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For parents of children with visual impairments

American Foundation for the Blind[®] | National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments

Accommodations and Modifications at a Glance

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What Are Accommodations and Modifications?

Children who are visually impaired can do virtually all the activities and tasks that sighted children take for granted, but they often need to learn to do them in a different way or using different tools or materials. For instance, your child may need reading materials in braille rather than in print or may need to examine a live rabbit with her hands to understand what it is, rather than learning from a picture in a book. Other examples might be arranging a classroom to let your child sit close to the science teacher who is demonstrating an experiment or allowing her extra time to complete a test that the whole class is taking.

Depending on your child's abilities and needs, she may need such adaptations to participate in the curriculum and various activities in school, as well as to make use of instructional materials. Your child will most likely learn about such adaptations from his or her teacher of students with visual impairments or orientation and mobility (O&M) instructor.

Such adaptations in school are usually referred to by the terms "accommodations" and "modifications." Different school systems attach different meanings to these terms, but "accommodation" usually refers to a change in the way your child is taught or tested without changing the standard of learning or performance or the requirements that she needs to meet. Some examples include having extra time to complete assignments, using braille or large-print materials, having assignments or tests broken up into smaller parts, or completing assignments in a quiet setting away from other students. "Modification" commonly refers to a change to what your child is learning or tested on that changes the standards or requirements she needs to meet. Being taught material

at a lower grade level or having to complete fewer items on a test are examples of modifications. Because these terms are not used in the same way in all school districts, it will be helpful for you to learn how your school district defines them.

Accommodations and Modifications at a Glance

Typically, students may require accommodations and modifications during the school day for various activities, in the broad areas of

instruction

materials

assignments

classroom testing

assistive technology

the environment

other activities

The following guide provides examples of accommodations and modifications that may be helpful for students in each of these areas. It is intended to provide you with a tool for working with your child's educational team to plan accommodations and modifications that will assist her. The ideas listed are only representative examples offered to stimulate your ideas, and may not be appropriate for your particular child. It is also important to keep in mind that your child may need different solutions in different situations—no one device or technique will be the answer to everything.

Instructional Accommodations and Modifications

Children with visual impairments need to have access to both written and oral instruction and to demonstrations in all subject matter. Accommodations and modifications can help a student better understand the instruction provided by the regular education teacher in the classroom.

Instruction

| Adaptation | Explanation and Examples |
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| Hands-on experiences | Real-life examples of pictures or actual objects are used in instruction, for example, real coins are provided when pictures of coins are shown in a book. |

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| Models | Models of objects that are primarily visual are used, such as objects rather than pictures to represent the planets in the solar system. |
| More easily readable visual aids | Your child receives his or her own copy of information that will be displayed on an overhead or whiteboard or chalkboard. |
| Clear directions | Explicit language is used when giving directions; such as "Pass your papers to the right," rather than "over here." |
| Peer (classmate) note taker | A classmate takes notes of material written on the board and provides a copy to the student with visual impairments. |
| Extra time for responses in class | Your child may require extra time to respond to class discussions because he or she needs more time to read an assignment. |
| Oral description or narration | Oral descriptions are provided of visual display material; for example, an exhibition of fine art would be described, or portions of a video or film would be narrated during times when there is no dialog. |
| Experiential learning | Your child has the opportunity to experience concepts directly that others may view in pictures or from a distance; for example, if the class is learning about farm animals, your child might visit a farm. |
| Verbalization of writing | Information that is being presented on a whiteboard or in an overhead is spoken aloud as it is being written. |

Accommodations and Modifications for Instructional Materials

Instructional materials need to be put into an accessible format for visually impaired students. It is important that all materials be considered—not just textbooks, but worksheets and all supplemental reading materials. It is also important for your child to receive them at the same time as her sighted classmates who read print.

