

Accommodations and Modifications for Students with Disabilities

By

Donna S. Wieser



What are accommodations and what do they do?

- Accommodations provide **equitable access** to students with disabilities through procedures and practices in the areas of presentation, response, setting and timing/scheduling during instruction and assessments.
- They are intended to reduce or eliminate the effects of a student's disability and level the playing field.
- They **do not** reduce learning expectations, alter the content of assignments or give the students with disabilities an unfair advantage.

Why is providing accommodations important and necessary?

- **Accommodations provide access to knowledge and information.**
- **It helps to provide equal opportunities to learn to all students by providing content in a meaningful way.**
- **It promotes equal access to grade level content during instruction and assessment.**
- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act calls for accountability for opportunities to learn at the individual level through Individual Education Programs (IEP's) designed to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities, inclusion of students with disabilities in general state and district wide assessment programs with appropriate accommodations; and defines reasonable adaptations and accommodations as necessary to measure academic achievement of students relative to state academic content and achievement standards. (Sec. 614, 612, 604)**
- **No Child Left Behind Act calls for participation of students with disabilities in high quality, yearly, student academic assessment; accountability for how schools include all students, academic standards and academic achievement. (Sec.1111)**

What are modifications?

- Modifications are alterations or practices that change, lower, or reduce learning expectations such as requiring a student to learn less material by having fewer objectives, shorter units or lessons, fewer pages or problems, reducing assignments or assessments, or revising assignments or assessments to make them easier.

Note: Modifications can increase the gap between student achievement and grade level expectations for proficiency and may have an unintended negative impact of the student's opportunity to learn critical content and may lead to the student performing inadequately on state level assessments and not meeting graduate requirements. (Thompson, Morse, Sharpe, and Hall, 2005)

How do you define the areas for accommodations?

- **Presentation:** allows student to access information in ways that do not require them to visually read standard print. Some examples are large print, magnification, human readers, Braille, tactile graphics, audio books, videos, talking materials, screen readers, and visual cues. Students who have difficulty or inability to read standard print benefit.
- **Response:** allows students to complete tests, activities, or assignments in alternate ways; or solves problems using some type of assistive device or graphic organizer. Some examples are use of a scribe or word processor, voice recognition devices, Braille, note takers, tape recorders, calculators, spelling/grammar devices, visual organizers (highlighters or place markers) or graphic organizers. Students with physical, sensory or learning disabilities benefit. This includes students who have difficulties with writing, memory, sequencing, directionality, alignment, or organization.

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- **Setting:** changes the location of instruction or testing which may include location within the classroom such as in front, next to teacher, study carrel. Some examples are small group testing, seated away from windows or other students, individual setting. Students who are easily distracted in large groups or might distract others due to disability or accommodations like read aloud, frequent breaks or students with physical disabilities that require a more accessible locations or special equipment.
- **Timing/scheduling:** changes allowable amount of time to complete assignments, activities, or assessments or changes how time is managed to include needed breaks. Some examples are extended time like time and half (90 minutes instead of 60 minutes), multiple or frequent breaks, change schedule. *Unlimited time is not generally appropriate or efficient.* Students who benefit are those who need more time for reading, writing, staying focused or processing; have health related challenges; or need frequent breaks. (Thompson, Morse, Sharpe, and Hall, 2005)

Who determines accommodations for students with disabilities?

- The IEP team, including the Local Education Agency representative, the Special Educator, the General Educator, the parent(s), and...
- The student. The more involved a student with disabilities is in the selection process, the more likely the accommodation will be used. The older a student gets, the more important it is for the student to self-advocate.

How are accommodations determined?

- **Accommodations are determined by individual student needs.**

Some questions to ask when determining accommodations are:

- 1. What are the areas of strength and areas of need?**
- 2. How do the learning needs of the student affect grade level content?**
- 3. What accommodations will increase the student's access to instruction and assessment?**
- 4. What are the results of the use of the accommodation on assignments and assessments?**
- 5. What are the perceptions of the student, teachers and parents of the use of the accommodation?**
- 6. Should you continue use or are changes needed?**
- 7. Have there been problems administering previous accommodations?**

(Thompson, Morse, Sharpe, and Hall, 2005)

What are some do's and don'ts for choosing accommodations?

