



HRPA Accommodation Policy

With respect to its examination process, it is HRPAs policy to provide reasonable testing accommodations for candidates with documented disabilities. Reasonable accommodation refers to any adjustment to the examination materials or testing environment that permits a qualified applicant with a disability to perform, without undue hardship to the institution providing accommodation. Documented disabilities are those for which there is a diagnosis by a qualified professional.

The purpose of accommodations is to provide equity, not advantage. Any requested modification that would substantially alter essential elements of the examination will not be granted. As a general principle, it is desirable to retain as much of the original examination materials and testing environment and make the accommodations specific to the disability or disabilities in question.

There are many different types of disabilities and many kinds of accommodations. Most individuals with disabilities fall into one of the following categories:

- Learning disabilities
- Auditory impairment
- Mobility Impairment
- Visual impairment
- Mental illness or psychological disability
- Attention deficit disorder (ADD) & Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Brain or head injury
- Medical conditions
- Other disabilities

Each of the above disabilities can present challenges that will impede the performance of otherwise qualified candidates on examinations. Depending on the disability, there are many different possible types of accommodation. (The following list is not exhaustive.)

- Extended testing time
- Additional rest breaks
- Writer/recorder of answers
- Reader
- Sign language interpreter (for spoken directions only)
- Braille
- Large print
- Large-print answer sheet

- Audio recording
- Audio recording with large-print figure supplement
- Audio recording with raised-line (tactile) figure supplement
- Low-noise testing environments
- Wheelchair-friendly testing rooms
- Examinations that are individually proctored
- Assistive devices or adaptive equipment (e.g., computers, calculators, specialized software,

It is recognized that no single type of test accommodation may be adequate or appropriate for all individuals with any given type of disability.

Test takers with disabilities may be able to test under standard conditions if HRPAs Office of the Registrar determines that only minor adjustments to the testing environment are required (e.g., wheelchair access, large-print test book, a sign language interpreter for spoken directions). For example, if a test taker uses a large-print version of a reading comprehension test and requires no extended test time, the test could be administered under standard conditions.

Score reports contain no indication of whether a test was taken with accommodations.

The Legal Framework

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982*, and the Ontario Human Rights Code (revised 1990) are major pieces of legislation guaranteeing equal opportunity and freedom from discrimination because of disability. In accordance with the law, HRPAs recognizes the legal obligation to institute policies and procedures that provide equal opportunity and safeguard against discrimination on the basis of disability.

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982*, section 15(1), guarantees that:

Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race...or mental or physical disability.

The *Ontario Human Rights Code* (revised, 1990), guarantees every person:

Equal treatment with respect to services, goods and facilities without discrimination because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status, or handicap.

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, (AODA)* is legislation that focuses on the core principles of independence, dignity, integration, and equality of opportunity for all individuals. Under this Act, the government of Ontario has developed mandatory accessibility standards that will identify, remove, and prevent barriers for people with disabilities in key areas of daily living, and applies to both public and private sector organizations across Ontario.

HRPA is committed to the objective of accessibility in all its activities including its certification process. In the context of its certification process, the context in which accommodation is most relevant is the conduct of examinations.

Defining Disabilities

Learning Disability

The *Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario* defines learning disabilities as follows:

"Learning Disabilities" refers to a variety of disorders that affect the acquisition, retention, understanding, organization or use of verbal and/or non-verbal information. These disorders result from impairments in one or more psychological processes related to learning, in combination with otherwise average abilities essential for thinking and reasoning. Learning disabilities are specific not global impairments and as such are distinct from intellectual disabilities.

Auditory Impairment

Deafness is a profound hearing loss in which there has been damage to the auditory pathway. Many deaf people must depend on sign language to communicate.

Hard of hearing is a condition that describes people with all types of hearing disabilities ranging from mild to profound hearing loss.