Materials

| Adaptation | Explanation and Examples |
|---------------------|---|
| Braille | Textbooks, worksheets, and all materials used in instruction are provided in braille. |
| Tactile graphics | Printed maps, diagrams, and illustrations are provided in a tactile format. |
| Audiotape materials | Books and other print materials are provided on tape. |

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| Electronic access | Materials are provided in an electronic format to be accessed with a computer or electronic notetaker, for example, your child uses an online encyclopedia to do research for a term paper or reads a textbook in digital format. |
| Print book for parents | If your child reads in braille, he receives a print copy of a textbook for your use. |
| Highlighting | Markers and highlighting tape are used to enhance the important parts of text. |
| Large print | Large-print books are used for instruction or portions of books, such as a map, are enlarged as needed. |
| Manipulatives | Physical items (such as small toys, buttons, or beads) are used to demonstrate mathematical concepts or used in art classes to complete a tactile drawing. |

Accommodations and Modifications for Assignments

To make the best use of their education, students need to be responsible for all classroom and homework assignments. Additional time, or alternatives to visual tasks, may be important modifications for your child.

Assignments

| Adaptation | Explanation and Examples |
|---------------------------|--|
| Extra time for completion | Your child may need extra time because of his or her reading or writing speed or the kind of tools required for reading or writing. |
| Descriptive response | Your child may provide a written description of a project instead of a visual representation. For example, the class assignment might be to make a drawing of a cell viewed through a microscope. The student who is blind instead provides a written description of the cell rather than a drawing. |
| Use of models | Your child provides a model for an assignment rather than a two-dimensional representation. |
| Reduction of copy work | If an assignment requires copying text or problems, a worksheet is provided so your child can write answers directly on the worksheet and does not need to re-copy the assignment. For example, the teacher might write ten mathematics problems on the board for the students to copy and solve in their notebooks, but the visually impaired student works on a worksheet instead. |

Accommodations and Modifications for Classroom Testing

Different types of accommodations and modifications can help visually impaired students take their class tests along with their sighted classmates. For example, Ahmed, who is in third grade, has low vision and cerebral palsy and reads and writes more slowly than his classmates. To have the same opportunity as the rest of class to complete all the items on his class tests and to take the tests independently, he will need to be allotted more time than the other students.

Classroom Testing

| Adaptation | Explanation and Examples |
|---|---|
| Extended time | Your child may need extra time because he or she reads or writes slowly, or because of the tools he or she uses for reading or writing. |
| Use of manipulatives | Your child may use manipulatives to demonstrate understanding, rather than responding in writing to a question, for example, a first-grade student demonstrates an understanding of time by using a braille model of a clock to show the answers on a test. |
| Spelling tests for braille readers | A student who uses contracted braille (which uses a number of contractions and shortened forms to write words) should also take spelling tests using uncontracted braille to make sure they can also read and write in standard English. |
| Dictation of responses to a scribe | The student verbally reports an answer, and a sighted person records the answer on the answer sheet. |
| Screen access to tests administered on a computer | Depending on your child's need to read in print or braille, appropriate screen access to text may be needed through enlarged text, refreshable braille, or a copy of the test in hardcopy braille. |

Assistive Technology Accommodations and Modifications

Your child may need assistive technology tools to learn or to communicate with others. You can learn more about the range of assistive devices available for visually impaired children in the Technology section of this web site, but you may want to get started by browsing through the adaptations listed below.

Assistive Technology

| Adaptation | Explanation and Examples |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Low vision devices (near) | Magnification devices for viewing or completing near vision tasks. |
| Low vision devices (distance) | Telescopes for viewing or completing distance vision tasks. |
| Braillewriter | A mechanical tool resembling a typewriter that is used for writing or "embossing" braille. |
| Slate and stylus | A portable tool for writing braille made up of two flat pieces of metal or plastic that are used to hold paper and a pointed piece of metal used to punch or emboss braille dots. |
| Electronic braillewriter | An electronic device for writing braille, incorporating a braille keyboard, which frequently has additional features, such as a calculator. |
| Personal digital assistant (PDA) | An electronic device for organizing and managing data, often integrated with an electronic notetaker. |
| Notetaker (braille) | A portable device for reading and writing in class, with braille output, often integrated with the features of a PDA. |
| Notetaker (speech) | A portable device for reading and writing in class with speech output, often integrated with the features of a PDA. |
| Computer | A tool for literacy and learning activities and access to information, especially when equipped with specialized software and hardware. |
| Refreshable braille | A device that is connected to (or integrated into) a computer or notetaker and that represents braille text by means of pins that can be raised or lowered to form braille cells. |
| Speech access software | Computer software that enables a computer to "speak" the text on the screen through the use of synthetic speech that announces what is displayed on screen. |
| Braille translation software | Computer software that translates print into braille and braille into print. |
| Large monitor for computer | A monitor that, by virtue of its size, provides larger images for students with low vision. |
| Scanner | A device that copies print material and uses software to translate it into an electronic format so that it can be converted into a preferred reading medium. |

