



CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY
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Disability Resource Center
(805) 756-1395

Dear Faculty Member,

This FAQ handout is designed to help you understand and provide test accommodations to students with disabilities enrolled in your courses. Please feel free to contact us with your feedback, questions, or concerns.

FAQs - Testing Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

1. What is "Alternative Testing"?

Alternative testing (AT) is a nationally recognized, appropriate reasonable accommodation for students with certain disabilities. Testing accommodations should not fundamentally alter the intent of the exam or lower the program standards of the university. Test accommodations may include additional test time, alternative test formats (e.g., large print, audio or Braille), or the use of adaptive equipment (word processors, electronic spelling checkers, text enlargers). Some students experience episodic impairments (e.g., epilepsy, depression, migraines, multiple sclerosis) which may need to be considered in determining exam accommodations.

2. Why might it be fair for a student to take an exam with accommodations?

Testing accommodations are provided to ensure examinations do not measure a student's disability, but rather create an environment allowing students to appropriately demonstrate their mastery of the material. Disabilities that interfere with reading print, fine or gross motor skills, processing speed, managing severe anxiety, or sitting for long periods of time may be appropriately accommodated by a test accommodation. For most students, the disability affects the pace at which they can complete work relative to other students. Disabilities may include learning disabilities, visual impairments, motor disabilities, head injuries, attentional or psychological disabilities. For some, the accommodation itself requires more time to use adaptive equipment (e.g., a text enlarger, an audio exam, a scribe or adaptive keyboard). Providing a test accommodation ensures that exam grades most fairly represent the student's understanding of the course material with minimal interference from his/her disability.

3. How do students receive a recommendation for a test accommodation?

Students choosing to work with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) provide documentation from a professional specialist (e.g., physician, clinical psychologist) that is reviewed by DRC staff. If the documentation meets guidelines establishing a disability, a DRC Access Specialist develops recommendations for reasonable accommodations and records them on a student's VISA (Verified Instructional Services and Accommodation) plan. Students should provide faculty with a copy of their VISA. Faculty can also request confirmation of the accommodations by contacting the DRC. Students can also choose to work directly with faculty and independently negotiate their accommodations. Faculty members have the right to work with students directly, or refer students to DRC. DRC staff is also available to consult with faculty regarding the requested accommodations.

4. Who provides AT accommodations?

Like regularly administered exams, many AT accommodations are provided by the faculty or teaching assistant. Providing test accommodations within the department offers students with disabilities comparable access to instructors during tests, ensures greater test security, and facilitates last minute changes or clarifications to exam questions. It also eliminates grading delays and minimizes confusion in exam delivery and return. Exams requiring more complex accommodations (e.g., a Brailled exam, an adaptive computer or workstation, a scribe, etc.) can be provided by the DRC. Exams taken at the DRC require students and

faculty to work together to complete the request forms in a timely manner and coordinate exam delivery to and from the exam location. Throughout the AT process, the student's right to confidentiality shall be maintained (see <http://drc.calpoly.edu/faculty/index.html#disclosure> for more information about confidentiality with regard to DRC documentation and the accommodation process).

5. When and where are accommodations provided?

Generally, exams overlap the time of the regularly scheduled class exams. Occasionally, due to schedule conflicts or back-to-back classes, students may take exams before or after the regularly scheduled class times. Test sites in the department may include adjacent classrooms, faculty offices, libraries or conference rooms. Exams administered through the DRC are generally proctored in our offices by undergraduate student assistants under the supervision of a professional DRC staff member. During busy exam periods, alternate sites may also be used. The DRC may proctor exams in the evening and on weekends when regularly scheduled exams occur at those hours.

6. What happens if faculty feels the requested accommodation is inappropriate? Who has the final authority to determine appropriate test accommodations for students with disabilities?

Ultimately, the institution has the authority to decide the appropriateness of accommodations through a multi-level appeals process. However, most decisions are made via communication between the student and faculty, with additional input from the DRC staff as needed. Students communicate the test accommodations recommended by their DRC Access Specialist, which are based on the interaction between the student's disability and general test conditions. DRC staff may consult with faculty when an accommodation request is unusual or there is concern that the accommodation could fundamentally alter the intent of the exam. Faculty may accept, modify or deny the recommendation. If accepted or modified to the satisfaction of the parties involved, the authority can be thought of as residing within the collaborative process. If there is not a mutually agreed upon accommodation, or if a faculty member denies an accommodation, the student may appeal the decision. While an appeal is in process, services endorsed by the DRC director must continue during the grievance process. (See THE CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY Policy for the Provision of Accommodations and Support Services to Students with Disabilities, Section XI. Page 9 Of 16 at <http://www.calstate.edu/ar/SWDpolicyFINAL.pdf>)

7. What happens when a student makes a late request for AT?

Students are responsible for providing adequate notice to faculty and/or the DRC in order to receive test accommodations. The DRC instructs students to discuss their accommodation needs with faculty within the first three weeks of the quarter. (Sometimes a student acquires a disability during the quarter so this is not always possible). In order to identify space and schedule proctors, the DRC requires 72 hours notice (excluding weekends and holidays) to arrange accommodations. For both faculty and the DRC, insufficient time to do the following may justify an inability to accommodate an exam when a request is made with less than 72 hours notice: a) consult with the student or student's Access Specialist, b) identify available space and proctors and/or, c) adapt the exam (e.g., provide a Braille or audio copy). The student may need to take the exam without accommodations if the faculty member chooses not to postpone the exam. The student and faculty member should meet to discuss arrangements for the remaining exams in the quarter.

8. Where can faculty direct questions about alternative testing?

- STUDENT: Faculty members are encouraged to first ask their questions of the student. Students receive orientation at the DRC on the alternative testing service and may be able to answer questions or concerns.
- DRC: Questions about the impact of the disability or the appropriateness of a requested accommodation can be directed to the DRC Access Specialist identified on the VISA at 756-1395.
- CLASSROOM SCHEDULING: Questions regarding locating space in the department for proctoring an exam can be directed to the major department office or to the university scheduler.
- DRC WEBSITE: The DRC website provides information regarding DRC issues, confidentiality, campus policies and procedures and relevant DRC links. See <http://drc.calpoly.edu/>