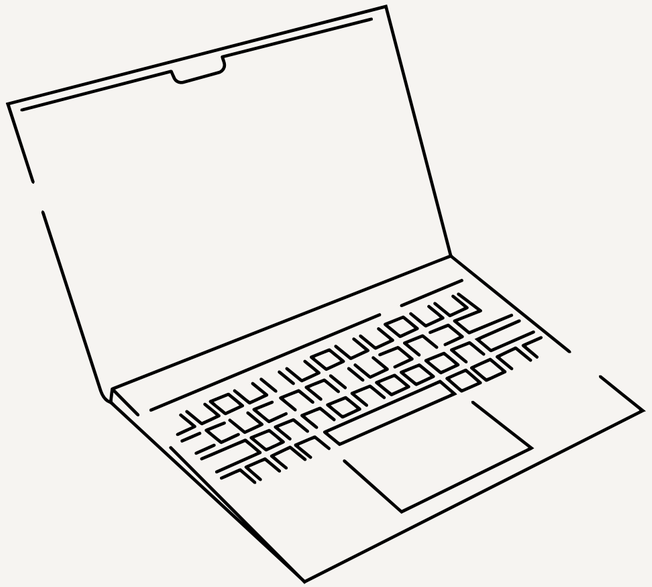
NCCSD
NATIONAL CENTER FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

ICI INSTITUTE on COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

UNDERSTANDING
ACCOMMODATION LETTERS

GETTING AN **ACCOMMODATION LETTER**



THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTERS

Disability services professionals send accommodation letters to faculty so they know which accommodations are approved for students with disabilities. The letters also give contact information if faculty have questions.

HOW THEY ARRIVE

Letters are usually sent through email, but may also arrive as a printed letter. Sometimes students hand deliver them

WHY EXPLAIN THEM?

Even experienced faculty can have difficulty understanding accommodations letters. This presentation will provide an overview with a sample letter.

SAMPLE LETTER

The next few slides have a sample letter, if you'd like to read through it.

Otherwise, you can skip ahead to a step-by-step explanation of the letter.

Dear instructor:

I am writing this accommodation letter for Mary Smith, a student in your spring course. Town College is committed to ensuring equal access to students with disabilities in all aspects of campus life. The contents of this letter are confidential.

Required Accommodations

Below are the academic accommodations Ms. Smith will need in your course. Some of the listed accommodations may not be applicable to the course, or students may choose not to utilize an accommodation. If this course has an experiential or hands-on learning component, including fieldwork or labs, please contact me as soon as possible, as additional accommodations may be needed.

- Notetakers. Notetakers are paid student workers from the Access Office who are trained to take notes for classes. The notetakers will identify themselves to you at the beginning of the course.

- 1.5 extended time on tests. For every 60-minute test, the student will have 90 minutes. You may provide this accommodation, or the Access Office can proctor the exam.

- Use of GrammerAIMe to check spelling and grammar on papers. Due to Town College's AI policies forbidding the use of AI, the Access Office notifies all students that the use of GrammarAIMe should be confined to spelling and grammar. Professors are still allowed to check for plagiarism but be aware that plagiarism-checking software may occasionally flag GrammarAIMe corrections.Concerns should be handled on a case-by-case basis in consultation with Access Services.

- Brief breaks. Ms. Smith may occasionally need a brief break from class. Breaks should not be longer than ten minutes and should only occur once during each class period. If Ms. Smith needs a break during quizzes or tests, she should not leave the room with any electronic device, notes, or books.

- Being late without penalty. Because your course is the first class of Ms. Smith’s day, the student may occasionally be late due to circumstances related to their disability. If she is more than five minutes late, Ms. Smith will text, call, or email you, depending on your preference. This is likely only an occasional issue, but if you have concerns about the number of times the student is late, please contact our office.The student should not be penalized for being late.

Additional Information

Disability accommodations provide equitable access for students with disabilities and are mandated under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Access Services’ accommodations decisions rely on healthcare providers' documentation. Faculty are required by law to implement these accommodations, although you may contact me with any questions.

Disability accommodations should be reasonable and not compromise essential components of courses and are designed to promote equitable access for students with disabilities. If you have concerns about the accommodations in this letter, please contact me. Additional information about Access Services and accommodations is in the Instructor Handbook located at http://www.TownCollegeInstructorHandbook.net.