- **Do choose accommodations based on student needs for each area of content.**
- **Do select accommodations that help reduce or eliminate the effects of the student's disability.**
- **Do get input regarding accommodations from teachers, student and parents.**
- **Do evaluate the accommodations for effectiveness and use.**
- **Do make sure accommodations relate to back to the statement in the IEP of how the disability affects the student's involvement and progress in the general curriculum. (Karger, 2004)**

- **Don't make decisions based on what is easiest.**
- **Don't check all accommodations just to be safe.**
- **Don't assume accommodations remain appropriate year after year.**
- **Don't select accommodations that are not related to student's needs, giving him/her an unfair advantage. (Thompson, Morse, Sharpe, and Hall, 2005)**

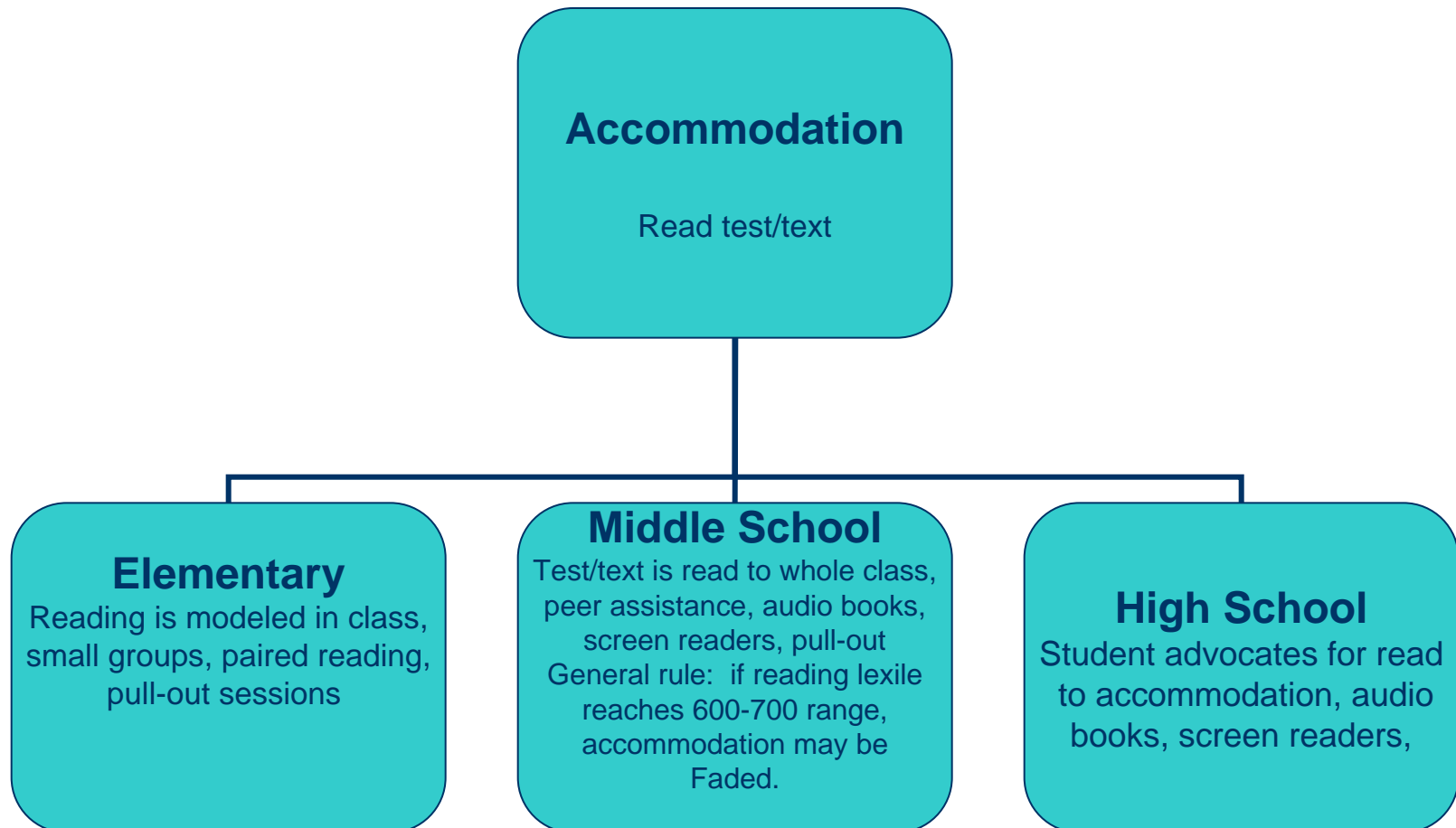
Do accommodations look the same from year to year?