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| Magnification software | Software that enlarges text displayed on a computer or other screen. |
| Braille embosser | A printer that embosses (prints) braille. |
| Print printer | A regular printer to provide print text for sighted teachers and classmates. |
| Tactile graphics maker | A tool that makes print images into tactile format that can be "read" through the fingers. |
| Word processor | A computer software program for writing and manipulating text. |
| Electronic mail (e-mail) | Electronic mail sent through computers and other devices that is a communication medium for students to receive and return classroom assignments. |
| Talking calculator | A device that provides speech access to a calculator. |
| Large-print calculator | A calculator with large numbers on the keys to provide access for students with low vision. |
| Talking dictionary | An electronic device that provides a dictionary with speech access. |
| Tape recorders | A device for recording auditory information and listening to materials provided auditorily on tape. |
| Digital players | A portable device to access digitally recorded audio books and materials. |
| Alternative computer access | A number of methods that allow a person with physical disabilities to use a computer, such as adapted keyboards and voice recognition technology. |
| Augmentative and alternative communication devices | Special communication devices for students who may have hearing disabilities or other limitations in communication. For example, some of these devices play prerecorded messages at the push of a button. |
| Adapted devices for daily living | A wide variety of devices adapted for use by people who are visually impaired, including measuring devices, kitchen utensils, games and toys, and writing aids. |

Accommodations and Modification to the Educational Environment

Students who are visually impaired often cannot perceive information directly from their environment, but accommodations and modifications help them do so. Something as simple as the flexibility to sit closer to the chalkboard may meet your child's needs, or it could be necessary to alter the physical arrangement of the environment by providing

additional furniture, shelving, or access to electrical outlets for the operation of specialized equipment.

The Environment

| Adaptation | Explanation and Examples |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Preferential seating | Your child is allowed to sit in the classroom wherever it is most beneficial, for example, where he has the best view of the board, away from a light source to reduce glare, or near a power outlet needed for an assistive technology device. |
| Flexibility to move within a room | A student with low vision is given flexibility to move closer to visual activities in the class room, such as a demonstration being given. |
| Additional desk or work space | Some students (especially those who read and write in braille) require extra space to place materials needed to complete classroom tasks. |
| Additional shelving or storage space | Braille books and additional equipment require storage space, and adequate shelving should be provided for materials. |
| Appropriate lighting | Some students benefit from additional lighting for literacy tasks; others are very light sensitive (photophobic) and require reduced lighting. |

Accommodations and Modifications for Other Activities

Students with visual impairments need to be able to participate in all the educational activities their school offers, not just those that take place in the classroom. For example, Natasha, a blind high school student, is involved with her school's marching band. Special methods allow her to participate as independently as possible in the band routines and competitions.

Other Activities

| Adaptation | Explanation and Examples |
|----------------|---|
| Subscriptions | Your child may benefit from special subscriptions to materials that are difficult to access, such as newspapers. Some subscriptions are available by telephone. |
| Mobility tools | Your child may use a long white cane for travel or other travel tools or devices. |

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| Adapted equipment for physical education | Your child may use adapted equipment, such as balls that beep, to help him participate in physical education classes and other physical activities. |
| Organizational tools | A variety of products can help students organize and manage their time and school materials, including notebooks, planners, and PDAs. |
| Emergency procedures | Procedures need to be created for the student and others to follow in the event of emergencies, such as the need to evacuate the school building. |
| Use of a sighted reader | Your child may need to learn to work with a sighted reader to have access to print materials. |
| Other health accommodations | Your child may need other accommodations or modifications because of related health concerns, such as use of protective eye wear or head gear. |

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