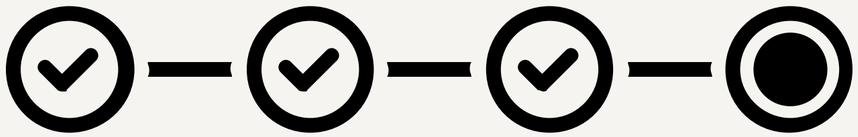
Related Recommendations

Town College also recommends having the campus access statement in your syllabi.The access statement is available at www.TownCollegeAccessSvcs.net/stmt. The college also encourages all faculty and instructors to learn more about research-based Universal Design for Learning (UDL) through the online faculty training at the National Center for College Students with Disabilities (NCCSD) or annual workshops offered by Access Services.

UDL shows how courses can reach more students, including those with disabilities.In some cases, UDL may even eliminate the need for individual accommodations. If you have questions about UDL, contact the Teaching Resource Center on campus, the Access Office, or the NCCSD at NCCSD@ahead.org or 704-744-9979 (phone or texting).

Thank you,
Daniel Johnson
Student Advisor
Access Services
DJ555@towncollege.net
555-655-6600

STEP-BY-STEP
EXPLANATION



Dear instructor:

I am writing this accommodation letter for Mary Smith, a student in your spring course. Town College is committed to ensuring equal access to students with disabilities in all aspects of campus life. The contents of this letter are confidential.

DIAGNOSES

Letters do not share a student's disability (or disabilities). It's not necessary, disability documentation is protected health information, and some instructors make negative assumptions based on a diagnosis.

Dear instructor:

I am writing this accommodation letter for Mary Smith, a student in your spring course. Town College is committed to ensuring equal access to students with disabilities in all aspects of campus life. The contents of this letter are confidential.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Only share this letter's information with people who have an immediate "need to know," like teaching assistants or substitute instructors.

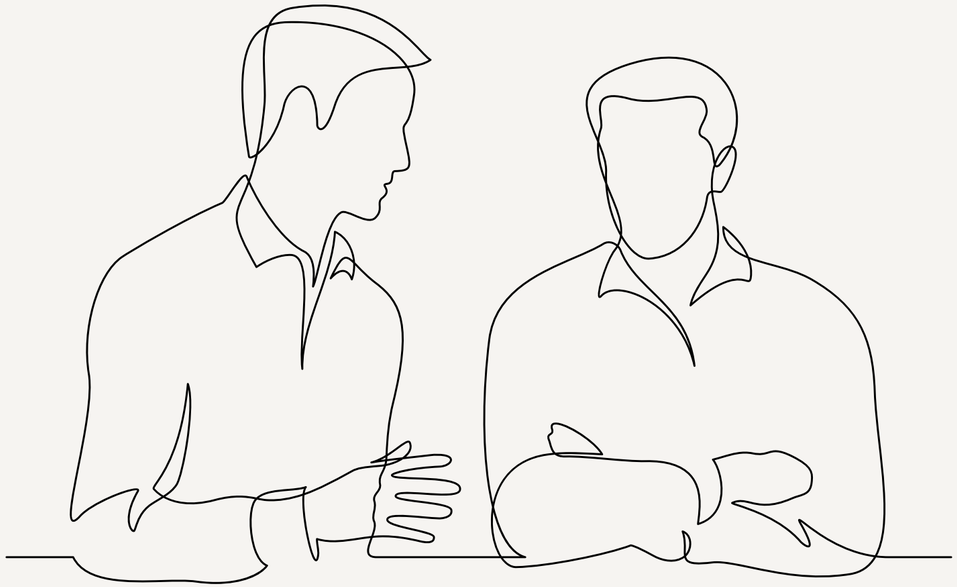
Required Accommodations

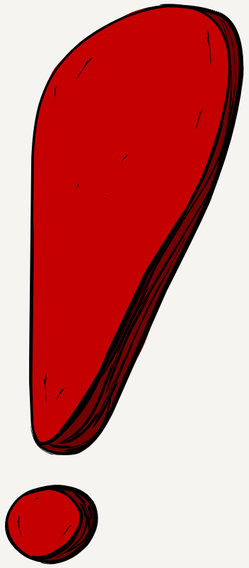
Below are the academic accommodations Ms. Smith will need in your course. Some of the listed accommodations may not be applicable to the course, or students may choose not to utilize an accommodation. If this course has an experiential or hands-on learning component, including fieldwork or labs, please contact me as soon as possible, as additional accommodations may be needed.