- Accommodations are selected based on individual needs. As needs change, so should accommodations.
- As technology progresses, accommodations may look different.
- As student's learn strategies and skills, accommodations will change and may even be faded out.
- Research shows that as some students with disabilities get older, the gap between achievement and grade level expectations grows. Accommodations need to address this.
- Evaluating and assessing accommodations is an on going process, the IEP team should review use and effectiveness on a yearly or regular basis.(LD Online, 2008)

Why should accommodations change from elementary to middle to high school?

- Students are taught strategies in earlier grades to help compensate for their disabilities.
- Students create their own coping skills for the areas of disability.
- Teachers utilize differentiation in their instruction and expectations.
- Student's desire to be viewed as and become more independent.
- Research indicates students in secondary schools are not receiving or accepting their accommodations.
- The gap for some students with disabilities becomes greater as the student proceeds from year to year.

How might accommodations look different from elementary to middle school to high school?



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Accommodation

Extended time

Elementary

Teacher determines by assessing student needs

Middle School

Amount of time is set to address the areas of disability. Time may be faded as skills improve.

High School

Student advocates through IEP participation for time needed for areas of disability. May be faded or increased based on increase in skills or gap.

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Accommodation Scribe

Elementary

Teacher or peer models
as student acquires
skill.

Middle School

Student moves to use of
word processors, spelling
and grammar assistive
devices

High School

Accommodation may be
faded as typing/writing
Skills increase.

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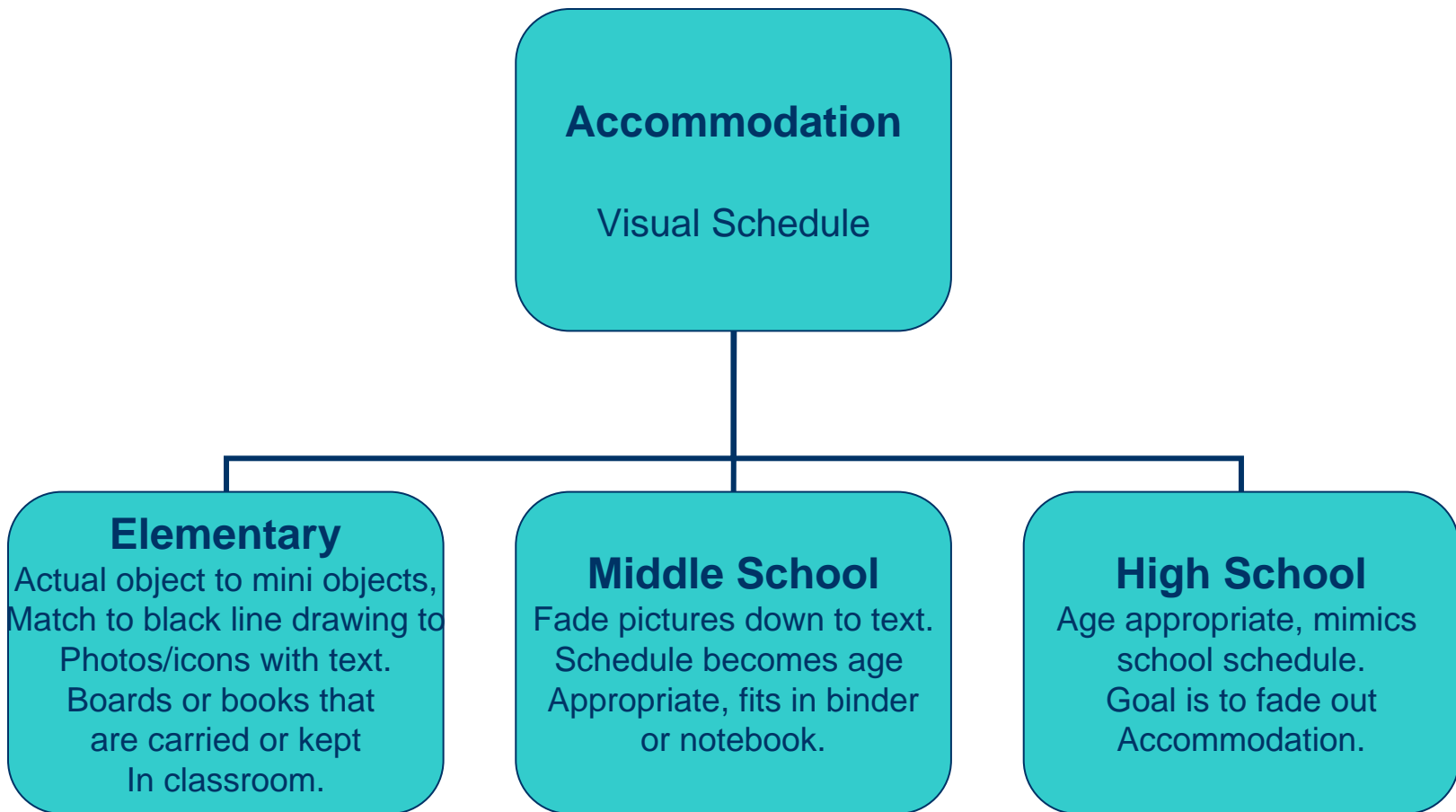
Accommodation
Small group testing

