

Accommodations vs Modifications: What's the Difference?

During an Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting, you may hear the terms accommodations and modifications. Although these words sound similar, they mean different things. Knowing the difference helps you better understand your child's educational program and participate as an informed member of the IEP team.

The goal of both accommodations and modifications is to help students be successful. The IEP team carefully considers your child's individual needs before deciding which supports are appropriate. An accommodation changes how a student learns or shows what they know. A modification changes what a student is expected to learn. Understanding the difference can help you make informed decisions during IEP meetings.

What are accommodations?

Accommodations change **HOW** your child learns or shows what they know. They do not change **WHAT** your child is expected to learn. Accommodations help remove barriers so your child can access the same learning as other students. Some examples of accommodations would be:

- Extra time to complete a test or assignment
- Taking a test in a quiet place
- Listening to a book instead of reading it
- Using speech-to-text or other technology
- Having directions read aloud or repeated
- Sitting in a place that helps with attention
- Taking breaks during longer tasks
- Using large print or other accessible materials

Example: The class is reading the same book. Your child listens to the book as an audiobook. The book and learning goal stay the same, but how your child accesses the book is different.



What are modifications?

A modification changes the learning expectations because the grade-level expectation may not be appropriate for the student at that time. Some examples of modifications are:

- Learning different or fewer skills than classmates
- Using materials at a different learning level
- Completing an assignment with different expectations
- Being tested on different skills or content
- Using different grading expectations

Example: The class is working on grade-level math problems. Your child works on different math skills that match their current learning needs. What your child is expected to learn has changed.

What is the difference?

Accommodations = HOW	Modifications = WHAT
Change HOW a student learns	Change WHAT a students learns
Grade-level expectations stay the same	Learning expectations are adjusted
Helps student access grade-level instruction	Change in the curriculum to meet student needs

Why does the difference matter?

Supports should fit your child's strengths and needs. Accommodations change how your child learns; modifications change what your child is expected to learn. Understanding the difference helps you discuss learning goals and progress with the school team. In high school, modifications may affect whether your child earns a regular high school diploma. Ask the team how any changes could affect graduation.

IEPs do not continue after high school. In college or training programs, students may qualify for accommodations under Section 504 and the ADA, but they must request them and provide required documentation. Modifications are generally not available. Learning to explain their needs and ask for support helps your child prepare for the future.

Questions to Ask

- What barrier is this support helping my child overcome?
- Is this an accommodation or a modification?
- Does it change how my child learns or what my child is expected to learn?
- How will we know if the support is helping?
- Will all school individuals who work with my child know what their accommodations are?

Parent Tips

- **Share what helps.** Tell the team about your child's strengths, challenges, and supports that work at home.
- **Ask for clear examples.** Ask how each accommodation or modification will be used during lessons, assignments, and tests.
- **Understand what changes.** Ask whether a support changes how your child learns or what they are expected to learn.
- **Build your child's voice.** Help your child understand their supports and practice asking for help.
- **Watch the companion learning session.** Learn more through South Dakota Parent Connection's IEP Journey learning series at <https://bit.ly/4kLhSg9>.

South Dakota Parent Connection is Here to Help!

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