

Tricky Accommodation Requests

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Scenario #1

- A student and his mother are adamant that the student requires access to memory aids. The student has a diagnosis of a Learning Disability in written expression from 2012, confirmed by an updated assessment administered in 2023. The clinician did not initially recommend a memory aid but, based on parental contact, the practitioner has recently sent an addendum letter stating that it is essential. The student has recently begun the Life Sciences program at your institution and is expressing concerns that he will fail without this support, as he was given access to memory aids throughout secondary school.

Memory Aids

- Appropriate when student has a genuine retrieval deficit (meaning that they can learn the information but have difficulty retrieving it from memory without cues).

Review

Memory Aids as a Disability-Related Accommodation? Let's Remember to Recommend Them Appropriately

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Abstract

Memory aids are now frequently provided to elementary and secondary school students to increase their success in achieving provincial curriculum standards. While such an accommodation may meet the immediate goal of improved academic performance it may not be warranted based on an actual long-term memory retrieval impairment and may therefore be inequitable, providing an unfair academic advantage relative to non-disabled students. Furthermore, providing memory aid accommodations inappropriately may rob students of the opportunity to learn effective study and retrieval strategies, leading instead to dependence on an accommodation that may not be continued once they enter post-secondary education. An appropriate accommodation at the post-secondary level of education removes a disability-related barrier (functional impairment) and assists only those facing such barriers; under human rights legislation, accommodations are not implemented to guarantee success, reduce anxiety, or provide unequal access to material. Memory aids improve the retrieval of information from long-term storage for everyone. As such, the current widespread provision of this accommodation prior to post-secondary studies must be evaluated critically, with such supports offered only when justified. A six-step process for determining when memory aids are an appropriate accommodation within the post-secondary setting is provided and discussed.

Memory Aids

When evaluating if a memory aid is appropriate:

1. Ensure that the assessment included measures of performance validity.
2. The recommendation should be based on scores from measures of memory rather than working memory.
3. The memory test administered must measure immediate recall, delayed recall, and recognition memory.
4. The assessor must consider the profile of memory scores to demonstrate a true “retrieval deficit.”
5. Delayed recall score must be impaired (falls at least below the 16th percentile).
6. Student must be informed that memory aids may not be appropriate in every course.

Scenario #2

- A student with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder is requesting access to double extra time for tests and exams as they say that it is required to help them fully understand the questions and express their responses in writing. The student was provided with this support in elementary and secondary school. They are stating that they will be filing a complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Commission if this accommodation is not provided.

Extended Time

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Provision of Extended Assessment Time in Post-secondary Settings: a Review of the Literature and Proposed Guidelines for Practice

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Abstract

Although extended time for tests and examinations is the most commonly requested and provided accommodation in post-secondary institutions, best practice guidelines from existing research are rarely translated into practice. Thus, a review of the literature was undertaken to examine support for granting additional assessment time to persons in specific disability categories. Based on this review, no more than 25% additional time is supported for students with learning disabilities, and even then, only when their documented area of functional impairment overlaps with assessment task requirements. No research support exists for the provision of extra time for students with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) or mental health diagnoses. Research is silent on the appropriateness of additional assessment time for individuals with autism spectrum disorder and thus individuals need to be considered on a case-by-case basis. In very exceptional situations, more than 25% additional time may be warranted, but this would need to be well considered using an established decision-making model.

Keywords Disability · Accommodations · Postsecondary · Functional impairment · Speed · Extra time

Extended Time

A review of the literature:

- Fails to support the need for more than 25% extra assessment time as a reasonable accommodation for functional impairments secondary to a learning disability.
- In exceptional cases, up to 50% extra time may be required to compensate for severe impairments associated with a LD, but this would require objective evidence supporting the need for this accommodation rather than be given on the basis of convention or past history.



Extended Time

- However, an extended time accommodation is only appropriate when:
 - academic skill fluency is a concern,
 - the functional impairments overlap with test demands,
 - the impaired academic skill is not already corrected with another accommodation (such as assistive technology), and
 - the need for additional time is not related to another, treatable, condition, such as test anxiety or inefficient work habits.



Extended Time

- Fails to support the need for additional assessment time for students with AD/HD.
 - Instead, clinicians may wish to determine other accommodations to address specific areas of disability-related difficulty, such as a stop-the-clock breaks.
- Is silent on the appropriateness of additional time for tests and examinations for individuals with autism spectrum disorder.



Extended Time

- Fails to support the need for extra time due to impairment in reading speed, processing speed, or attentional capacity for those with mental health conditions, such as anxiety or depression.
- Fails to support a need, generally, for more than 25% additional time for those with co-morbid diagnoses, though the severity and complexity of the presentation may need to be considered on a case-by-case basis (though no more than 50% additional time would likely be appropriate as a basic accommodation).



Scenario #3

- A student recently diagnosed with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder is asking for access to technology, including text-to-speech and speech-to-text software, to complete daily assignments as well as tests and examinations. The student does not have a diagnosis of a Learning Disability but states that the multi-modal presentation of reading materials is helpful for focus when reading, and it helps to brainstorm ideas when writing when they speak aloud.



Scenario #4

- A student has recently been diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder. They express concerns regarding their ability to manage anxiety in assessment situations as well as their ability to meet assignment deadlines. They are asking for extended time for tests and examinations, as well as extended due dates.



Questions?



Thank You!

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