

# Accommodations (Auxiliary Aids) & Strategies Guide

A guide to navigating accommodations and strategies for the college student

## **Preface**

*Every school has a different process for making accommodations for students with concussions. Some schools may have informal accommodations in the initial recovery stage and require more formal accommodations later if symptoms persist. Other schools may pursue a formal accommodation route from the beginning. Consult your institution's accessibility office for more information about school-specific policies.*

*\*Note: the ADA specifies that students must be provided with any necessary "auxiliary aids." Commonly, colleges and universities refer to these auxiliary aids as "accommodations."*

## **The Americans with Disabilities Act**

*An essential part of self-advocacy is knowing one's rights and being able to speak up for them. The most important information regarding rights in the college environment is the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) for students in the United States. ADA serves to protect Americans with disabilities from disability-based discrimination. Brain injuries, including concussions or mild traumatic brain injuries, are recognized as a disability under ADA according to researchers. [Additionally, a Mayo Clinic pdf explains that brain injury, including mTBI \(concussion\), is covered by the ADA.](#) Even if a school doesn't list concussion or mTBI as a disability, they are still required to provide reasonable accommodations. Even for the majority of concussion patients whose symptoms are temporary, these symptoms still constitute a (temporary) disability and should be treated as such by both the school administration and the students themselves.*

## **Identifying a concussion disability with the Accessibility Office**

*Under ADA, colleges are required to provide qualified students with reasonable accommodations. Students are the ones who initiate the accommodations process by identifying as a student with a disability to their Accessibility Office. When seeking accommodations, students are required to provide their educational institution with the necessary documentation of their disability. A student is not legally required to disclose their disability, but documentation is necessary for them to be qualified for accommodations under the ADA. A reasonable accommodation is a change that allows the student with a disability to participate equally in the college environment without placing undue hardship on the institution.*

## Before Meeting with the Accessibility Office

- Reach out to peers for more immediate accessibility challenges.** Your meeting with your accessibility office may not be soon enough to meet some of your immediate needs. Try reaching out to friends, roommates, classmates, or Resident Assistants if you need support with getting meals, creating or accessing a quiet environment, or getting class notes. Some schools may also have peer support programs where you can get support from student wellness advocates, accessibility services peer leaders, or other students
- Contact your school's accessibility/disability office.** They will help you set up a meeting to discuss your accommodations. More information about your school's specific process should be provided on the school website.
- Obtain medical documentation** from a campus or external health provider, when applicable. Under ADA rules, schools can request medical documentation from students. Your healthcare provider, following [HIPAA regulations](#), may be asked to provide documentation to your school that details a diagnosis and supporting information along with the type of accommodations you may need. However, neither you nor your doctor are required to disclose details of your symptoms. [Read more about post-secondary ADA documentation here.](#)
- Some schools have requirements about what types of medical providers can provide official documentation for concussions, so you should check to see if your provider is acceptable to your school.
- Consider symptoms and accommodation needs.** Taking some time to think about or write down your symptoms and what might help them will make it easier for you and your school's accessibility office to understand and meet your accommodation needs.

## During Your Meeting

- Ask questions.** Some example questions are:
  - How will professors learn about my accommodations?
  - Where can I get medical help for managing symptoms?
  - How can I change my accommodations throughout the return-to-learn process?
  - Where are campus mental health services, and how do I access them?
  - Does the school have a pre-existing return-to-learn process?
- Discuss accommodation ideas.** Before the meeting, it may be helpful to think about how your symptoms and the concussion have affected your ability to do academic work and how accommodations could be helpful. It may be helpful to explain how certain activities or environments worsen your symptoms, but don't feel the need to report symptoms to

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your accessibility coordinator the way you would to a doctor. If you aren't sure where to start with accommodations or find the process too overwhelming and difficult, ask for guidance! The person you are meeting with is there to support you in this process, regardless of how much you know about accommodations.

Remember that all concussions are different so the person you are talking to may not understand your unique situation. Advocate for your needs, even if they differ from the commonly-held ideas about concussion recovery.

