



4 common accommodations -- and how to write them into students' plans

Extended time. Preferential seating. Tutoring. These are common accommodations in Section 504 plans. But what do they mean, exactly, for the student?

"All of those statements are ambiguous in that they can be interpreted differently by different people, including school and family, and they don't have sufficient parameters to explain to the teacher, student, or parent what is intended," said Linda L. Yoder, a school attorney at [Shipman & Goodwin LLP](#) in Hartford, Conn.

Share with your 504 teams these suggestions to help individualize common accommodations in Section 504 plans.

- **Extended time.** Any reference to extended time should have a deadline and should be very specific about what it's referring to, Yoder said. Does it apply to the student's art project? History paper? Both?

"If you don't mean extended time on a morning homework check you do every day, then you need to make it very clear you're talking about extended time on tests and quizzes, not homework assignments," she said.

Specify how long the extended time will be. When students at the end of the year still owe an assignment to a teacher from October because their extended time was not limited, it leads to frustration for both the student and teacher, Yoder said.

For a student with a chronic illness who is frequently absent, the accommodation might say: "Guidance counselor will meet with student to prepare a make-up schedule with student input so assignments can be done in an orderly fashion," or "Guidance counselor will meet with student to develop schedule that will give guidance as to what should occur."

- **Preferential seating.** Instead of just writing the accommodation as "preferential seating," identify why the student needs preferential seating, Yoder said. If the teacher doesn't know why the student needs preferential seating, he might interpret it to be that the student should be in the front row or within arm's reach of the teacher or not within arm's reach of another student. Maybe the student needs to have a certain view of the smart board.

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"If I don't identify in the plan why the student needs the accommodation, I can't interpret what preferential seating means," Yoder said. "The way a number of teachers teach, they go up and down the classroom or have the desks in a circle -- it may mean something very different in their class. If preferential seating is needed because a wheelchair user needs to navigate in and out of the classroom, we need to say so."

- **Outline.** Another common accommodation under Section 504 is to provide the student with an outline of the material before an exam. Make it clear that if the teacher has given an outline to every student, she doesn't need to write a separate outline personalized to the student with the 504 plan, Yoder said.

"We get into the trap of, 'The whole class got that, but I have a 504, so that must mean [I get] something more or different,'" Yoder said. "In some cases, that student may need more information than the rest of the class. But often the same outline that everyone in the class receives is good enough."

"Be very clear in the accommodation the scope of what you're offering," Yoder said. "I've [had] parents make [Office for Civil Rights] complaints because they interpreted [the accommodation to mean that their child was] getting a study guide or class notes that's only particular to them." Or they expected that the student's outline would tell them every single question that was going to be on the exam, she said.

- **Tutoring.** A student may need this accommodation if she has a chronic ailment and has to miss a lot of class because of migraines, for example. It might involve giving the student some form of class notes, allowing her to record the classes she will miss or meeting with the teacher to go over key elements. "It may need to be done on a class-by-class basis," Yoder said. For example, will it only be for core courses? For English and math? Ask yourself questions such as these before writing something generic like "tutoring" as the accommodation.

"Teachers and administrators want absolute rules: 'We never do tutoring because that's specialized instruction,'" Yoder said. But consider the example above. Tutoring the student to give her access to the information is not the same as tutoring to help her get a better grade because she learns in a different way, Yoder said.

February 25, 2020

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