

Academic Accommodation Process for Students with Disabilities

Step 1: Student completes an Accessible Learning (AL) [intake form](#) and provides supporting documentation if available.

Note that if a student has questions or needs support before they fill out an intake form, they can email accessibilityintake@conestogac.on.ca. Sometimes students need some encouragement from faculty to take this first step.

Members of the college community who have reason to believe a student might be experiencing a disability that affects their academic participation are asked to help them connect with AL. Please reach out using the email address above if you need assistance with bridging that gap.

Step 2: As needed, the Intake Coordinator follows up with the student to clarify information and assist with documentation.

Supporting documentation needs to be completed by a regulated health professional who is working within their scope of practice and must conform to AL's documentation standards. At this stage there may also be a preliminary assessment of urgent matters and interim suggestions to keep problems from escalating.

Step 3: Student is assigned to an Accessibility Advisor and a meeting is scheduled. In working collaboratively with the student, the Advisor gathers background information, reviews documentation, and designs an accommodation plan that addresses accessibility needs while respecting essential academic requirements.

The plan helps to ensure the College and individual instructors can fulfill their "duty to accommodate" under the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. The agreed upon accommodations are documented in an "accommodation letter" which is made available to the student's instructors.

Step 4: Accommodations are put into action through one of the following means:

- a) Common accommodations administered by Accessible Learning or the Test Centre are generally available to the student immediately. Faculty may be prompted to provide details about tests and exams in their courses by the Test Centre, which is required to make the necessary arrangements for the student.
- b) Accommodations that are reasonably common but require instructor input might involve the student reaching out. Instructors should always review the accommodation letter (see "What to Expect" below) to ensure the request aligns with the student's accommodation plan. Any time a faculty member is concerned, they should reach out to the student's Accessibility Advisor for further discussion.
- c) Occasionally, the Accessibility Advisor will reach out to the instructor on the student's behalf. This is standard practice for situations where the best way of accommodating the student and respecting the course requirements is unclear, or for sensitive accommodations that may raise more questions.

Accessible Learning also provides a range of additional support to students, including:

- On-going support related to students' disability-related needs
- Hiring part-time staff and finding third-party service providers to work 1-on-1 with students
- Facilitating use of accessible furniture and equipment
- Navigating external funding for disability-related expenses
- Acting as a resource on inclusion of students with disabilities in the academic environment

Accommodations: What are they?

Disability-related academic accommodation removes barriers that unfairly disadvantage students with disabilities, ensuring an equitable opportunity to learn and demonstrate learning outcomes.

They do not reduce bona fide academic requirements, which are those things that are so important a course or program would be unrecognizable as its essential self without them. In general, these requirements need to be documented and disclosed to the student before the course begins and need to be graded/assessed.

Academic accommodations frequently involve creative solutions – something that seems like an insurmountable barrier initially, can frequently be resolved by breaking things down into constituent pieces and examining the purpose of each one. Part of our collective duty to accommodate is to consider each request for accommodation carefully.

They may be imperfect – accommodation rarely completely removes the barriers experienced by students with disabilities. The goal is to do our best to create a respectful, inclusive and accessible environment.

In Ontario, the standards for academic accommodations are different at the post-secondary level as compared to high school. For example, we are not required to lower academic standards and accommodations do not guarantee success – they provide an opportunity to learn and demonstrate outcomes without being encumbered by barriers that create a disadvantage.

Academic accommodation can create costs for the College and can be an inconvenience for faculty and staff. The standard is to the point of "undue hardship" which is intended to be a very high standard and is defined by a series of legal tests. For example, would the college as a whole be financially inviable if the accommodation were provided? Does it present a risk to health and safety that is reasonably likely to happen and cause serious harm?

What to Expect

An email will be sent to faculty members' Conestoga email address from accessibility@conestogac.on.ca notifying them that a student in their course has an academic accommodation. The email message includes the student's name and ID number, as well as the course title, course code and section. Detailed instructions in the email specify that the faculty must navigate to [Accommodate](#) (Conestoga's Accessibility platform) to acknowledge and sign the student's accommodation letter.

