

# What you need to know about your child's accommodations!

## THE WRONG ONE CAN MAKE A TEST MORE DEMANDING.

College Board tests are not the same as classroom tests. In order to ensure your child gets the accommodations they need, you and your child's school need to understand the differences between how a school administers accommodations and how they are administered on the PSAT/NMSQT®, the SAT®, or on AP® Exams. Knowing the differences may make a world of difference to your child's test experience.

### What do these students have in common?

*Joaquin has always struggled with paying attention for a sustained period. During tests, he often needs about 5–10 minutes to refocus and returns to his work. When given extended time, he often takes breaks, rather than use the additional time to work on the test.*

*Olivia is quick and impulsive in everything she does. She has great difficulty sitting still and is easily distracted. She races through her homework and tests in the hope to complete her work as soon as possible. She takes pride in being the first one done. Even though Olivia's school provides her with extended time, she does not use it.*

Both students receive extended time for classroom tests, however, they would not find this helpful on College Board tests. Tests administered in your child's classroom are often timed by the length of the class. Exams are handed out at the beginning of the class and collected at the end. Students who require time to address their needs during the test (check medical readings, stretch, rest, etc.) are allotted extra time because the test cannot be stopped for everyone in class while that student attends to their needs. College Board tests, however, are given differently.

For College Board tests, such as the SAT:

- The tests are given in highly structured settings in a quiet environment. The test itself is highly organized by design, divided into predictable sections with standard breaks.
- Students cannot self-pace and must stay for the entire duration of the test.
- Specific accommodations are available that directly correspond to how students use the extra time

provided in their classroom (e.g., extra breaks, which allow students to focus in short bursts and then get up to move around between each period of sustained attention).

- Students can access other accommodations that may be more helpful, such as seating away from distractions (preferential seating), or a small group setting with fewer distractions.

### You know your child. We know our tests. Let's work together.

*Nadia has diabetes and needs accommodations to manage her blood glucose levels. Accommodations on her 504 plan include extended time to manage her symptoms (i.e., test blood sugar, have a snack or juice, retest her blood sugar, and recover). Nadia does not work slowly but sometimes needs a few minutes to manage her medical needs.*

- Some helpful College Board accommodations for students with diabetes include permission for food/ medication, permission to test blood sugar, and extra or extended breaks to stop the test clock while blood sugar testing and remediation occur.
- Unlike school testing, extended time always makes College Board tests significantly longer and does not allow a student to conveniently manage and regulate their symptoms.
- Students with other physical or medical disabilities (e.g., Crohn's disease, colitis, migraine headaches, regional pain syndrome, narcolepsy) may be better accommodated with breaks, as extended time cannot ensure they get both the needed time to address medical needs and the full testing time other students receive.

## Just because it's used in class does not mean it's needed on the SAT, PSAT/NMSQT, or on AP Exams.

Accommodations students need in class may already be built into the regular test process. For example:

- All students taking the SAT, the PSAT/NMSQT, or AP Exams can ask that instructions be repeated.
- Spelling mistakes are not counted.
- All students can access drinks and snacks during breaks.

While your child may use various accommodations that provide assistance in classes, they may not be helpful or needed on College Board tests.

*Elijah is hard of hearing. His 504 plan allows him to receive extended time, a copy of his teachers' notes, and a written transcript of audio and video recordings because he can't hear everything that is said. However, Elijah can complete written tests within a large group setting with his peers without accommodations.*

- Some students with disabilities may not need any accommodations for College Board tests. Unlike classroom instruction, College Board tests are primarily written tests, given in a quiet environment.
- If a student needs assistance with oral instructions, they may consider requesting preferential seating, a written copy of oral instructions, or the use of an FM system (if consistently used in school).

Before requesting all accommodations on your child's school plan, please consider which ones your child will actually be able to use on their College Board test. For example, extra textbooks, class notes, and reduced homework noted in your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) are not going to be useful when your child takes the SAT.

Similarly, while your child may use multiple accommodations that provide the same function in school, not all will be required on one College Board test. For example, braille, a reader, and a screen reader might all be used in the various courses throughout a school week, but it's unlikely they would all be used on a single College Board test.

Excluding redundant accommodations may expedite the approval of accommodations that are needed.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT US:

Email: [ssd@info.collegeboard.org](mailto:ssd@info.collegeboard.org)

Phone: 212-713-8333 Fax: 866-360-0114  
[collegeboard.org/ssd](http://collegeboard.org/ssd)

## Are accommodations needed?

*Sophia always received top grades in middle school and qualified for honors and AP classes in high school. She found the AP courses more difficult and demanding than her prior courses. She spent more time each night on homework, yet she no longer had top grades in every class. When she took the PSAT/NMSQT, Sophia did not do as well on one of the sections as some of her classmates. She ran out of time and didn't complete the final few questions. Sophia and her parents wondered if she had a learning disability. When they spoke to the school, her teachers thought Sophia was doing fine.*

- Most people have strengths and weaknesses, and some classes are difficult. A student's difficulty in one or two classes—especially advanced classes—does not mean that they need testing accommodations.
- Many students without disabilities do not complete College Board tests. Some students don't budget their time in order to complete every question. Others have difficulty with a few questions and expend the time that would have been used on the remainder of the test. Not finishing a test is not, in itself, evidence of a need for extended time.

## Learn what the right accommodation can do.

Translating the accommodation that works in the classroom into one that accomplishes what your child needs during a College Board test can ensure that your child has the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities. Rather than requesting generic and ill-fitting accommodations, request those that fit your child's needs.

When requesting accommodations, keep in mind:

- Accommodations other than extended time might be more helpful.
- There is no self-pacing on the SAT.
- Don't request accommodations that won't be needed or used on test day.

## Keep your child's score meaningful.

**In the end we, like you, want to ensure that each student tests under the conditions that give them an equal opportunity to show their abilities, not their disabilities. Consideration of what your child actually needs and how that need translates into an appropriate and useful accommodation on a College Board test is a vital step toward a fair and meaningful test experience.**