- Be honest.** If there is something you need, ask for it. Even if it doesn't seem that important, getting the accommodations you need is important. Likewise, if an accommodation doesn't sound right for you, you don't need to use it. However, it is your right to be provided with any accommodations that you need.

## After Your Meeting

- Remember, there is no set timeline for recovering from a concussion.** Everyone recovers from concussions at different rates, with different symptoms resolving or appearing at different times. While your progress may feel frustrating or slow, following a gradual return to activity that minimizes symptoms ensures you aren't returning to tasks you aren't ready for or risking delaying your recovery.
- Use your accommodations when you need to.** They exist to support you. If you don't need to use them, that's okay, too! It may feel uncomfortable to use or ask for accommodations, especially as symptoms improve. Listening to your brain and body's needs is essential.
- Modify your accommodations as needed.** If an accommodation isn't working for you, ask to change it. Additionally, concussion symptoms can appear days after the initial injury. Your needs may change over the course of the recovery process. All of this is completely normal. Reach out to your school's accessibility office to modify, remove, or add new accommodations as necessary.

## Accommodations and Self-Care Strategies For Different Needs

*The accommodations listed below are grouped based on common needs that concussion patients experience. This list is not comprehensive. The following information will, hopefully, help provide an idea of common accommodations to help start the accommodations process.*

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## Accommodations & Strategies for General Concussion Symptoms

- Modifying or canceling assignments
- Short, in-class breaks
- Extended time on assignments, exams, or quizzes
- Alternate testing environments
  - e.g., small group, individual, quiet rooms, dimmer lighting
- Access to recordings of lectures
- Provided notetaker
- Alternate forms of assessment e.g., oral instead of written, paper instead of digital
- Excused absences
- Schedule change, e.g. drop a class or classes
- Preferential seating in accordance with accommodation needs
- Exemption from reading out loud when applicable e.g. cognitive or speech problems
- Using a planner (not strictly an accommodation but helps with many symptoms)

## Accommodations & Strategies for Headaches

- Lay head on desk during class
- Breaks during class
- Breaks from computers/screens

## Accommodations & Strategies for Sensitivity to Noise

- No physical education, band, or choir classes
- Avoid loud classes/labs
- Earplug usage
- Alternate setting for eating, rather than in the cafeteria
- Take-out food options or food delivered to room
- Leave/arrive to class early/late to avoid noisy hallways
- Limit volume of devices, speakers, and headphones/earphones

## Accommodations & Strategies for Sensitivity to Light

- Wear a hat with a brim
- Do not wear sunglasses indoors; this can make vision problems worse in the long-term
- Work in an alternate area with warm or low lighting
- Wear sunglasses outdoors when in direct sunlight

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## Accommodations & Strategies for Sleep Difficulties

- Priority registration to avoid early courses (may need more sleep or struggle with sleep)
- Discuss dropping early courses or moving to a later time slot if possible
- Frequent rest breaks

## Accommodations & Strategies for Visual Problems

- Limit computer use
- Reduce/shorten reading assignments
- Work with professors to prioritize readings for relevance to exams and in-class discussion
- Ask professors to record lectures
- Auditory learning/adapting apps
- Increase font size on computer/projection screens
- Use [F.lux app](#) on laptop
- Use dark mode on phone and Night Shift on iPhones

## Accommodations & Strategies for Concentration/Memory Problems

- Primarily focus on essential academic content/concepts
- Postpone exams
- Allow extra time for assignments, quizzes, projects, and exams
- Modify class assignments and homework
- Limit to one exam per day
- Postpone any planned standardized testing
- Request pre-printed lecture notes
- Request a notetaker
- Request a reader for test-taking
- Request oral/written instructions or additional clarification of instructions for exams
- Request an outline/study guide when available
- If needed, request a computer with spelling/grammar checking software for assignments and note-taking
- Ask for reduced emphasis on spelling/grammar when grading assignments (unless it is the purpose of the assignment)

## Accommodations & Strategies for Dizziness/Lightheadedness

- Arrive/leave class early/late to avoid crowded hallways
- Request an escort to/from classes
- Lay head on desk in class

