

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Taking the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test® (FCAT)

Background

The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test® (FCAT) is a statewide assessment that is administered in grades 3 through 11. Students with disabilities are expected to participate in the FCAT unless the following two circumstances exist:

- The student's cognitive ability prevents him or her from completing coursework that would lead to mastery of the Sunshine State Standards.
- The student requires extensive direct instruction to master the competencies needed for domestic, community living, leisure, and vocational activities.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Florida laws require that students with disabilities be provided with the necessary accommodations when taking the FCAT. Students who qualify as students with disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act are also eligible for accommodations. The individual educational plan (IEP) team or the 504 plan team determines which accommodations a student needs, if any. This information is documented in the student's IEP or 504 plan. The accommodations are then used regularly in the classroom as the student prepares daily academic work. In accordance with testing guidelines, these same accommodations—if proven successful in the classroom and if allowed—may be used during FCAT testing.

The Florida Department of Education (DOE), in Rule 6A-1.0943, Florida Administrative Code (FAC.), specifies the types of accommodations that are allowed on the FCAT. The Department has been diligent in developing written and Web-based material that informs families, students, teachers, and district administrators about the types of accommodations that can be used during the FCAT. A list of publications describing FCAT accommodations can be found in Appendix A.

Introduction

The publications in Appendix A provide examples of the types of accommodations that can be used during the FCAT. These examples cannot cover every accommodation available or every situation in which accommodations may be used. Therefore, this technical assistance paper has been developed to provide additional information about FCAT accommodations and is based on questions received at the DOE through electronic mail, letters, telephone calls, or meetings. The purpose of this technical assistance paper is to share the Department's responses to these questions generated from a variety of forums and to further clarify specific technology, settings, or procedures that may be involved in providing accommodations for the FCAT.

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BUREAU OF EXCEPTIONAL EDUCATION AND STUDENT SERVICES

Questions/Answers

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Taking the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test® (FCAT)

FCAT Accommodations – Administration

1. Which students are allowed to receive accommodations on the FCAT?

All students with disabilities who have an IEP or 504 plan may receive accommodations on the FCAT. The accommodations must be specifically identified on the IEP or 504 plan and must be used regularly in classroom instruction and assessment.

2. Can non-certificated personnel administer the FCAT (e.g., secretary, substitute, aides)?

It may be appropriate, in some cases, for non-certificated employees to administer the FCAT. Everyone who assists with the test administration should participate in a training session on procedures for FCAT administration and test security and should be familiar with the *FCAT Test Administration Manual*. Decisions as to who should administer the FCAT should be made by the FCAT school coordinator, principal, and/or district assessment coordinator.

3. Must a teacher of students who are visually impaired proctor tests given in large print, in braille, or by auditory presentation?

Students who are visually impaired using large print or an auditory presentation do not require a teacher of students who are visually impaired to proctor the FCAT. Students using braille, however, must have a proctor who can read braille.

4. For students who need an oral presentation format, may schools coordinate the materials so that only one form of the test is used for those students?

Yes. It is possible to coordinate the use of forms in small group administrations. District and school assessment coordinators should work together to make sure that schools have adequate numbers of one form.

5. If technology is listed on the IEP as a classroom accommodation, is this technology automatically allowed as FCAT accommodations?

No. FCAT accommodations must be noted separately on the IEP. Not all technology is allowed as FCAT accommodations. Software may not be used to read the reading portion of the FCAT, calculators may not be used below grade 7, spell checkers and grammar checkers may not be used at any time, and word prediction may be used only in very specialized cases.

6. What is a unique accommodation?

A unique accommodation is a “unique” situation that typically requires an alteration to the test booklet. The accommodation must be one that is used regularly in classroom instruction and assessment and must be indicated on the IEP or 504 Plan. The alteration must not change the content of the FCAT. The alteration of the test booklet is done by the Office of Assessment at the Department of Education. Written requests for unique accommodations must be submitted using a form provided by the Department of Education, Office of Assessment. This form is sent yearly to assessment coordinators and exceptional student education (ESE) directors. Accommodation requests are reviewed by district level staff before being sent to the Department of Education. In addition, the signature of both the district ESE coordinator and the district assessment coordinator are required for all unique accommodation requests. The request must be received by the Department of Education in time for it to be processed, approved by the Department of Education, and appropriate alterations made. Examples of unique accommodations include, but are not limited to, page tabs, greater space between items, and fewer items per page.

