended time for his tests, don't I have a right to know what the disability is and to see proof of the diagnosis?

Answer: No. Students are not required to identify the nature of their disabilities to their professors. But professors have a right to know if students who say they are disabled have been officially approved for accommodations.

If you have a question regarding the need for accommodations, contact your campus disability services office. It should have documentation regarding the student's disability on file. Staff cannot give you details about the disability unless the student has signed a written consent form,

Faculty Training Tips

but they can inform you if the student has a documented disability and if the accommodation requested is appropriate.

If a student chooses to disclose his disability to you, it's important to maintain confidentiality. The confidential nature of disability-related information has been an overarching principle of nondiscrimination law.

Question: If a student comes to me at the beginning of my first class, tells me he has a disability, and asks me to provide a specific accommodation, do I have to immediately spring into action?

Answer: Not unless he shows you verification that he has gone through your institution's disability service office.

If a student claims he has a disability, but has not registered with your disability service office, explain that he must report there to show documentation of his disability. The disability service officer will determine whether the student legally qualifies for accommodations.

Question: Are students with learning disabilities required to inform their institutions that they have a disability?

Answer: No. However, if they want the college or university to provide an academic adjustment, they must identify themselves as having a disability. And they must provide documentation to prove that their disability impacts a major life activity.

Question: What academic adjustments must my institution provide for students with LD?

Answer: The appropriate academic adjustment must be determined based on each student's disability and individual needs. In providing an academic adjustment, your institution is not required to lower or effect substantial modifications to essential requirements.

Also, it does *not* have to provide personal attendants, individually prescribed devices, readers for personal use, or study or other devices or services of a personal nature, such as tutoring and typing.

Question: A student in my class presented me with documentation from the campus disability service office that she is eligible for extra time on tests. But I think that is unnecessary. Am I within my rights to tell the student her test is due when the others are?

Answer: When a student provides the proper documentation for accommodations, you need to comply. In other words, you may not unilaterally decide that an accommodation is unnecessary.

Question: A student with a documented learning disability says he should not have to take my math course. He is majoring in art. Do I have to go along with him being given a waiver for the course?

Answer: If your mathematics course is considered an essential part of the student's degree program, your university probably will not allow it to be waived. Most institutions have an academic committee to decide these issues on a case-by-case basis. Find out your institution's policies and procedures concerning course waivers. And speak to your campus disability service provider for more guidance.