Mobility Impairment

Generally, there are two types of physical disabilities that affect mobility: orthopedic and neurological. Orthopedic disabilities involve a deformity of the skeletal system. The impairment can be the result of a congenital anomaly (e.g., scoliosis, Spina Bifida), the result of disease, (e.g., Muscular Dystrophy, Arthritis), or the result of trauma or accident (e.g., amputation)

Neurological disabilities involve the nervous system affecting the ability to move, use or control certain parts of the body. Such impairments can be the result of a congenital anomaly (e.g., Cerebral Palsy), the result of disease (e.g., poliomyelitis, carpal tunnel syndrome), or the result of an accident (e.g., spinal cord injury, head trauma).

Visual Impairment

To be considered legally blind, an individual's visual acuity must be equal to or less than 20/200 and impossible to correct by medical or surgical means or corrective eye wear.

Low vision refers to visual acuity between 20/70 and 20/200. Some individuals with low vision can distinguish only light or darkness, or varying patterns and shapes. Many are able to read only with difficulty and may rely on large print materials and optical aids such as magnifying devices, tactile drawings, print enhancers and reading software.

Mental Illness or Psychological Disability

Mental illnesses or psychological disabilities are conditions either temporary or permanent that have a significant, serious impact on an individual's functioning. Included in this category are conditions such as depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, schizophrenia, and mood disorders. A psychological disability will often not be apparent in the classroom. Many psychological disabilities are invisible and episodic in nature. Psychological disabilities are the most frequently misunderstood and stereotyped of all the disabilities. Questions about psychological disabilities should be addressed in private to protect student confidentiality.

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) & Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Medical research treats this disorder as neurobiological in origin. ADD and ADHD tend to be transmitted genetically and are characterized by chemical abnormalities in the brain. According to the DSM-IV (the diagnostic manual used by physicians), ADD can occur in three forms: inattentive type, hyperactive impulsive type, and combined type.

Most children diagnosed with these deficits have symptoms that persist into adulthood and affect social, academic and occupational functioning to a significant degree. Other conditions, including learning disabilities, anxiety and depression, often co-exist. ADD/ADHD is not due to poor parenting or diet. It is manageable through a combination of medical intervention, compensatory strategies and academic accommodations.

Brain or Head Injury

A brain injury is a traumatic insult to the brain. It may be the result of a violent concussion (e.g., car accident, stroke), penetration of the skull, or illness. The injury may be mild, moderate or severe and varies greatly from person to person. A brain injury may result in numerous impairments, including the following:

- Physical impairments, such as paralysis, susceptibility to seizures, and impairments of speech, vision, and hearing
- Cognitive impairments, such as loss of concentration, short and long-term memory loss, and loss of communication skills
- Behavioural impairments, such as anxiety, depression, loss of motivation, and fluctuations in mood.

Medical Conditions

Medical conditions refer to serious health problems that may be chronic or acute and that interfere with functioning. This category includes conditions such as epilepsy, kidney disease, HIV-related illnesses, cancer, fibromyalgia, tuberculosis, and diabetes. The presence of a medical condition may result in absences due to the effects of medication, treatment schedules, fatigue, and pain.

Other Disabilities

This category includes other dysfunctions that necessitate the use of support services or programs and do not fall within the categories listed above. One example is a severe speech impediment

Documentation Criteria

A key aspect of accommodation is documentation. Documentation on file for the applicant must:

- clearly state the diagnosed disability or disabilities
- describe the functional limitations resulting from the disability or disabilities
- be current — i.e., completed within the last 5 years for LD, last 6 months for psychiatric disabilities, or last 3 years for ADHD and all other disabilities (NOTE: this requirement does not apply to physical or sensory disabilities of a permanent or unchanging nature)
- include complete educational, developmental, and medical history relevant to the disability for which testing accommodations are being requested
- include a list of all test instruments used in the evaluation report and relevant subtest scores used to document the stated disability (this requirement does not apply to physical or sensory disabilities of a permanent or unchanging nature)
- describe the specific accommodations requested
- adequately support each of the requested testing accommodation(s)
- be typed or printed on official letterhead and be *signed* by an evaluator qualified to make the diagnosis (include information about license or certification and area of specialization).

