



Test Administration Accommodations Frequently Asked Questions

What are test administration accommodations?

Test administration accommodations are changes to the manner in which a test is administered or how a student responds to a test. Accommodations provide access for select groups of students (students with disabilities and English language learners) to demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have learned as a result of instruction. Importantly, accommodations do not change or alter the constructs (i.e., the knowledge and skills) the test is designed to measure, nor do they reduce or change learning expectations.

What are conditional accommodations?

Conditional accommodations are more expansive and are designed to provide access for the small number of students with more serious, severe disabilities or students with very limited English proficiency. Conditional accommodations may be provided to students who meet specific eligibility criteria. The criteria are outlined in the *Student Assessment Handbook* and the *Accommodations Manual* (for students with disabilities). Only students who meet the eligibility criteria are eligible for conditional accommodations.

Why is the state concerned with the number of students who participate via conditional accommodations?

Conditional accommodations were never intended to be used with large numbers of students. These accommodations have always been referred to as something other than 'standard' in an effort to communicate that they were different. Because these accommodations are more expansive than standard accommodations, it is imperative that they be used only when appropriate. Since the early 2000s, the State Board Testing Rule has set forth the expectation that only a small percentage of students will participate in the state assessment program through conditional/non-standard accommodations.

In November 2006, the Georgia Department of Education introduced guidance to help IEP teams make sound and appropriate decisions about accommodations, including conditional accommodations. In August 2007, guidance for appropriate decisions about ELL students' use of accommodations was issued. The guidance for both groups of students can be located in the *Student Assessment Handbook*.

It is important to note that federal laws (including the *No Child Left Behind Act* and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*) and regulations require that states develop comprehensive accommodation policies for students with disabilities and English language learners. States are charged with ensuring the appropriate inclusion of these students in their assessment systems, resulting in valid and meaningful measurement of student achievement. States are also charged with monitoring those policies. Federal regulations released in April 2007 require that states direct IEP teams to select only approved accommodations.

Can an IEP team consider other accommodations that are not listed on the state's list of allowable accommodations?

Both federal regulation and Georgia State Board of Education rules direct IEP teams to consider only state-approved accommodations. The rationale behind this requirement is to ensure valid measurement of student achievement. The purpose of test administration accommodations is to provide access for students while protecting the constructs (knowledge and skills) the tests are designed to measure. The paramount goal of state assessment is meaningful measurement of what students have learned as a result of instruction. Approved accommodations are listed annually in the *Student Assessment Handbook*, including guidance on the appropriate selection and use of the approved accommodations.

What if an IEP includes an accommodation that is not on the state's list of allowable accommodations?

If an IEP includes an accommodation that is not listed as state-approved, the best course of action may likely be to amend the IEP. When a non-approved accommodation is used on a state-mandated test, it must be reported to the Georgia Department of Education as an irregularity. Depending on the circumstances, the Department may invalidate the scores resulting from the assessment. It is important to note that federal regulations stipulate that if the results of an assessment are considered invalid, the student may not be considered a participant for AYP purposes.

Without a doubt, the IEP is an important document that guides a student's educational program. What is written in the IEP must be followed. For this reason, it is essential that IEP teams have knowledge of the allowable accommodations and guidance issued by the state. It is also important that all parties involved in making decisions about accommodations understand the potential consequences of including accommodations that are not on the state's approved list.

Why is the reading of the reading passages prohibited in grades 1 and 2?

Allowable accommodations *always* grow out of the content and skills measured by the assessment and the purpose of the assessment. The Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests are designed to measure the state curriculum. Inherent within the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) for English language arts in grades 1 and 2 are standards that address the development of reading skills and abilities, including decoding and fluency. Because decoding and fluency are crucial building blocks for learning to read, and are compromised when text is read to students, it is essential that students independently read the reading passages, which have been designed to be developmentally appropriate for early readers.

Students in grades 1 and 2 are developing critically important foundational reading skills. Given the variability in which students in grades 1 and 2 develop these foundational skills, it is essential they be given the opportunity to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved these skills relative to the grade level standards and expectations.

For these reasons, it is inappropriate to read the reading passages to first and second grade students. Test items in these grades are read to *all* students by the Test Examiner (via the scripted Examiner's Manual); thus, reading the items is not an accommodation for these grades but is something that occurs for every student at these grades.

What is a non-reader?

A non-reader is a student whose disability prohibits him/her from decoding at any level of difficulty and, therefore, from reading and comprehending text at any level of difficulty. These students are unable to move from parts (individual letters and words) to whole (phrases and sentences) and gain meaning from text. Often the cognitive effort expended on decoding words is such that they do not gain meaning from the text, and therefore are unable to demonstrate comprehension of what they have read. Non-readers have access to text only through assistance (i.e., a human reader or assistive technology).

A non-reader is not a student who reads below grade level. Students who read below grade level are reading, although they may struggle to fully comprehend grade-level text. Nonetheless, these students are able to comprehend text and each test contains a range of reading passages so that struggling readers can demonstrate their reading skill. For struggling readers (those who read below grade level), reading the test questions can serve to reduce the reading load and allow the student to focus his/her cognitive effort on the reading passages.

Students, in grades 3 through 8, who meet the criteria outlined in the *Student Assessment Handbook* may be eligible for the conditional accommodation of reading the reading passage.

Can the questions, responses, and any associated text be read in the other CRCT content areas?

Yes. Because the tests in the other content areas (English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies) are not designed to measure reading comprehension, reading text associated with an item, including the item itself and the response options, is permissible and is a standard accommodation.

Is using a basic function calculator an accommodation on the CRCT?

Use of a basic function calculator is a conditional accommodation for students with disabilities and is restricted to students who meet the eligibility criteria outlined in the *Student Assessment Handbook*.

What is a basic function calculator?

A basic function calculator has the four computational functions (addition, subtraction, multiplication, & division). Many basic function calculators also have square root and percentage functions. A basic function calculator is not a scientific, graphing, or programmable calculator. These calculators have additional functions that encroach on the concepts and skills inherent in the curriculum. Importantly, students who use the calculator should still be taught the mathematical processes and reasoning behind the procedures they perform on the calculator.

Why can't more advanced calculators be used on the CRCT?

Any time accommodations are considered it is important to take into account what the test is designed to measure - which for the CRCT is the state curriculum. Inherent in our state mathematics curriculum standards is the building of mathematical fluency and understanding.

Some students have a disability that prohibits them from learning or retaining certain computational functions (i.e., multiplication or division facts). The use of a calculator is allowed for these students. Importantly, the use of a calculator is not a substitute for the student building competence in mathematical processes, understanding, and reasoning. Because advanced calculators perform procedures (e.g., order of operations) for students in addition to providing computational support, use of these calculators significantly alters the constructs targeted by the test. A basic function calculator provides the computational support needed by a student, but requires the student to demonstrate an understanding of the mathematical concepts that underpin the calculations performed.

What changes in Georgia's accommodation policies will go into effect for 2008 - 2009 school year?

At this time, no changes in the list of approved accommodations are anticipated. Changes that will occur in the guidance on the appropriate selection and use of accommodations include the following:

1. The IEPs of students who meet the eligibility criteria for one or more conditional accommodations and are assigned one or more conditional accommodations must include specific goals and objectives which address the deficits necessitating the conditional accommodation(s).
2. The conditional accommodation of reading the reading passages for ELL students will be restricted to grades 3 – 8, meaning the reading passages may not be read to ELL students in grades 1 and 2.