Accommodations vs. Modifications at a Glance

A practical introduction to two commonly confused supports.

A Note for Families

Accommodations and modifications are often used as if they mean the same thing, but they don't. The difference can affect grades, testing, and long-term goals. This guide explains each one in plain terms. It is a starting point, not a substitute for individualized guidance.

The Difference

	ACCOMMODATIONS	MODIFICATIONS
What Changes	How a student learns or shows what they know	What a student is expected to learn
Expectations	Same grade-level standards as peers	Adjusted or reduced standards
Example	Extended time on a test	Fewer or simpler test questions
Found In	IEPs and 504 Plans	IEPs

DEA PERSPECTIVE

Start with access.

Accommodations should usually be tried first, because they keep students on grade-level work. Modifications are appropriate when a student needs a different level of content to make meaningful progress.

Common Accommodations

Presentation	Read-aloud, audiobooks, large print, or visual supports.
Response	Oral answers, speech-to-text, or a scribe.
Setting	Small-group testing, preferential seating, or a quiet space.
Timing	Extended time, frequent breaks, or shorter work sessions.

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Common Modifications

- Shorter or simplified assignments that cover less content
- Different grading standards or criteria
- Alternate learning goals below grade level
- Alternate assessments in place of standard state tests

Why the Difference Matters

Modifications can affect grades, course credit, which assessments a student takes, and which diploma they work toward. Before modifications are added, ask how they will affect your child now and in the years ahead.

Common Misconceptions

MYTH	WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW
Accommodations give students an unfair advantage.	Accommodations remove barriers so students can show what they know. The expectations stay the same.
Modifications are just stronger accommodations.	Modifications change what is learned and expected, which is a different decision with different effects.
Accommodations on the IEP automatically apply to state tests.	Not every classroom accommodation is allowed on every test. Ask which ones apply.

Questions About Your Child's Supports?

Every child is different, and no guide can replace individualized support. If you would like help reviewing accommodations, modifications, or your child's plan, schedule a consultation with Distributed Education Advocacy.

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