Elementary
Pull-out

Middle School
May be faded out as
all students learn
appropriate test taking
behavior

High School
Student self-advocates
through IEP process.
Teacher advocates based
on student need.

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How can students with disabilities access content standards?

- Through instruction provided by teachers who are qualified to teach the content areas and know how to differentiate instruction.
- Through implementation of IEP's that are developed to insure provision of specialized instruction.
- Through the provision of appropriate accommodations to help students access grade level content. (Thompson, Morse, Sharpe, and Hall, 2005)

How can we accomplish the goal of equal access through accommodations?

- Collaboration between the general and special educators must occur in order to plan for equal access.
- All members of the IEP team must be familiar with content standards or know where to access them.

What are some ways to manage the provision of accommodations?

- Collaboration between general and special educators.
(Remember, accommodations are part of a student's IEP and are required to be provided by any teacher who works with the student)
- Student involvement in understanding his/her disability and self-advocacy. Students become more independent as they reach adolescence. Parents and teachers can provide opportunities for students to advocate for the accommodations.
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

How does UDL fit into providing equal access to students?

- In terms of learning, universal design means the design of instructional materials and activities that makes the learning goals achievable by individuals with wide differences in their abilities to see, hear, speak, move, read, write, understand English, attend, organize, engage, and remember. Universal design for learning is achieved by means of flexible curricular materials and activities that provide alternatives for students with differing abilities. These alternatives are built into the instructional design and operating systems of educational materials-they are not added on after-the-fact. (*Research Connections*, Number 5, Fall 1999, p. 2)

What are some examples of instructional methods that employ principles of UDL?

- **Class Climate.** *Adopt practices that reflect high values with respect to both diversity and inclusiveness.* Example: Put a statement on your syllabus inviting students to meet with you to discuss disability-related accommodations and other special learning needs.
- **Physical Access, Usability, and Safety.** *Assure that activities, materials, and equipment are physically accessible to and usable by all students and that all potential student characteristics are addressed in safety considerations.* Examples: Develop safety procedures for all students, including those who are blind, deaf, or wheelchair users; label safety equipment simply, in large print, and in a location viewable from a variety of angles; repeat printed directions orally.
- **Delivery Methods.** *Use multiple accessible instructional methods.* Example: Use multiple modes to deliver content and motivate and engage students—consider lectures, collaborative learning options, hands-on activities, Internet-based communications, educational software, field work, etc.
- **Information Resources.** *Assure that course materials, notes, and other information resources are flexible and accessible to all students.* Example: Choose printed materials and prepare a syllabus early to allow students the option of beginning to read materials and work on assignments before the class begins and to allow adequate time to arrange for alternate formats, such as books on tape.

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- **Interaction.** *Encourage effective interactions between students and between students and the instructor and assure that communication methods are accessible to all participants.* Example: Assign group work for which learners must support each other and that places a high value on different skills and roles.
- **Feedback.** Provide specific feedback on a regular basis. Example: Allow students to turn in parts of large projects for feedback before the final project is due.
- **Assessment.** *Regularly assess student progress using multiple, accessible methods and tools and adjust instruction accordingly.* Example: Assess group/cooperative performance as well as individual achievement.
- **Accommodation.** *Plan for accommodations for students for whom the instructional design does not meet their needs.* Example: Know how to get materials in alternate formats, reschedule classroom locations, and arrange for other accommodations for students with disabilities.

