ets

Tips for Test Takers with Disabilities

Taking a test lets you demonstrate what you know and your readiness for the next step in your education or career.

However, as a test taker with a disability, you may find that tests also pose disability-related barriers — potentially preventing you from demonstrating your true knowledge and skills.

It's helpful to have a good understanding of the nature of your test and which accommodations might be appropriate for you. The five steps listed in this document will help you learn about test format, break times and test site accessibility conditions. They also explain how to prepare your request for accommodations and your supporting documentation.

STEP 1:

Learn about the test

First, find out whether the test is administered on paper or computer. You should then read about the test in the appropriate ETS information or registration bulletin available at www.ets.org/disabilities/test-takers/bulletins-supplements and review the content areas covered by the test.

Second, be sure you understand the format of the test. Is it entirely multiple choice or are there short-answer and essay questions as well? Some tests may also have audio or video content, tables and charts, or other media. Test format may influence your accommodation requests (e.g., a test with audio content may require accommodations if you have hearing loss).

Next, find out if you are permitted to go back to questions that you skipped and learn about the test taking tools available to you even if you don't request accommodations. For example, some tests provide an on-screen calculator and, for most tests, you may take notes.

Finally, take practice tests and view sample questions to help you prepare for your exam(s). View the test preparation materials online at www.ets.org to learn about the wide variety of resources that ETS programs offer.

STEP 2:

Understand test length and break timing

Test length

Many test takers with disabilities are permitted to take classroom tests with extra time, typically 50-100% more time than the time allotted to the class overall. However, many standardized tests are 2–3 hours or longer. Understanding how a high-stakes test is timed is critical, especially if you are considering asking for 50-100% extra time.

If you have difficulty sustaining your attention and focus over time, or tend to get fatigued and distracted if sitting for a prolonged period, it is important to think through the potential implications of significantly lengthening the duration of an exam that is already several hours long.

Breaks

Extra breaks can often be a more effective accommodation than extended testing time. Some ETS tests have scheduled breaks for all test takers. Be sure to review this information on the testing program website for the test you plan to take. Carefully consider if you will need additional and/or longer breaks than what is permitted for all test takers.

If approved for extra breaks on an ETS test, it's recommended to take a break at the end of a section. However, we recognize that for some medical conditions, immediate breaks may be necessary. In those instances, you will be permitted to take a break at your discretion.

STEP 3:

Prepare your request for accommodations

Plan ahead. Submit your request as early as possible. Documentation review takes approximately four to six weeks once your completed paperwork has been received. If your request is deemed incomplete by ETS and additional documentation is requested, it can be an additional four to six weeks from the time the new documentation is received until the review is complete. You want to be sure you have ample time to submit the necessary information and wait for a decision.

Determine if disability documentation is needed. DO NOT submit disability documentation if you can use the Certification of Eligibility: Accommodations History form as a shortcut for approval and/or you are submitting verification of testing accommodations approval from ETS or another standardized testing agency. Complete information is available at www.ets.org/disabilities/test-takers/disability-documentation.html.

If disability documentation is needed, speak with the qualified professional who completed your most recent evaluation. Encourage your doctor or evaluator to review our Disability Documentation Guidelines to ensure your documentation is sufficient. A note from your doctor or evaluator simply stating a diagnosis is usually not sufficient. It's best to provide a detailed report/letter describing your condition/disability and how it impacts you in academic tasks, such as test taking. Your doctor or evaluator should include a disability-related rationale for each requested accommodation.

Consult with the disability service professional (DSP). If you're a student on a college or university campus and have been working with the DSP, schedule an appointment and review your records with this individual. Your DSP can assist you in assembling your request for accommodations and ensuring you have all of the relevant materials. Request that your DSP complete a Certification of Eligibility (COE): Accommodation History form or submit a letter of support that documents the types of accommodations you have used and the history of your accommodation use.

Provide a personal statement. The statement can be an excellent way for you to explain the limitations you experience and how those limitations impact your test taking performance. This can provide important information along with the documentation submitted by your evaluator. Read Guidance on How to Write a Personal Statement online at www.ets.org/pdfs/disabilities/disabilities-guidance-writing-personal-statement.pdf for tips on writing an effective personal statement.

STEP 4:

Once you hear from ETS

If you are approved for accommodations, your approval letter will be sent via email. This letter will provide you with directions for scheduling your test. Do not schedule a test before receiving this notification If you have any questions regarding your accommodations or test site, please contact ETS Disability Services by email at stassd@ets.org or call 1-609-771-7780.

If any or all of your requested accommodations are not approved, you will receive a decision letter by email. Consider whether the approved accommodations are sufficient. If not, the decision letter will provide directions on how to have your request reconsidered.

If your accommodation request is missing information or documentation, work with your evaluator and/or DSP to obtain the missing materials for ETS.

STEP 5:

Review test site location and conditions

Consider the amount of travel time needed to get to your test site — including the volume of traffic and time of day your test is scheduled. Ideally, you should arrive at least 30 minutes prior to testing time.

If you have any concerns about physical access to the test site, contact ETS Disability Services in advance to discuss your concerns. Although most standard test centers are fully accessible, a few may be in older buildings which could pose challenges. You should also explore the testing site conditions, including test center hours, the size of the center, the number of testing carrels available and how many test takers can be served at a time.

Additionally, you should also find out what resources the test center can provide (e.g., earplugs or earmuffs). Prometric® allows certain pre-approved personal items into its test centers. It is recommended that you view the list of pre-approved personal items online at www.prometric.com/files/2020-10/Permissible-items_20201023.pdf before the test date.

Prometric also offers a program called “Test Drive”. This program allows you to walk through, on a practice basis, all check-in and testing procedures that occur at the test center on test day. View Prometric Test Drive on the test center’s website at http://www.prometric.com/test-drive/ to find information about this program, its cost and how to schedule an appointment.

Things to keep in mind when requesting accommodations

Accommodations on high-stakes tests are designed to permit equal access to the test, not to achieve an outcome — such as finishing the test or performing your best.

While your requests and evaluator's recommendations will be considered, some requests may be impossible or not permissible because they would fundamentally alter the nature of the test or result in invalid scores

Most high-stakes tests are administered in carefully controlled test centers. Typically, test takers will be seated at individual workstations that resemble library carrels. The test center's proctors will ensure that the environment is quiet and conducive to testing. Therefore, some accommodations that are appropriate for classroom tests (e.g., "preferential seating," "private room") may not be necessary on a high-stakes test.

For additional questions, please visit our Frequently Asked Questions page at www.ets.org/disabilities/test-takers/faqs.

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