7. If a student with a disability uses an accommodation in the classroom and it is not specifically listed as allowable in the literature from DOE, may this accommodation be used on the FCAT?

Literature produced by the DOE gives examples of accommodations. However, not every accommodation can be listed. Other accommodations that are not on the list may be used on the FCAT if they do not affect the validity of the test and are noted on the student’s IEP.

8. What is the district’s responsibility for providing accommodations for students served through the McKay Scholarship Program?

Students accessing a McKay Scholarship may take the FCAT with allowed accommodations. Accommodation decisions are made based on the individual needs of the student by private school personnel and the parent and should be consistent with accommodations used during instruction. The request for accommodations must be made within a reasonable amount of time in order for the school district to provide the requested accommodations on the FCAT. The private school has the responsibility for notifying the district of the names of the students and the necessary accommodations.

9. What is the district’s responsibility for providing accommodations for a home education program student who is identified as a student with a disability?

Students in home education programs may select the FCAT as a required assessment with allowed accommodations. If the FCAT is selected and the student uses an accommodation on a regular basis in home education, a request must be made to the school district to provide that accommodation on the FCAT. The accommodation(s) must be requested by the parent and must be consistent with the accommodations used during instruction. The student will be administered the FCAT in the student’s home school.

10. Should the IEP team ever recommend classroom accommodations that cannot be used on the FCAT?

Yes. Accommodation decisions should be driven by the student's need to access the curriculum. Accommodations that are not allowed on the FCAT may help the student finish class work more quickly, produce work that the student can take pride in, increase independence, or facilitate the student's understanding of concepts. Software such as spelling checkers, word prediction, and text to speech will help a student access the curriculum but are not allowed on the FCAT. While functional in some areas of the curriculum, this software should not substitute for spelling, writing, or reading instruction. Parent permission must be obtained for any accommodation not allowed on the FCAT.

11. What if classroom instructional accommodations are needed during the course of an instructional activity and the teacher provides the accommodation as good educational practice, but the accommodation is not on the IEP? Are teachers going to be limited in using accommodations that may represent good educational practice during the course of instruction because the accommodation is not specified on the IEP and is not allowed on the FCAT?

No. Accommodations can be provided in the classroom as needed. Providing these accommodations is considered an accommodation trial. If the teacher determines that the accommodation is successful, it should be discussed with the IEP team and added to the IEP. If this is an accommodation that is not allowable on the FCAT, parent permission must be obtained to ensure that parents understand how the accommodation is being used. Also, the teacher must be sure that the accommodation does not substitute for instruction needed by the student to successfully participate in the FCAT.

12. What is the procedure for “transferring” answers into the answer book?

Transferring is done from responses in the large print books and responses placed on special paper other than the answer book. Transferring may be done by school personnel and will be verified by the agent contracted to score the FCAT. For this reason, all material used in the transferring process must be turned in to the testing coordinator with the test. Answers transferred to the test booklets must fit in the space allowed and cannot run over onto additional paper.

13. If a student uses a tape recorder to record FCAT answers, what does the test administrator do with the tape after testing?

First, the tapes must be transcribed into the answer booklet. The tapes should then be returned to the school assessment coordinator with all other test materials. School assessment coordinators should follow the district assessment coordinator's instructions on packaging and returning these materials.

14. If a student uses a computer to type a response, does the typed sheet get turned in with the test or is the information transcribed to the answer document?

Typed responses must be transcribed, and the typed sheets are to be returned to the district coordinator. The response must fit in the space allocated on the answer book.

15. Is there a limit to the number of times a student can take the FCAT after leaving school without graduating?

No. Students may continue to take the FCAT grade 10 mathematics and/or reading test during scheduled administrations until the graduation requirement has been met. Students pursuing this option should be enrolled in school, have enough credits for graduation, and be provided with intensive remediation in specific identified areas to assist the student in achieving a passing score.