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- Employing universal design principles in instruction does not eliminate the need for specific accommodations for students with disabilities. There will always be the need for some specific accommodations, such as sign language interpreters for students who are deaf. However, applying universal design concepts in course planning will assure full access to the content for most students and minimize the need for specific accommodations. For example, designing Web resources in accessible format as they are developed means that no re-development is necessary if a blind student enrolls in the class; planning ahead can be less time-consuming in the long run. Letting all students have access to your class notes and assignments on an accessible Web site can eliminate the need for providing materials in alternative formats. (Burgstahler,2008)

Three primary principles guide UDL and provide structure for these guidelines.

- **Principle I. Provide Multiple Means of Representation** (the "what" of learning). Students differ in the ways that they perceive and comprehend information that is presented to them. For example, those with sensory disabilities (e.g., blindness or deafness); learning disabilities (e.g., dyslexia); language or cultural differences, and so forth may all require different ways of approaching content. Others may simply grasp information better through visual or auditory means rather than printed text. In reality, there is no one means of representation that will be optimal for all students; providing options in representation is essential
- **Principle II: Provide Multiple Means of Expression** (the "how" of learning). Students differ in the ways that they can navigate a learning environment and express what they know. For example, individuals with significant motor disabilities (e.g. cerebral palsy), those who struggle with strategic and organizational abilities (executive function disorders, ADHD), those who have language barriers, and so forth approach learning tasks very differently and will demonstrate their mastery very differently. Some may be able to express themselves well in writing text but not oral speech, and vice versa. In reality, there is no one means of expression that will be optimal for all students; providing options for expression is essential
- **Principle III: Provide Multiple Means of Engagement** (the "why" of learning). Students differ markedly in the ways in which they can be engaged or motivated to learn. Some students are highly engaged by spontaneity and novelty while other are disengaged, even frightened, by those aspects, preferring strict routine. In reality, there is no one means of representation that will be optimal for all students; providing multiple options for engagement is essential
- Acknowledgements: The UDL Guidelines were compiled by David H. Rose, Ed.D., Co-Founder and Chief Education Officer at CAST, and Jenna Wasson, M.Ed., Instructional Designer and Research Associate at CAST.

Universal Design for Learning Guidelines

I. Representation

Use multiple means of representation

1. Provide options for perception

- Options that customize the display of information
- Options that provide alternatives for auditory information
- Options that provide alternatives for visual information

2. Provide options for language and symbols

- Options that define vocabulary and symbols
- Options that clarify syntax and structure
- Options for decoding text or mathematical notation
- Options that promote cross-linguistic understanding
- Options that illustrate key concepts non-linguistically

3. Provide options for comprehension

- Options that provide or activate background knowledge
- Options that highlight critical features, big ideas, and relationships
- Options that guide information processing
- Options that support memory and transfer

II. Expression

Use multiple means of expression

4. Provide options for physical action

- Options in the mode of physical response
- Options in the means of navigation
- Options for accessing tools and assistive technologies

5. Provide options for expressive skills and fluency

- Options in the media for communication
- Options in the tools for composition and problem solving
- Options in the scaffolds for practice and performance

6. Provide options for executive functions

- Options that guide effective goal-setting
- Options that support planning and strategy development
- Options that facilitate managing information and resources
- Options that enhance capacity for monitoring progress

III. Engagement

Use multiple means of engagement

7. Provide options for recruiting interest

- Options that increase individual choice and autonomy
- Options that enhance relevance, value, and authenticity
- Options that reduce threats and distractions

8. Provide options for sustaining effort and persistence

- Options that heighten salience of goals and objectives
- Options that vary levels of challenge and support
- Options that foster collaboration and communication
- Options that increase mastery-oriented feedback

9. Provide options for self-regulation

- Options that guide personal goal-setting and expectations
- Options that scaffold coping skills and strategies
- Options that develop self-assessment and reflection



SUMMARY



Accommodations help to provide equal access to the grade level content for students with disabilities. IDEA and NCLB call for students with disabilities to participate in general curriculum and high stakes testing. Accommodations are intended to level the field for students with disabilities. Accommodations may change over time as the student acquires skills and strategies or as the gap between academic achievement and grade level content expectations grows. Accommodations are determined by student need and need to be evaluated for effectiveness. Equal access can be accomplished through collaboration, differentiation and use of the Universal Design for Learning.

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