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## Accommodations & Self-Care Strategies by Setting

### General Accommodations & Strategies

*These refer to general strategies that may apply in your academic or day-to-day life.*

You can request the following:

- Priority registration
  - e.g., to avoid early courses or courses that may exacerbate symptoms
- Excused absences
- Schedule changes; drop a class/classes
- No physical education, band, or choir classes
- Avoid loud classes (e.g. music electives) or long, fatiguing classes (classes with labs)
- Reduce quantity of work in favor of quality
- Arrive/leave class early/late to avoid crowded hallways
- Provide an escort to/from courses
- Be provided with oral and written instructions/additional clarification of instructions
- Be provided with an outline/study guide when available
- Limit computer use
  - e.g., provide alternate formats for assignments/tests/quizzes

You can do the following:

- Use a planner (not strictly an accommodation but helps with many symptoms)
- Wearing a hat with a brim
- Do not wear sunglasses indoors—this can be detrimental to recovery
- Take rest breaks as needed

### Accommodations In Class

*These can be implemented in a classroom setting.*

You can request the following:

- Short in-class breaks
- Ask professors for lecture recordings
- Request a notetaker
- Preferential seating in accordance with accommodation needs
  - e.g., areas with dimmer lighting, avoiding speakers or direct sunlight
- Exemption from reading out loud when applicable e.g. cognitive or speech problems
- Ask instructors to be conscious of volume levels
- More listening and discussion opportunities (instead of readings)

- Pre-printed notes/access to in-class presentation notes
- Be provided with an escort to/from courses

You can do the following:

- Record lectures
- Lay head on desk in class
- Earplug or noise-canceling headphone usage
- If needed, request spelling/grammar check software for assignments and note-taking
- Arrive/leave class early/late to avoid crowded hallways

## **Accommodations for Assignments**

*These are geared towards in and out of class assignments.*

You can request the following:

- Modify or cancel assignments
- Extended time on assignments/quizzes
- Reduce/shorten reading assignments
- Auditory learning/adapting apps
- More listening and discussion opportunities (instead of readings)

## **Accommodations for Testing**

*These accommodations refer to tests associated with college courses. Standardized tests should have their own accommodation procedures—look for more information on the respective test's website. Taking standardized tests while recovering from a concussion is not recommended, so waiting until the return-to-learn process is complete or symptoms are minimal may be a better course of action.*

You can request the following:

- Additional time to complete tests
- Modify, cancel, or postpone tests
- Quiet, individual testing room
- Break up long tests into smaller sections with breaks in between
- Alternate assessment forms
  - e.g., oral with scribed responses instead of written, paper instead of digital
- Assess knowledge using multiple choice, instead of open-ended questions
- Allow student to clarify/explain responses on exams/assignments after submission
- Reference sheet for exams with formulas (unless memorizing formulas is required)
- Permit use of a calculator
- Permit use of a dictionary or thesaurus in written responses

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- Spelling/grammar check software in written responses
  - Limit to one exam/test per day, reschedule exams/tests if multiple on the same day
  - Permission to use earplugs or noise-canceling headphones

## **Instructor-Specific Accommodations**

*These refer to things an instructor can do to make their classroom more accessible for students affected by concussion. Not all of them may be formal accommodations, but they can be something you bring up with a professor to consider trying. You may also refer instructors to [Concussion for College Educators](#) for more information about academic accommodations for concussions in college.*

- Increase font size on computer/projector screens
- In grading, reduce emphasis on spelling/grammar (unless it is the purpose of the assignment)
- Place main focus on essential academic content/concepts
- Provide oral and written instructions/additional clarification of instructions
- Provide an outline/study guide when available

## **Accommodations for Non-Academic Life**

*These are ways the college environment can be more accessible to students with concussions.*

- Move to quieter floor/building
- Contact Residential Assistants to better manage noise/quiet hours
- New roommate agreement to reflect symptoms
- Alternate eating space (quieter, dimmer, or less overwhelming)
- Take-out meal options
- Meals brought to room
- Eat in the dining hall at less busy times



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