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Accommodations vs. Modifications: What's The Difference?

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Oftentimes, students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) receive classroom and/or testing *accommodations* or *modifications*. We hear these terms used interchangeably; however, they have very different meanings and serve two distinct purposes. An IEP team carefully chooses accommodations and modifications that are unique to each student.

What is the difference between accommodations and modifications?

Accommodations alter *how* a student learns. They do not change what the student is expected to learn. Accommodations describe an alteration of the environment, curriculum format, or equipment that allows an individual with a disability to pursue



a regular course of study and/or complete assigned tasks. Within a classroom, accommodations take the form of physical or environmental changes, such as changing the timing, setting, formatting, response, or presentation of material. For example, the teacher may seat a student easily overwhelmed or distracted away from noisy parts of a classroom; or a student having difficulty reading may listen to an audio recording of the text. Other classroom accommodations may include:



- Providing a student with extra time to complete assignments.



- Having breaks during instruction.



- Using large print books and worksheets.



- Having sign language interpreters.



- Using specialized keyboards.

Formal or standardized testing situations may also include accommodations, depending upon the needs of the student. Ideally, a student's testing accommodations are similar to the accommodations provided in the classroom.



Accommodations **do not** allow altering the

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scoring of a standardized test or content of the information presented.



Modifications describe very fundamental changes in the curriculum. They may include altering the standard expectations for a course or assessment, as the student may be unable to learn all of the material, or particular portions of the material presented. Within the classroom, modifications can include shortening assignments or providing texts that are easier to read. For an elementary student with cognitive impairments in a general education class, assignments might be reduced in number or modified significantly. When applied to standardized testing, modifications do impact the interpretation of the test results. Additionally, modifications may take the form of an “alternate assessment,” in which a test may not cover the same material as the standard exams.

It is important for parents, teachers, and administrators to be aware of the differences



between accommodations and modifications when creating educational programs for students. With appropriate accommodations and modifications in place, IEP teams can help set students up for success.

Related Handy Handouts®:

[109 – Common Testing Accommodations and Modifications for Students with Disabilities](#)

[459 – Inclusion Made Easier](#)

Resources:

Strom, Erich. 2013. Accommodations and modifications: How they’re different. Retrieved February 2016 from <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/treatments-approaches/educational-strategies/accommodations-and-modifications-how-theyre-different>

DO-IT Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology. 2015. What is the difference between accommodation and modification for a student with a disability? Retrieved February 2016 from <http://www.washington.edu/doit/what-difference-between-accommodation-and-modification-student-disability>

Bouchillon, Esther. Study.com. 2014. Modifications for special education students: definition & checklist. Retrieved February 2016 from <http://study.com/academy/lesson/modifications-for-special-education-students-definition-checklist-quiz.html>

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