16. What is the district’s responsibility for provision of accommodations for a student under the age of 22 with a disability who exited school after earning a special diploma and has no current IEP?

A student who exited school after earning a special diploma but has yet not reached 22 years of age may take the FCAT with accommodations. School districts should work with the student to determine what accommodations are appropriate. Previous documents, such as the student’s last IEP, may be useful in identifying appropriate accommodations. Consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), students with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) until they reach the age of 22 or until they graduate with a standard diploma, whichever comes first. For a student who has graduated with a special diploma but wishes to continue working toward a standard diploma, this process may include specific FCAT preparation courses and the use of FCAT accommodations.

FCAT Accommodations – Presenting

17. How many times may we repeat a math question when we are reading the math test to a student?

You may repeat the question as many times as requested.

18. Should we read the letter answers in the math problems? For example can you say, “Is it a, b, c, or d?”

Yes. You may read the letters identifying the answers.

19. When we read a math question how should we pronounce the numbers? For example, is 222 read two hundred and twenty two or should we read two, two, two?

The number 222 should be read two hundred twenty-two. The “and” is used for numbers after the decimal point.

20. May test booklets and answer booklets be prepared with tabs or page “fluffers” to allow students to easily turn the pages?

Yes. These accommodations must be requested as a unique accommodation because they must be applied to the test booklet by the DOE Assessment Office before the booklet is distributed to the student. Answer booklets equipped with these accommodations must be transcribed to another booklet.

21. May a student use the Franklin Speller or similar device to find the definitions of words he doesn’t know?

No. Dictionaries of any kind containing definition of words are not allowed.

22. Can an interpreter translate the reading items of the FCAT into American Sign Language (ASL) for a student who is identified as deaf/hard of hearing?

No. The reading items may not be translated into ASL.

23. May a student read a passage aloud as an allowable accommodation?

Yes. The student may read the test items aloud to aid in comprehending the items. However, this accommodation would require the student to be tested in an individual setting to prevent disturbing other students.

24. During a reading test, can a student ask the teacher the correct word while reading the story? For example, can the student say, “Is it ‘through’ or ‘thought’?”

No. The teacher may not pronounce or define words during the reading test.

25. When is a student allowed to use a highlighter on the FCAT?

If a student uses a highlighter regularly in classroom instruction and assessment and it is noted on the IEP, a student may highlight key words and phrases in the directions, questions, and passages. If highlighting is used on a document that is scored by scanning, the answers must be transcribed into a separate answer book. Highlighting marks on a scannable document can adversely affect the student’s score. The use of a highlighter must be closely monitored. In all cases where highlighting is used, the answer documents must be carefully monitored for stray marks. If any highlighting marks are found on an answer document, the document must be transcribed.

26. May students use removable highlighter tape to avoid transcribing the answers to another document?

A student may use removable highlighter tape, but these documents must be transcribed to a new answer booklet. Highlighter tape leaves residue that may change the score on a scannable document.

FCAT Accommodations – Responding

27. May students use additional paper if they need more space for writing?

No. All responses must fit into the required space in the answer booklet.

28. May a student use scratch paper to organize his/her thoughts before responding on the reading test?

No. If the student is responding in the test booklet, the student must use the space provided in the booklet to organize the response.

29. May a student use special large writing sheets if a disability prevents the student from writing small enough to respond in the answer booklet?

Yes. The written response must be transcribed back into the answer booklet and must not exceed the space available for the answer in the booklet. This special paper must be provided by the school, collected, and returned to the school assessment coordinator with all other test materials upon completion of the FCAT.

30. May a student use special paper with raised lines to respond to the written portions of the FCAT if this paper is used by the student in the classroom to produce legible material?