USE OF ACCOMMODATIONS

This part of the letter is self-explanatory, but if additional types of accommodations are needed or the required accommodations don't apply, then contact the disability specialist. It's also ok to ask students questions about accommodations or their preferences for implementing them.

CREATING **ACCOMMODATIONS**



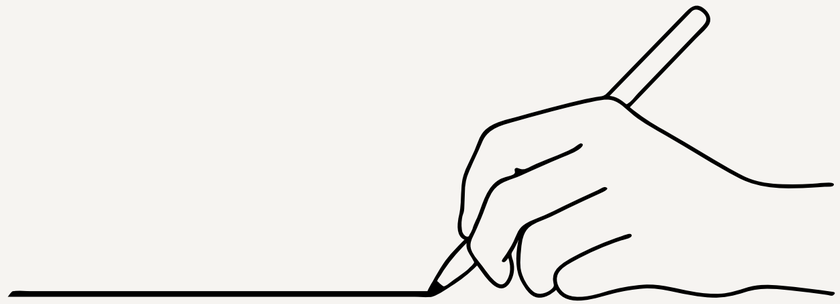


In general, it’s not a good idea to create new accommodations without notifying disability services.

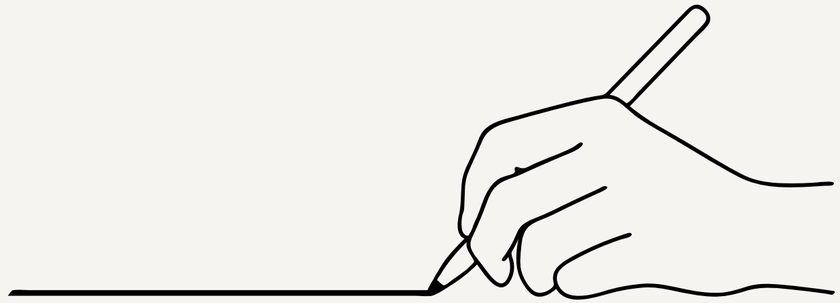
You may be making the course too easy or discriminating without realizing it. The disability services provider also knows the student’s disability, and may have important input or suggestions.

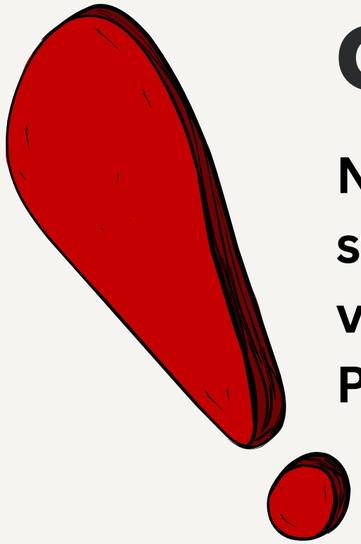
NOTES

Notes can be provided in different ways. In this letter, it says paid student workers will take notes. On other campuses there may be volunteers, students might tape-record lectures, or you may be asked to share your PowerPoints. These are all legitimate ways for students to get notes if it's difficult for them to create their own notes during class.



- *Notetakers. Notetakers are paid student workers from the Access Office who are trained to take notes for classes. The notetakers will identify themselves to you at the beginning of the course.*





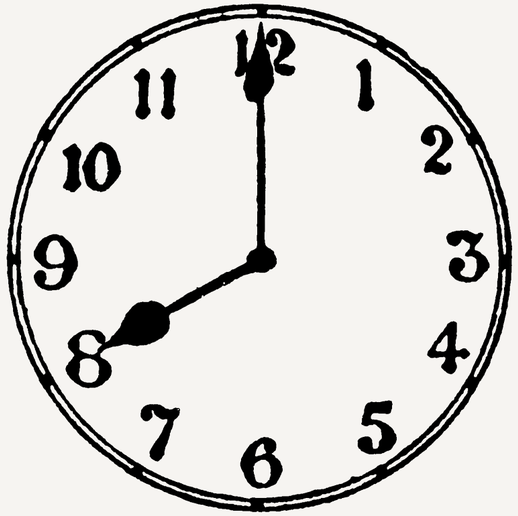
QUICK TIP

Notes can help all students, so consider ways for all students to get notes, including having two or three volunteers taking notes in each class or sharing your PowerPoints with everyone.

