

## Current Practices, Policies, and Research

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(The full-length paper can be found at [www.canadiantestcentre.com](http://www.canadiantestcentre.com).)

### What are test accommodations?

Test accommodations are changes to test administration conditions that are intended to support students with disabilities and/or English language learners (ELL) in demonstrating their knowledge and skills while not changing what the test is intended to measure (the test constructs).

Test accommodations typically influence one or more of four aspects of test administration: Timing (e.g., extended time), Setting (e.g., individual/small group administration, alternate testing locations), Presentation modality (e.g., large print, Braille, read-aloud/audio version), and Response modality (e.g., scribe, assistive technology, sign language). It is also very important to customize test accommodations for an individual student's needs; appropriate accommodations are typically specified in a student's IEP. The prior use of accommodations in the classroom is essential. In order to use the accommodations effectively and efficiently, students should already have become familiar with the accommodations in classroom instruction and assessments.

### Why are test accommodations important?

Test accommodations can help to increase the participation rates of students with disabilities and ELL students in large-scale assessments. More importantly, accommodations can increase the validity of inferences made from test results for these students, as the usual test administration procedures would interfere with the demonstration of ability for these students. As the Joint Advisory Committee specified in the *Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada*, "students should be provided with a sufficient opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, attitudes, or behaviours being assessed" (p. 5).

### What test accommodations have been used in Canadian provincial testing programs?

In Canada, the Joint Advisory Committee indicated that alternative testing, including testing with accommodations for disabled and ELL students, should be guided by a written policy. A well-written policy document is very important for guiding the decision-making processes for test accommodations and for obtaining information about students' learning outcomes. In general, the provincial, territorial, and national testing programs do have documents describing their test administration procedures and test accommodation policies, although the policies and procedures for accommodation selection often remain unclear.

Most of the provincial, territorial, and national testing programs provide test accommodations in all four major categories (Presentation Modality, Response Modality, Setting, and Timing). Extended time and alternate setting accommodations are the most popular test accommodations for students with disabilities. Almost all testing programs allow students to complete the assessments in a maximum of twice the allocated testing time with periodic supervised breaks.

For many provinces, reading the test items aloud to elementary students is rarely allowed for reading tests. The idea of the policy is to not compromise the validity of reading assessments for measuring young students' fundamental reading skills. Many provinces do, however, allow this accommodation for assessments other than reading (e.g., mathematics, writing, science), but the grades and subjects for which read aloud/oral reading accommodations are allowed varies among provinces.

Variability among provinces and territories also exists for other accommodations, including scribing, computer/assistive technology, use of a spell checker, interpretation of directions, dictionaries, and having a person familiar to the student administer the test. Similarly, variations in eligibility requirements and in the use of test accommodations are also seen among provinces for ELL students. Furthermore, for some provinces, ELL students' eligibility for accommodations and the use of accommodations are not clearly laid out in policy documents. The variability in provincial policies and in local decisions for test accommodations could have a substantial impact on test results and score interpretation.

Different terminologies have been used by provinces and territories. Provinces refer to “accommodations” (e.g., Alberta, New Brunswick), “adaptations” (e.g., Manitoba, Quebec), “special provisions” (e.g., Ontario, Saskatchewan), or use the terms “accommodations” and “adaptations” interchangeably (e.g., Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island). It is important to recognize the differences in terminology when comparing policy and practice among provinces.

### What do we know about the effects of test accommodations on assessments?

Research on different types of test accommodations often yields mixed results. Accommodations such as extended time may not only benefit disabled students but also provide unnecessary advantages for non-disabled students who do not need the accommodation. Furthermore, accommodations such as oral reading may be controversial. On the one hand, they may have positive effects on disabled students’ test performance, especially for mathematics tests; on the other hand, they may result in decreased validity and comparability of test results if they modify or alter the test constructs. The inconsistent research results reflect the variations among the studies, including the heterogeneity of student characteristics, the size of samples, the age of the studied groups, the subject domains, and the research methods employed. Because of the complexity of these variables, the effects of test accommodations on test results are still not completely understood. Evidently, provinces and territories need to conduct empirical studies to investigate the particular effects of test accommodations on their provincial large-scale assessments in order to obtain accurate, comparable and meaningful test results for educational accountability.

### Recommended Resources

**Cawthon, S. W., Ho, E., Patel, P. G., Potvin, D. C., & Trundt, K. M. (2009).** Multiple constructs and the effects of accommodations on standardized test scores for students with disabilities. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 14(18). Retrieved from <http://pareonline.net/getvn.asp?v=14&n=18>

**Francis, D., Rivera, M., Lesaux, N., Kieffer, M., & Rivera, H. (2006).** *Practical Guidelines for the Education of English Language Learners: Research-Based Recommendations for the Use of Accommodations in Large-Scale Assessments*. Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation, Center on Instruction. Retrieved from <http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/ELL3-Assessments.pdf>

**Fuchs, L. S., Fuchs, D., & Capizzi, A. M. (2005).** Identifying appropriate test accommodations for students with learning disabilities. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 37(6), 1-8.

**National Research Council. (2004).** *Keeping score for all: The effects of inclusion and accommodation policies on large-scale educational assessments*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. [Available at [http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record\\_id=11029#toc](http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=11029#toc)]

**Sireci, S. G., Scarpati, S. E., & Li, S. (2005).** Test accommodations for students with disabilities: An analysis of the interaction hypothesis. *Review of Educational Research*, 75(4), 457-490.