CHAPTER TWO
Selecting, Using and Evaluating Accommodations

Teachers, parents and students are part of the IEP or 504 team that uses the problem-solving process to make decisions about instructional supports. A teacher gives a pencil grip to a student who has trouble grasping a pencil. Parents notice that their child will finish homework assignments more quickly when there are no distractions. A student who struggles to read the textbook finds that when a teacher explains the information, the student is able to understand the lesson.

Accommodations are supports that students with disabilities need and are documented in their IEP or Section 504 plan. Accommodations fit within broader frameworks that support access and progress of all students in the general education curriculum and in all tiers of instruction within an MTSS (Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project, 2015). The frameworks include universal design for learning (UDL) (Center for Applied Special Technology, 2011) and differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2014). Schools and classrooms should make accessible materials and instructional scaffolding readily available for all students. They use a problem-solving process to make decisions about accommodations and supports for individual students. (For more information about UDL and differentiated instruction, see Chapter Three.)

Students with disabilities may need accommodations to make progress in the general curriculum and to function in daily life; however, selecting the same accommodation for all students with a particular disability is not appropriate. Similarly, accommodations that are unnecessary can have a negative impact on a student's performance. The accommodation should be based on the learning and behavior characteristics of the student's needs that result from the disability (Beech, 2015; BEESS, 2011).

When developing an IEP, the team must determine how the disability affects the student's involvement and progress in the general education curriculum. The IEP includes a description of the impact of the student's disability in present-level statements or other appropriate sections. For prekindergarten students, the IEP describes how the disability affects the student's participation in appropriate activities (Beech, 2015). A Section 504 plan describes the characteristics of the student's disability and the accommodations and services the student needs (BEESS, 2011).

IEP teams must also consider each student's need for assistive technology (AT) devices and services. An AT device is a piece of equipment or product used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of a student with a disability. AT services are provided to help with the selection, acquisition or use of an AT device (FDOE, 2013, August 21). The IEP team assists the student in selecting, acquiring, using and evaluating the effectiveness of AT over time.

The following questions can help the IEP or Section 504 team select, implement and evaluate accommodations, based on the problem-solving process used in an MTSS to guide decisions about services and supports. The questions are adapted from *Developing Quality Individual Educational Plans* (Beech, 2015).

1. What instructional and assessment tasks are difficult for the student to do independently? Are these difficulties documented in the student's individual plan?

2. Why are these tasks difficult for the student?

3. What accommodations will allow the student to access information and demonstrate performance of the tasks?

4. How will the team evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodations?

This chapter provides an explanation of each question with examples that illustrate the problem-solving process.

1. What instructional and assessment tasks are difficult for the student to do independently? Are these difficulties documented in the student's individual plan?

The planning team begins by identifying tasks the student has to perform independently in the general curriculum. Instructional and assessment activities involve many kinds of tasks. For example, tasks may involve reading to obtain information, writing answers to open-ended questions, solving math problems, following directions, working independently and collaborating with a group.

The student may have difficulty with specific tasks in academic, developmental and functional areas. In Florida, these areas are described in the domains that can be used to organize present-level statements and annual goals in IEPs. The descriptors provide examples of the student's needs in terms of specific skills, competencies and abilities. The table below lists the domains and subheadings with examples of descriptors from *Developing Quality Individual Educational Plans* (Beech, 2015).

Domains

Curriculum and Learning Environment
Task-Related Behavior: Effort, attention, participation, follow routines
Cognitive Processing: Apply knowledge, solve problems, sensory capabilities
Strategic Learning: Plan, organize, manage, self-monitor, note taking, test preparation
Higher Thought Processes: Clarify, estimate, analyze, evaluate, predict, deduce
Career/Employment: Workplace skills, attitudes and behavior, manage resources

| **Communication** |
| Initiate communication, converse, use vocabulary, speech fluency, articulation |

| **Independent Functioning** |
| Daily Living and Self-Care Skills: Personal care routines, safety, money management |
| Recreation/Leisure: Community participation, activities with families and friends |
| Physical Development: Gross motor skills, motor planning, fine motor skills |

| **Social or Emotional Behavior** |
| Personal Adjustment: Self-awareness, self-determination, coping skills |
| Interpersonal Relationships: Peer and adult interaction, turn-taking, respect |

The team uses current information about the student's achievement and abilities to identify concerns within these domains. The data may come from diagnostic or formative assessments, progress monitoring and classroom work samples, as well as observational and anecdotal records. Once concerns are identified, the team focuses on the specific tasks that are difficult for the student. The following examples describe difficulties students may have with tasks used in instruction and assessment.