- *1.5 extended time on tests. For every 60-minute test, the student will have 90 minutes. You may provide this accommodation, or the Access Office can proctor the exam.*

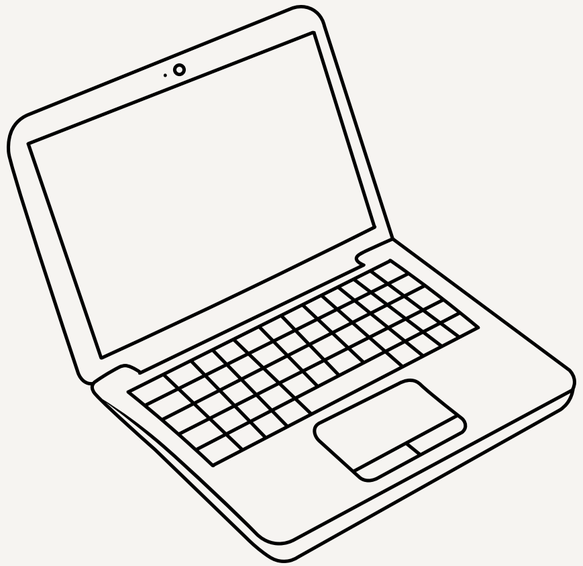
EXTENDED TESTING TIME

There are many types of disabilities that slow down test-taking, from difficulty physically writing answers being easily distracted. You can provide extended testing time in a quiet private place or ask for help from whoever arranges disability services.



If the student doesn’t need a quiet testing environment, you can also universally design tests and give everyone extended time. Just remember nondisabled students should be able to do the test in the allotted time - don’t give everyone 1.5x time and then lengthen the test.

- *Use of GrammerAIMe to check spelling and grammar on papers. Due to Town College's AI policies forbidding the use of AI, the Access Office notifies all students that the use of GrammarAIMe should be confined to spelling and grammar. Professors are still allowed to check for plagiarism but be aware that plagiarism-checking software may occasionally flag GrammarAIMe corrections. Concerns should be handled on a case-by-case basis in consultation with Access Services.*



EXTENDED TESTING TIME

Spelling and grammar-checking software as been in existence for decades, but students with disabilities may be unfairly penalized or accused of cheating. If you have concerns or find plagarism in a disabled student's paper,contact disability service providers immediately for advice.

- *<u>Brief breaks</u>. Ms. Smith may occasionally need a brief break from class. Breaks should not be longer than ten minutes and should only occur once during each class period. If Ms. Smith needs a break during quizzes or tests, she should not leave the room with any electronic device, notes, or books.*

BRIEF BREAKS

This accommodation is not common but may be reasonable for some students. Students may need a short break due to a mental health condition like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, but other students, like diabetics or those with gastrointestinal issues, may need a break for physical reasons.

- *<u>Being late without penalty.</u> Because your course is the first class of Ms. Smith's day, the student may occasionally be late due to circumstances related to their disability. If she is more than five minutes late, Ms. Smith will text, call, or email you, depending on your preference. This is likely only an occasional issue, but if you have concerns about the number of times the student is late, please contact our office.The student should not be penalized for being late.*

TARDINESS & ABSENCES

A disability can affect sleeping, disability transportation can be late in picking up the student, or a student's disability can be worse in the mornings. Some students may be absent for regular doctor appointment or occasional hospitalizations. Lateness and absences should be negotiated with the student and the disability services office, as explained in this sample letter, and students should make up any work they missed.

Additional Information

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LEGAL
INFORMATION

Even if you disagree with the letter, you must implement the accommodations until you get clarification, help, or approval to change accommodations. But "essential components" of a course should never be compromised.

WHAT'S "ESSENTIAL?"

Be careful in deciding what's essential in a course. It's easy to mix up *what* students are learning and *how* they are learning it or showing what they know.

For example, manipulating lab equipment may seem essential, but in many cases, students just need to know *how* to set it up, and don't need to do it themselves. Some disabled scientists work in teams with nondisabled people, and everyone leverages their strengths. Others carefully direct assistants in handling equipment. Things like microscopes can be set up and the disabled person can still view slides.

You should maintain high standards at all times, and in some fields students will need to follow strict professional standards, but students with disabilities can get accommodations and still do what's essential.

Related Recommendations

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Thank you,

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UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Explore UDL through the UDL module and Resources section of the NCCSD's online faculty training.

THANK YOU FOR WATCHING