The student is advised to introduce themselves to the faculty teaching their courses at an appropriate time.

At the start of the semester, faculty are advised to announce to their classes that any students who want to discuss their academic accommodations are encouraged to contact them to request a meeting so it can be discussed privately.

A student with academic accommodations can choose to complete tests and exams in the classroom or at the Test Center. If a student chooses the Test Center: (a) the student must request a booking via Accommodate at least 7 days in advance (14 days for midterms and finals); and (b) faculty should return the grades of students who wrote in the Test Centre at the same time as the rest of the class.

It is expected that faculty will load test dates and times in the Test Wizard at the beginning of each semester as soon as the week-by-week syllabus is complete. This should be done even before you are notified that you have a student with an academic accommodation.

Please contact the [Test Centre](#) if you have any questions about the test booking process.

Important Notes

There are a number of laws governing privacy of student's disability-related information, which is supported by College policy. To remain in compliance, faculty are not given the reason for the academic accommodation or the nature of the disability unless this information is required in the process of investigating an appropriate accommodation. Otherwise, it is the student's discretion as to whether they chose to share this information. Faculty should not ask the student about the nature of the disability, share the student's accommodation with other members of the class, or discuss this information with colleagues who are not directly involved in providing the student's accommodations.

When faculty are asked to consider an unusual accommodation, they are strongly advised to maintain a record of the decision-making process. Keep track of dates, what information was shared, and the rationale for any decisions. Do not include subjective opinions or perceptions.

Examples of Accommodations

While the kind of accommodation a student receives is specific to his/her documented disability, here are some of the more common accommodations and the possible reasons they might be needed.

In the Classroom

Electronic access to course lecture material (e.g. ANGEL, Electronic recording of

lectures)

- Student may be blind or partially blind and relies on this format so that they can access text-to-voice software for reading.
- Student with a reading disability needs to convert text-to-voice software for reading.
- Student may experience difficulties processing auditory information.
- Student may have physical difficulties writing class notes.

Preferential seat arrangement

- Attentional difficulties may require student to sit close to the front of class to attend to the lecture.
- Hearing difficulties may require the student to sit close to the front of class to hear lecture.
- Vision difficulties may require the student to sit close to the front of class to see any visual information.
- Student may be in a wheelchair or have another mobility concern that requires a certain location within the classroom.

Permission to periodically leave classroom

- Student may have chronic pain that necessitates periodically leaving classroom to stretch or walk in the hall.
- Student may have a medical condition that requires management with medication or frequent washroom breaks.
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For Tests & Exams

Extra time

- Student may have a slower speed of processing visual and/or written information because of a learning disability, chronic pain, medication, mental health symptoms, etc.
- Student may use adaptive reading and/or writing software because of a learning, vision, or physical disability, etc. and this process takes more time.
- Student may require assistance from a proctor and/or scribe and this process takes more time.

Access to adaptive technology such as:

- a) Dragon Naturally Speaking software where the student dictates responses to software which then converts it to text.
- b) Kurzweil which is software the computer reads the test to student)
- c) Zoomtext (i.e. allows written information to be enlarged on a computer screen)

Possible reasons:

- Student may have a learning disability in the area of expressive language or a physical disability.
- Student may have a learning, vision and/or attentional disability.

Proctor to read test questions and/or scribe test responses (verbatim)

- Student may have a learning disability in the areas of receptive and/or expressive language or could be blind or vision impaired.

Note

Conestoga College works with several external licensing boards regarding students with disabilities and exam accommodations. This allows us to maintain the required protocols while also addressing accessibility. These include: Paramedic, Canadian Registered Nurse Examination (CRNE), Canadian Practical Nurse Registration Examination (CPNRE), Canadian Securities Institute Exams (CSI), Technical Standards and Safety Authority (TSSA), and Certificate of Qualifications (C of Q).

More Information

Watch for our regularly offered workshop “So you’ve received an accommodation letter, now what?”

Visit [Accessibility at Conestoga](#) or contact [Accessible Learning](#) to speak with an Accessibility Advisor.