

# ENTRANCE EXAMS

## tips for students with learning issues

Submitted by PC READS

College entrance testing remains part of the admission process for many colleges and universities, and students with learning or attention issues – like dyslexia, dysgraphia or ADHD – rely on testing accommodations to be successful on these standardized tests.

The requirements and application process to receive accommodations differ for the ACT and the College Board, which administers the PSAT, SAT, and AP courses. Thus, it is essential to review information from both testing services before applying.

Unfortunately, the recent college bribery scandal was a disservice to students with disabilities who truly require such accommodations to provide a level playing field for standardized testing. Obtaining learning disability diagnoses for the purpose of cheating is disheartening and frustrating to families of students with genuine attention and learning disabilities. These families understand the need and use of testing accommodations and many have spent years properly identifying and documenting their child's disability and relevant, appropriate accommodations.

A student with dysgraphia, which causes poor handwriting, may require a computer to write essays. A student with dyslexia may read 100 words per minute slower than her non-dyslexic peers and require extra time to read the test. A student with ADHD may need extended breaks to get up, move around and refocus. Ultimately, accommodations enable students to demonstrate their knowledge, serving the test's intent and purpose.

While many schools require SAT and ACT scores, hundreds of colleges – including some highly selective schools – have made submitting test scores optional. (Visit [Fairtest.org](http://Fairtest.org) for more information.) Yet, most students with

IEPs and 504 Plans will still take college entrance tests and should become familiar with the accommodation application process. Additionally, as tests often cause anxiety and accommodations and test formats differ, it may be beneficial to focus on taking either the ACT or the SAT, but not both. While individualized research is necessary, here are some basic tips to prepare for the application process.

**Gather Documentation.** Students on 504 Plans and IEPs for learning disabilities will need to provide diagnostic documentation that is current, typically meaning within three academic years prior to the date of the request. It is best if documentation explains how a child's learning and attention issues affect test-taking. Students without 504 Plans or IEPs may still be able to obtain accommodations; however, they must have a diagnosed disability and supporting documentation.

**Common Accommodations:** Generally, individual accommodations should be based upon those used during school

and listed on an IEP or 504 Plan. It is a good idea to review documents for current testing accommodations and decide if any additional ones will be needed for standardized testing. Common accommodations granted include extended time, extra or extended breaks, small group test settings, use of computer for essay and answering in text booklets. If an accommodation used in school is not listed on the testing organization website, special requests can be submitted with supporting documentation.

**Apply Early.** Know the test dates and apply for accommodations early. For the SAT, applications are submitted prior to registering for the test and appeals may take up to 7 weeks. For the ACT, students register first and then request accommodations. Requests may be denied, so leave time for the appeals process which may require gathering additional information. Typically, once approved, students do not need to reapply for subsequent tests.

**Work With Your School.** The initial paperwork is often prepared by the school counselor and signed by parents. The Park City High School Counseling Office has written guidelines which are very helpful.

**Other Resources:** As policies and procedures often change, it is important to refer to the ACT and College Board websites often. Also, mark your calendars for College Planning: For Students with IEPs and 504 Plans, an event co-sponsored by PC READS scheduled for October 15, 2019.

*PC READS is a local nonprofit advocating for recognition and education of dyslexic students. We promote elevating literacy through early identification of struggling readers, effective reading interventions and appropriate classroom accommodations. To learn more, please visit our website: [parkcityreads.org](http://parkcityreads.org).*



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