- Domain: Social and Emotional Behavior—Attention and Task Persistence

    Task: Complete assignments and assessments in class
    Marquez is easily distracted by extraneous noises. He has difficulty maintaining attention and effort and completes only 50 percent of his assignments.

- Domain: Curriculum and Learning Environment—Reading and Sensory Capabilities

    Task: Read standard print materials
    Linda has a type of visual impairment known as low vision. Based on the learning media assessment conducted one month ago, she most efficiently accesses print materials by using a nonelectric 4× dome magnifier to enlarge text for activities that involve reading.

- Domain: Curriculum and Learning Environment—Mathematics Problem Solving and Analyzing

    Task: Solve mathematical word problems
    Madison answers 75 percent of math word problems incorrectly. She has trouble determining which information is needed to solve the problem and often uses the wrong operation to calculate the answer.

- Domains: Communication and Curriculum and Learning Environment—Mode of Communication and Sensory Capabilities

  Task: Hear what the teacher is saying
  > Leandre has a substantial hearing loss and is proficient in the use of American Sign Language for communication. He requires a sign language interpreter during the school day for all activities involving verbal and auditory language.

Consider this Example
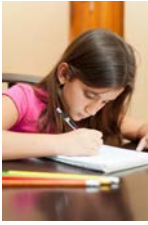
The IEP team identifies written expression in the Curriculum and Learning domain as a concern for Meghan, a fifth-grade student who is not performing on grade level. The team looks at more detailed information to identify specific tasks involving writing that are difficult for Meghan. Based on data from interim assessments and work samples from language arts and social studies classes, Meghan has difficulty with writing tasks that require her to organize details, ideas or events in the final product. Her responses to open-ended questions on social studies tests are also unorganized and generally include irrelevant and incorrect information.

2. Why are these tasks difficult for the student?

The team needs to figure out why these tasks are difficult for the student. They will look for barriers that may affect performance. Each task is considered separately.

Analyze Expected Task Performance—First, the team determines what the task requires and what the student is expected to do. They analyze grade-level standards along with developmental and behavioral expectations to identify the components of the task. They also determine if relevant abilities, such as communication, cognitive, physical, sensory or social/emotional abilities, are involved in performance of the task (Zabala, 2010).

Review Current Task Performance—Next, the team reviews how the student currently performs each component and relevant ability of the task. By comparing the requirements of the task with what the student currently can do, the team identifies gaps that can be addressed by instruction and accommodations.

The team also determines if conditions in the learning environment are a support or a barrier to student performance. The student may have strengths that can be used to support effort and motivation. Barriers may be present because the student has difficulty using standard classroom materials or tools even with accommodations or AT. The student may not be using the accommodations effectively or may need different accommodations.

Consider this Example

The IEP team finds that Meghan has difficulty with writing tasks that involve organizing information.

Analyze Expected Task Performance: The team reviews the fifth-grade English Language Arts standard for writing persuasive text that requires that students create an organizational structure.

Grade-Level Standard: LAFS.5.W.1.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

a. Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which ideas are logically grouped to support the writer's purpose.

b. Provide logically ordered reasons that are supported by facts and details.

c. Link opinion and reasons using words, phrases and clauses (e.g., consequently, specifically).

d. Provide concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.

Meghan has to create organizational structures in other kinds of writing tasks in addition to persuasive writing pieces. For example, she is required to manage the sequence of events in stories, link ideas and categories in informative reports, discuss time periods in history, and answer essay questions on tests.