The type of documentation and the qualifications required of the professional will depend on the disability or disabilities documented. In the case of learning disabilities, such assessment will usually be made by psychologists, psychological associates, or psychoeducational consultants. Self-diagnosis is not sufficient or appropriate in supporting a request for accommodation. Individuals with undiagnosed disabilities are strongly encouraged to seek out an appropriate diagnosis of their disability.

Documentation and identification may come from a variety of professionals including: physicians, medical specialists, psychologists, psychiatrists, speech/language pathologists, case managers with insurance companies, community agencies, and Workplace Safety and Insurance Board representatives.

For instance, “not doing well on multiple-choice tests” is not a disability per se, and accommodations cannot be provided based on such requests. There are many different kinds of disabilities that may impact one’s ability to perform on multiple-choice tests. Each of these disabilities might well require a different form of accommodation. The key here is to get a diagnosis of the disability which then can be used to provide an effective accommodation.

Procedures for requesting accommodations

1. Individuals must identify themselves to the Office of the Registrar and, where required, provide appropriate documentation of their disability or disabilities.
2. The request for accommodation must be made no later than at the time of registration. Individuals with well described disabilities, and for which the type of accommodation sought is straightforward; this should be sufficient time to provide the requested accommodation. However, should the requested accommodation be more extensive; the normal time frames may not be sufficient. It is strongly recommended that individuals with disabilities who would be requesting more extensive or individualized accommodations get in touch with HRPAs Office of the Registrar as early in the process as possible.
3. By their very nature, accommodations are often individualized. In response to a request for accommodation, and considering all available resources, HRPAs Office of the Registrar will develop a specific accommodation that it deems reasonable and effective. HRPAs Office of the Registrar endeavors to respond within two weeks to requests for accommodation, nonetheless, in more complex cases it may take more time to develop an effective accommodation.
4. In providing accommodation to individuals with documented disabilities, HRPAs Office of the Registrar will work cooperatively with other institutions and organizations. For instance, HRPAs Office of the Registrar will often work with the centers that exist in colleges and universities for students with disabilities. It has been possible, on many occasions, to make use to the testing facilities and the assistive technology equipment available in such centers. Many test writers at HRPAs Office of the Registrar are students, or have recently graduated from colleges and universities. Often, these colleges and universities will make the resources of their testing centers available to their students, and sometimes even to non-students, to write the NKE. Nonetheless, access to these testing centers is not guaranteed.
5. HRPAs Office of the Registrar has the right to select the specific adaptive equipment and support services it provides, as long as they are reasonable and effective.

Appeal

In accordance with the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and HRPAs Office of the Registrar Policy, HRPAs Office of the Registrar is required to provide reasonable and effective accommodations for documented disabilities. Should the individual requesting accommodation not agree with the accommodation proposed by HRPAs Office of the Registrar, the individual may appeal the decision of the Registrar to HRPAs Appeals Committee.

The parties to an appeal of a proposed accommodation (or the decision that no accommodation is warranted) are the Registrar and the individual requesting an accommodation to an examination.

As part of the appeal process, the Registrar will be asked to demonstrate: (a) that alternate proposed accommodations would cause undue hardship for the Association; or (b) that the alternate proposed accommodations would fundamentally alter the examination requirement.

Confidentiality

It is understood that information about disabilities is personal and highly sensitive. It is also the case that effective accommodation often involves the coordination of different organizations and individuals (diagnosing professionals, test centers, the Canadian Council of Human Resources Association, proctors, etc.).

In matters relating to accommodations and requests for accommodations, HRPAs are guided by the following guidelines:

1. HRPAs will obtain explicit written consent of the individual requesting accommodation to share any personal information with any external organization, agency, or individual.
2. In working with any external organization, agency, or individual, HRPAs will only share the information that is necessary to provide effective accommodation.
3. Documentation regarding accommodations or requests for accommodation will be kept separate from the member file and will only be available to HRPAs' Office of the Registrar staff.
4. There will be no indication in the record of examination results that accommodations were provided to the individual

References

Ontario Human Rights Commission (2000). *Policy and guidelines on disability and the duty to accommodate*.