Yes. A wide range of special paper is available to students who have writing difficulties. Any of this paper may be used by the student if it is used in the classroom and noted on the IEP. Responses produced on this paper must be transcribed back into the answer book. It is important for the student to understand the length of the required response because the response, when transcribed, must fit into the space allocated in the answer book. Special paper must be provided for the student by the school, collected, and returned to the school assessment coordinator with all other test materials upon completion of the FCAT.

31. May the student use math grids to align math calculations when computing problems?

Yes. Math grids may be used to align problems if these grids are used regularly by the student in the classroom and documented on the IEP. After the calculations, the student must place or select the proper answer in the answer booklet. The math grid must be provided for the student by the school, collected, and returned to the school assessment coordinator with all other test materials upon completion of the FCAT.

32. May a student use highlighted, specially designed paper for FCAT Writing+, and may this student use one piece of paper for each paragraph?

Yes. Both of these accommodations are allowable if they are documented on the student's IEP and used regularly in the classroom.

33. Could an accommodation for a student with poor visual motor and visual perceptual skills be that a preprinted graphic organizer be provided for FCAT Writing+?

No. Preprinted or electronic graphic organizers are not allowed.

34. Under accommodations for responding, the following is stated: “Students may respond to the test using speech-to-text technology.” Does this mean that students can use Dragon NaturallySpeaking?

Yes. If a student uses speech-to-text technology on a regular basis in the classroom to produce written work, that student may use text-to-speech technology such as Dragon NaturallySpeaking. It is important that the student learns spelling and writing conventions in order to pass the multiple choice section of FCAT Writing+.

35. If a student uses speech-to-text technology outside the classroom but dictates to a scribe while working in the classroom, may the student use speech-to-text technology to respond to the FCAT?

No. The student must respond on the FCAT with the accommodation that is used regularly in the classroom. In this case, it would be dictating to a scribe.

36. If a student uses spell and grammar checkers on classroom assignments and assessments and this is written in the IEP, can this student have the same accommodations on the FCAT Writing+ assessment?

No. Spelling and grammar checkers are not allowable accommodations on any part of the FCAT. If a student is using these accommodations for classroom work, the parents must be notified that they are not allowable FCAT accommodations.

37. May spelling and grammar checkers be requested as unique accommodations for the FCAT?

No. Unique accommodations are accommodations that typically change the format of the FCAT and must be approved by the DOE Office of Assessment.

38. May technology with grammar checkers or spell checkers be used on any part of the FCAT?

No. Technology used for the FCAT must have spell checkers and grammar checkers disabled. If the technology used daily by the student will not allow the disabling of these applications, the student must be tested with a proctor present.

39. Does spelling count on the FCAT Writing+ portion of the FCAT?

For a satisfactory score, the scoring rubric indicates that “Knowledge of conventions is demonstrated, and commonly used words are usually spelled correctly.” Poor spelling, grammar, and punctuation can jeopardize a score.

- 40. When addressing FCAT Writing+, the test administration manual states, “A student may respond orally to a proctor for the writing portions of the FCAT. The student must indicate punctuation and spell select words. A proctor must enter the oral responses exactly as stated. The student may review the written material and direct the proctor on editing.” What words must be spelled?**

It is not necessary for students to spell every word. A general guideline to follow is that words of two or more syllables should be spelled by the student.

- 41. May an interpreter translate a student’s response on performance questions or the writing assessment from American Sign Language (ASL) to English?**

No. School personnel are to transcribe the answer exactly as it is said or signed. The student must be told the amount of space provided for the response and then give his or her response indicating punctuation. The transcriber is not to edit, change, or correct the student’s response. Capitalization and punctuation are to be provided by the student.

- 42. May a student use a communication device where words and short phrases are represented by pictures or icons to respond to FCAT Writing+?**

Communication devices with programs that allow the student to produce words and short phrases by spelling or selecting icons may be used to respond to the FCAT. These devices allow the student to generate a sentence word by word or letter by letter. Communication devices where complete sentences are represented by pictures cannot be used to respond to the FCAT. Complete sentences will not allow the student to generate appropriate responses to questions or the FCAT Writing+ prompt.

- 43. May visually impaired students use counters, number lines, and coins to complete math activities?**

Counters and number lines may not be used as counting or calculating aids when taking the FCAT, unless the student creates them. Coins may be used.