Review Current Task Performance: Interim assessments and work samples reveal that Meghan always provides an introduction and conclusion in persuasive writing pieces; however, she never uses an organizational structure or linking words to show how details or reasons are related. Her responses to essay questions on social studies tests are not organized and often include irrelevant and incorrect information. In terms of relevant abilities, Meghan can use handwriting or a word processor, and she is able to express an opinion in writing. She also stays on task and completes her assignments in the allotted time. Meghan does not currently use any accommodations for writing. The following chart summarizes the analysis of Meghan's difficult task.

Analysis of a Difficult Task

Student: Meghan   **Grade Level:** 5   **Accommodations:** None
Domain: Curriculum and Learning Environment
Task: Organize information in writing assignments and tests

Academic Skill/Behavior Expectations	Student Difficulties
Introduce topic and state opinion	
Support a point of view with reasons and information (create organizational structure)	Includes irrelevant and incorrect information Does not use organizational structure
Logically order reasons	Lists reasons, no logical order
Provide conclusion related to opinion	
Abilities	
Use written language to express opinion	
Use words, phrases, clauses to link ideas	Does not include linking words
Produce written language	
Maintain effort and attention	
Complete task on time	

3. What accommodations will allow the student to access the information and demonstrate performance of the tasks?

The team can identify several accommodations and should not feel restricted to a single strategy or device. By considering multiple options, the team can select the most effective accommodation rather than the most popular. The team should make sure the accommodation matches the student's abilities and needs. The student will need to learn how and when to use the accommodation in a satisfactory time frame (Zabala, Bowser, & Korsten, n.d.).

When thinking about possible accommodations for a student, the planning team should also consider any tools, strategies and supports that have been effective for the student in the classroom. They can be documented as accommodations to ensure that the student has access in all educational environments.

In many documents that address accommodations, including this one, examples of accommodations are grouped by categories: Presentation, Response, Setting and Scheduling. The team can use these examples to identify possible accommodations. More information about each category is provided in Chapter Four and Appendix B.

Accommodations and Modifications Defined

In Florida, modifications are defined as "changes in what a student is expected to learn, and may include changes to content, requirements, and expected level of mastery" (Rule 6A-6.03411(1)(z), F.A.C.).

Changes that modify the requirements of the standard and lower expectations can limit academic progress of the student. The following are examples of changes that modify the requirements of a standard:

- Requiring a student to learn fewer objectives (i.e., learning anything less than the full standard),

- Reducing the level of complexity of assignments and assessments, and

- Using an accessibility support that invalidates the intended construct or standard (what the task is designed to measure, e.g., using a spell checker for a spelling assignment).

Accommodations should not reduce learning expectations. In Florida, accommodations are defined as "changes that are made in how the student accesses information and demonstrates performance" (Rule 6A-6.03411(1)(a), F.A.C.).

Narrowing the Decision

After the planning team has considered a number of possible accommodations, they can help the student select the specific accommodation. The team can use the following criteria and questions to consider the potential impact of the accommodation:

Necessary—Does the student require the accommodation to perform the task?
- Reduces or eliminates the impact of the student's disability
- Increases the student's ability to access information and demonstrate performance

Supports Independence—Can the student perform the task more independently with the accommodation?
- Easy to use—the least complex alternative
- Supports continued skill development and promotes self-sufficiency

Generalizable—Can the student use the accommodation for similar tasks?
- Use for other tasks
- Use in different settings

Acceptable—Does the student feel the accommodation will be helpful?
- Willing to use the accommodation
- Prefers the specific accommodation over others that are also effective

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Students must be included in the decision-making process. Their preferences and willingness are important factors in selecting accommodations. Students may be unwilling to use an accommodation because it makes them feel different from their peers. They are also likely to abandon an accommodation when teachers and family members do not support its use.

Documenting Accommodations

Decisions about accommodations are documented on the IEP. The IEP form typically has separate sections for instructional accommodations and assessment accommodations. If a particular accommodation is not included in the preprinted list, the team can add a brief description. The location, anticipated initiation, duration and frequency of classroom accommodations must be included on the IEP (Beech, 2015).

A Section 504 plan should include a description of the accommodations and services the student needs. It may also indicate how, where and by whom the services and accommodations will be provided (BEESS, 2011).

