

General Guidance Regarding Distraction-Reduced Testing Environments

A distraction-reduced testing environment is a setting outside the usual classroom or testing center that limits auditory and visual interruptions. It allows for increased control of lighting, noise, or other environmental distractions that may impact student performance in a testing situation. This accommodation can be provided by an instructor or by the services for students with disabilities office as long as the student is provided an environment that is quiet without interruptions.

Considerations

<p>It does not have to be a private room if other methods, based upon the manifestations of the student’s disability, would be effective (e.g., headphones, use of screens or partitions, etc.).</p> <p><i>Note: OCR has previously investigated institutions that deferred to instructor preference with regard to test-taking and an established procedure with regard to the distraction-free environment, without directly engaging with the student regarding the disability-related needs.</i></p>	<p>There is no single solution as the decision relies on the facts of any particular case. An adequate interactive process should include attempts to locate additional sites where students can take exams, an exploration of possible alternative methods of having a qualified instructor present for the exams, and an investigation of other potential alternatives that could help constitute a distraction-reduced environment. An individual with a disability is not entitled to the accommodation of his choice. The ADA only ensures that he receives an accommodation that is effective. If a public entity can establish that the provided accommodation is adequate to accommodate the individual's disability, the individual cannot pursue an ADA claim on the grounds that he prefers a different accommodation.</p>
<p>Students receiving accommodations who are scheduled for evening exams can be asked to test at an earlier time on the same day to manageably administer the exam--exceptions for students with disability-related restrictions on time (e.g., medication or restroom use) should be considered.</p>	<p>OCR has recognized that in fashioning effective accommodations, the experiences of disabled and non-disabled students upon occasion will not be identical. The question in such situations is whether there is a substantial adverse impact on the student’s receipt of educational benefits.</p>

OAE's basic recommendations:

- 1) Utilize carrels to address various attentional needs for all
- 2) Provide preferential seating as needed (e.g., place students who need additional breaks for medication or restroom nearest to the door)
- 3) Limit personal items allowed into testing room (excepting those who need access to water, medication, or food)
- 4) Outline clear policies for late arrivals/early finishers to minimize distractions from entering and exiting (consider using tape to prevent clicking of door and jamb)
- 5) Provide pre-sharpened pencils
- 6) Provide disposable earplugs
- 7) Provide digital clocks vs. analog (reduces noise made by ticking)
- 8) Secure additional space that may be required for last-minute adjustments

Helpful Resources

[ADA Requirements for Testing Accommodations](#)

[Final Report of the "Best Practices" Panel](#)