- 44. In what grades may a student use a calculator on the FCAT?**

The school coordinator and test administrator must ensure that one working calculator is available to each student in Grades 7 through 10 for use on all mathematics tests and in Grades 8 and 11 for use on the science test. Calculators may not be used by students in Grades 3 through 6.

- 45. May students use another calculator instead of the FCAT calculator if it is used in the classroom on a regular basis and is on the student’s IEP as a classroom accommodation?**

For students who regularly use a large key or talking calculator, a similar calculator may be used on the FCAT if it is a basic four function calculator. Any calculator used must have only those functions which are available on the official FCAT calculator.

46. May a student use MathPad to work math problems?

MathPad is an acceptable accommodation under the following conditions:

- MathPad or math software is documented in the student's IEP as an FCAT accommodation.
- The student uses this software on a regular basis in the classroom to complete math assignments.
- A proctor/transcriber is available to the student.
- The student understands the tool bar and can independently set up the problems and reset the problem list to continue with a new problem.
- The help features, which include a calculator and self-correct feature, are turned off.
- A transcriber copies the solution from the screen and, if the FCAT question requires the student to show the work, the solution is printed.
- No problems are saved.

47. May a student use word prediction as an accommodation on the FCAT?

In a very few circumstances, word prediction is a standard form of response for a student who uses a switch to scan and who, without word prediction, would produce responses very slowly. In these cases, word prediction may be used as a rate enhancing accommodation.

48. May a program be used that speaks letters and words as a student types if a student uses this program daily and needs the auditory feedback feature of the word processor for FCAT Writing+?

Yes. Talking word processors may be used on FCAT Writing+ if this accommodation is used regularly by the student and documented in the IEP. Spell check must be turned off.

FCAT Accommodations – Scheduling

49. How is extended time defined?

Extended time is not unlimited time. IEP teams should make a decision about what is appropriate for each student. Twenty-five percent more time, double the regular time, or some other limit on time may be used. Extended time must be noted on the IEP and used regularly in the student's classroom instruction and assessment activities.

50. Can time on the norm referenced test (NRT) portion of the FCAT be waived?

Yes. Extended time can be given on the NRT if this is an accommodation used regularly in classroom instruction and documented on the IEP. This accommodation must be noted on the student's score sheet.

51. Can the writing assessment be extended beyond the school day?

No. The writing assessment must be concluded in one day.

FCAT Accommodations – Setting

52. What is considered “white noise” as used in situations for tuning out distractions?

White noise is a specific “hiss-like” or “sh” sound formed or produced by a machine. Its intent is to mask voices or other sounds in the environment but not be distracting to the student.

53. Can music be used during testing like white noise?

Yes. Music may be played during the FCAT administration if it is:

- A regular part of the student’s classroom instruction and assessment
- Not a disturbance to any other test takers
- Selected and closely monitored by the FCAT administrator

54. If a student does not have small group assessment indicated as an accommodation on the IEP but needs to have directions paraphrased, may this accommodation take place in the classroom setting?

Yes. Paraphrasing the directions for an individual student does not necessarily require the student to be administered the FCAT in a different setting from the student’s usual classroom setting. The teacher or test proctor would provide the directions for the entire class and then deliver the paraphrased version to the individual student who needs the accommodation.

Appendix A

Resources

Florida Department of Education Publications

The following resources are available free of charge through the Florida Department of Education's Clearinghouse Information Center. To order these resources, contact the Clearinghouse by phone, mail, fax, or e-mail. Be sure to include the accession number and the title of the publication when ordering. Visit the Web site to see a complete index of publications. Most of these resources may be downloaded directly from the Web site.

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Title of Publication

- 312494 *The IEP Team's Guide to FCAT Accommodations*. 2005.
- 311901 "FCAT Accommodations for Students with Disabilities—Information for Parents" (brochure). Revised 2004.
- 309603 "Planning FCAT Accommodations for Students with Disabilities—Information for Parents and Teachers" (pamphlet). Revised 2004.