A student with a disability can use an accommodation in the classroom even if it is not yet documented on the IEP or Section 504 plan. Accommodations are sometimes provided on a trial basis. The teacher offers coaching and monitoring to gather data and evaluate the impact of the accommodation. Once the accommodation has been determined to be effective, the student's plan can be amended. Accommodations used on statewide assessments must be documented on the student's IEP or Section 504 plan (FDOE, 2017b, pp. 3, 4 and 12).

Consider this Example
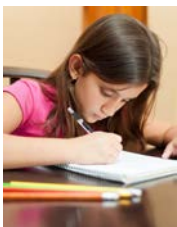
The IEP team brainstormed the following possible accommodations for Meghan to help with writing tasks that involve organizing information:

- Outlining form for planning,

- Template or graphic organizer for planning, and

- Cue card with linking words or organizational structures.

With the assistance of her IEP team, Meghan decided she wanted to use a graphic organizer that has different organizational structures for planning and a cue card to help her remember linking words and phrases. The team felt that an outlining form would not provide enough support for Meghan.

The team also discussed the fact that Meghan may not be able to use these accommodations when she takes the statewide standardized assessment English Language Arts writing component. Meghan's parents were informed of this at the meeting and signed a written consent agreeing to her use of the accommodation in the classroom. The team made sure that Meghan would have opportunities to practice without the accommodation during classroom work and learn how to draw a graphic

organizer on the blank planning sheet that all students receive for the writing assessment.

4. How will the team know if the accommodation is effective?

Now it is time for the planning team to develop an action plan to guide the use and evaluation of the accommodation. The action plan involves the following components:

1. **Identify the specific accommodation, the environments and time period.**

   If the student is using an accommodation for the first time, the impact should be carefully monitored at the outset.

2. **Determine what instruction and support the student needs to be able to use the accommodation effectively.**

   - Who will provide or acquire the materials or devices? Who is responsible for initial set up and maintenance?

   - What information, instruction and coaching does the student need to be able to use the accommodation?

   - What information and training will teachers, parents and others need to support the student?

3. **Determine how the impact of the accommodation will be evaluated.**

   The team will identify indicators (e.g., task completion, accuracy, productivity, rate and independence) that reflect how effectively the accommodation is used. In addition, the team should measure the impact on student performance on the targeted task. Progress toward grade-level standards can be measured using grades, progress monitoring and other assessment data. If student performance is not improving, the team will need to determine whether to continue, change or remove the accommodation (Reed, Bowser & Korsten, 2002). For any accommodation, it is important to determine the following:

   - Does the student actually use the accommodation during instruction and assessment independently or with prompting?

   - What are the results of classroom assignments and assessments when accommodations are used, versus when they are not used? If the student did not achieve the expected level of performance, was it because of a lack of instruction, not using the accommodation, or was the accommodation ineffective?

   - What difficulties does the student encounter when using the accommodations? Does using the accommodation make the student feel uncomfortable?

- How does the student feel about how well the accommodation worked (Adapted from Shyyan et al., 2016, August, p. 38)?

Consider this Example

Meghan and her ESE teacher developed an action plan with her teachers in language arts and social studies for her new accommodations.

Learn How to Use the Accommodations: The ESE teacher will teach Meghan how to use the graphic organizer and cue card with linking words to plan writing tasks that include an organizational structure. Meghan will practice using the accommodations in her ESE class until she is successful and comfortable using them on her own. Her ESE teacher thought this might take three weeks.

Use the Accommodations in One Class: Meghan will then use the accommodations in her language arts class. For the first two assignments, her language arts teacher will remind Meghan to use the graphic organizer and cue card. After that, Meghan will be responsible for recognizing when she needs the accommodations. She will use laminated copies of the organizer and cue cards stored in the classroom. When Meghan can independently use the accommodations to create persuasive essays that meet grade-level standards, she will begin to use the accommodations in social studies class.

Use the Accommodations in a Second Class: The ESE teacher and language arts teacher agreed to confer with Meghan's social studies teacher. They will share tips on how to help Meghan use the accommodations in class. Meghan will store the laminated copies of the graphic organizer and cue cards in her backpack so she can use them in both classes. Meghan also asked the social studies teacher to remind her when to use these accommodations for the first three weeks because she feels uncertain that she will recognize which assignments and assessments involve organizing content.

