



“Sorry, Lauren, you cannot use extended time on this exam because you did not register online within seven business days to take the exam with this accommodation at the testing center.”

How to Actually Use Your Accommodations for ADHD in College

“Jenna, I am just now seeing the email you sent on the first week of class asking to meet with me to go over your accommodations plan and how we can implement them for the semester. Unfortunately, since it is now May and the semester is almost over, there is not much that we can do about it. I really wish you had followed up when I hadn’t responded and asked me so that we could have figured out how to best support you in this class.”

“Jennifer, I am sorry you were out sick and have missed two classes. For the big research paper, please just get it in when you can.”

Carey Heller, PsyD

Do any of these situations sound familiar?

Formal accommodations in college—such as extended time, private testing, copies of notes—are quite commonly provided to help support students who have ADHD and/or learning disabilities. Obtaining accommodations requires that the students first provide appropriate documentation in a timely manner, before classes start. And while the accommodations typically are helpful when used, sometimes students with ADHD find it challenging to access the accommodations they’ve been granted.

Since students with ADHD need to figure out strategies and systems that work for them in order to use their accommodations effectively, the remaining portion of this article is written specifically for the students to use themselves. So, if you are the parent, please share this article, especially the second half, directly with your college student.

Using permitted accommodations

As you begin attending college classes, you may find that you need a tool or system that works for you in order to remember to access your specific accommodations, follow up with professors, and so forth. Here are some suggestions for ways to navigate some of the more common accommodations provided by colleges and universities. You may need to tweak these tools slightly based on how you do things and how your school implements supports.

Extended time and/or private testing: First, figure out how you need to go about requesting access to use this accommodation. Most colleges require you to sign up online a certain number of days in advance to take it at the testing center or make arrangements with a professor to use extended time during the class period.



"Jonathan, if you need help with this assignment, please email whichever TA is assigned to you based on where your last name falls in the alphabet. Or, try to connect with them after class."

"Yes Sandy, I am willing to meet with me to go over your recent exam that you did not do very well on so you can better prepare for the next one. Please book a slot in my schedule during office hours. My office hours fill up quickly so please plan ahead so we can meet before the next exam."

"Heather, I am emailing you because you unfortunately failed the class due to not following the directions on the composition paper and receiving a 50 percent. Had you planned ahead and met with me during office hours I would have been happy to have looked over your draft and could have caught this major error before you completed the paper incorrectly. Since the semester is now over it is too late for me to even give you the option to redo the paper."

"Jack, as your professor, I can give you a copy of the notes as indicated in your accommodations letter. However, I can't keep track of remembering to give them to you so you need to ask me for them before or after class."

Suggestions:

- Meet with the professor at the beginning of the semester and make a plan for taking each exam with the professor, if that makes sense. During this initial meeting, look at all exam dates, your schedule before or after that class, and see if the dates work for the professor to proctor the exam with extended time. Following that conversation, send the professor an email thanking them for meeting with you. Include a list of the exam dates and what was agreed to (such as starting early, staying late to finish, etc.).
- If you will be taking exams at the testing center, within the first day or two of classes, take a look at the exam days/times for all classes together. Then, register to use extended time for all exams for the semester at once. This gets you registered at one time for all exams. (Obviously, if any changes in dates occur, you will need to update your registration for a given exam.)

Copy of notes: Figure out how your school provides this accommodation: Are notes uploaded to a portal weekly for download?

Are you expected to audio record and transcribe notes? If the professor plays a role in how the notes are disseminated, you will want to meet with each professor during the first week of the semester to make a specific plan for getting notes.

Suggestions:

- If getting the notes requires you to download them or pick them up in person, pick a set weekly time that is convenient and logical to do this. Put it in your calendar as an event, and perhaps also include it as a task in a task list, so that you ensure that you obtain copies of notes at least once weekly rather than waiting for an exam and suddenly needing the notes at the last minute.

General tools for making it easier to use accommodations

Most accommodations require that students first ask their professor directly, follow up with the professor as needed, or register online in some way (scheduling an appointment, for example, or

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registering for the exam). Therefore, for effective follow-through, students need to know what task they must do and keep track of any required follow-up activity.

Suggestions:

- Don't rely on your memory.
- List all tasks in a task list of some kind (examples include, Reminders, Todoist, Asana, Google Tasks). Schedule due dates and times for each task (when you anticipate being available to perform the task or follow up if needed).
- Allocate time in your schedule (block out time in calendar) for certain categories of tasks that match up with the specific tasks in your task list. To ensure you actually have time to complete things as scheduled, be sure to view task list items in a calendar along with classes and events. When things don't get done as planned, reschedule them for another time that works.
- Keep a list within a task list program (or separately if preferred) specifically for emails and/or things about which you need to follow up. Just because you emailed your professor requesting to take the exam with the class using extended time does not mean that the item has been addressed. Set a due date and time for follow-up items and check to see if your professor responded to your email.
- Keep recurring tasks that are important in a task list and/or calendar so they are on your radar for the future. Relevant items may include: meeting with each professor at the start of the semester to review accommodations and make a plan, meeting with your advisor to make a plan for registering for classes for the next semester, registering for classes, registering for housing, and other similar things you might forget until the last minute or miss all together. Setting automatic reminders of these recurring tasks will help keep you aware of these tasks in a timely manner.

Accommodations in college can be highly beneficial if warranted based on individual needs. However, they can only be helpful when you are taking steps to be able to use them. **A**



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