Evaluation Plan: To determine the effectiveness and impact of the accommodations, Meghan and her teachers agreed to collect data using the questions on the form below each time she has a writing task. All three teachers and Meghan agreed to complete the form. They will review the outcomes each week for nine weeks.

Accommodation Evaluation Form

Student: Meghan	
Class: **Date**:	
Describe the writing task that requires an organizational structure.	
How did Meghan know when to use the graphic organizer and cue card? Pr: Prompted Ind: Independently	Pr Ind
Did Meghan use the graphic organizer and cue card effectively to plan her writing?	Y N
Did the writing include: Evidence of an organizational structure?	Y N
Logically ordered details or reasons?	Y N
Linking words that described the relationship?	Y N
Overall, did the writing meet the expectations of the assignment or assessment?	Y N
Did the accommodations help Meghan complete the task successfully?	Y N
Assignment or Assessment Grade and Comments:	

More on Involving Students

When considering accommodations, it is important that the student actively participate on the planning team. The student can provide important insights into accommodations he needs and is willing to use. This can avoid problems that arise when a student refuses to use a particular accommodation because it makes him feel uncomfortable.

Involving students in planning their educational programs is not new. Since 1997, students with disabilities who will be 14 years or older must be invited to participate in their IEP meetings; however, it is not necessary to wait until age 14 to involve students in planning. Students need to become knowledgeable about their own disability and feel comfortable discussing how it affects tasks they are asked to do in the school, home or community. As students mature and gain more understanding, they will be better able to make decisions about their own needs and goals.

> The more involved students are in the selection process, the more likely they are to use the selected accessibility supports (accommodations), especially as they reach adolescence. Their desire to be more independent increases as well. Self-advocacy skills become critical here. Students need opportunities to learn which accessibility supports are most helpful for them, and then they need to learn how to make certain those supports are provided in all of their classes and wherever they need them outside of school. For instance, students with significant cognitive disabilities, many of whom do not have sophisticated expressive communication systems, can show teachers whether they prefer

certain supports. It is important to not limit the option of student feedback and student self-advocacy for those who cannot communicate those preferences easily (Shyyan et al., 2016, August, p. 29).

Schools can provide a range of supports and opportunities to ensure that students are ready to enter postsecondary settings with the ability to independently select, acquire and use accommodations and assistive technologies. Examples of supports include the following:

- Elementary school: Provide a range of academic choices where students can choose how they engage with instructional activities. This may include options in content formats (e.g., text, audio and video), options in work product (e.g., handwriting, typing on a computer and drawing pictures), and options in engagement (e.g., topic selection).

- Middle school: Provide explicit problem-solving strategies so students can analyze their learning support needs, make decisions on choosing accommodations and evaluate the effectiveness of their decisions.

- High school: Give responsibility of selecting, using and evaluating accommodations to students with teachers or parents monitoring and providing feedback as needed. At this point, students should be using the independent self-determination skills that they will need in postsecondary settings.

Accommodations for Postsecondary Education and Careers

When students with disabilities leave the kindergarten through Grade 12 system, they will have to make their own decisions about accommodations. This is part of the process of self-determination. Students who are effective at self-determination understand how their disability affects them. They can describe their own strengths and weaknesses. As adults, students need to be able to think about things that are hard for them to accomplish and identify accommodations they need to be successful (Bowser & Reed, 2007).

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ensure persons with disabilities the right to **reasonable accommodations.** As adults, they must decide if they want to tell appropriate personnel in a postsecondary institution or workplace about their disability. They must request the accommodations they need and provide documentation that shows that the accommodations are necessary; however, adults are not required to disclose their disability unless they want accommodations.

The ADA defines reasonable accommodations as "any modification or adjustment to a job or the work environment that enable a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to participate in the application process or to perform essential job functions." Examples include the following:

- Sitting on a stool instead of standing at a work station for long periods of time;

- Flexible work hours or breaks that do not impair essential functions of the job;

- Alternative formats for written material, such as audio recording or color-coded instructions; and

- Noise or distraction reduction strategies (Pacer Center, n.d.).