

Accommodations Guide


An (un)comprehensive guide to navigating accommodations for the college student

Remember that every school has a different process for making accommodations for students with concussions. Some schools may have informal accommodations in the initial recovery stage and require more formal accommodations later if symptoms persist. Other schools may pursue a formal accommodation route from the beginning. Consult your institution's accessibility office for more information about school-specific policies.

Before Meeting with the Accessibility Office

- Reach out to peer supports for more immediate accessibility challenges.** Your meeting with your accessibility office may not be soon enough to meet some of your immediate needs. Try reaching out to friends, roommates, classmates, or RAs if you need support with getting meals, creating a quiet environment, or getting class notes.
- Contact your school's accessibility/disability office.** They will help you set up a meeting to discuss your accommodations. More information about your school's specific process should be provided on their website.
- Obtain medical documentation** from a campus/local health provider or an athletic trainer, when applicable. Schools are allowed to request official documentation under ADA. Some schools have requirements about what types of medical providers can provide official documentation for concussions, so you should check to see if your provider is acceptable to your school.
- Consider symptoms and accommodation needs.** Thinking about or writing down the symptoms you are experiencing and the things that may help them can make it easier for you and your school's accessibility office to better understand your accommodation needs.

Symptoms vary between concussion patients, and symptoms may manifest after the initial injury. Some symptoms are listed below, but this list is not comprehensive. Examples of



accommodations to consider are included below, grouped by symptom management and the setting they apply to.

During Your Meeting


- Ask questions.** Some example questions are:
 - How will professors learn about my accommodations?
 - Where can I get medical help for managing symptoms?
 - How can I change my accommodations throughout the return-to-learn process?
 - Where are campus mental health services, and how do I access them?
 - Does the school have a pre-existing return-to-learn process?
- Discuss accommodation ideas.** Coming into the meeting knowing your symptoms and having ideas about accommodations may be helpful. If you aren't sure where to start with accommodations or find the process too overwhelming and difficult, ask for guidance! The person you are meeting with is there to support you in this process, regardless of how much you know about accommodations.

Remember that all concussions are different, so the person you are talking to may not understand your unique situation: Advocate for your needs and symptoms, even if they differ from the common idea of a concussion.

- Be honest.** If there is something you need, ask for it. Even if it doesn't seem that important, getting the accommodations you need is important. Likewise, if an accommodation doesn't sound right for you, you don't need to use it. However, having more options can always be helpful.

After Your Meeting

- Remember, there is no set timeline for recovering from a concussion.** Everyone recovers from concussions at different rates, with different symptoms resolving or appearing at different times. While your progress may feel frustrating or slow, following a gradual return to activity that minimizes symptoms ensures you aren't returning to tasks you aren't ready for or risking delaying your recovery.
- Use your accommodations when you need to.** They exist to support you. If you don't need to use them, that's okay, too! It may feel uncomfortable to use or ask for accommodations, especially as symptoms begin to improve, but listening to your brain and body's needs is essential.
- Modify your accommodations as needed.** If an accommodation isn't working for you, ask to change it. Additionally, concussion symptoms can appear days or weeks after the initial



injury. During the recovery process, you may have different needs than before. All of this is completely normal. Reach out to your school's accessibility office to modify or add new accommodations as necessary.

Accommodations Based on Symptoms

The accommodation ideas listed below are grouped based on common symptoms that concussion patients experience. This list is not comprehensive—there are many symptoms students with concussions experience that are not listed—but it will hopefully help give an idea of common accommodations to help start the accommodations process.


Accommodations for General Concussion Symptoms

- Modify or cancel assignments
- Short in-class breaks
- Extended time on assignments or quizzes
- Alternate testing environments
 - e.g., small group, individual, quiet rooms, dimmer lighting
- Record lectures
- Provided notetaker
- Alternate assessment forms
 - e.g., oral instead of written, paper instead of digital
- Excused absences
- Schedule change
- Drop a class/classes
- Preferential seating in accordance with accommodation needs
- Reduce quantity of work in favor of quality
- Exempt the student from reading out loud when applicable
- Use a planner (not strictly an accommodation but helps with many symptoms)

Accommodations for Headaches

- Lay head on desk during class
- Breaks during class
- Breaks from computers/screens

Accommodations for Sensitivity to Noise

- 
- No physical education, band, or choir classes
 - Avoid loud classes/labs
 - Earplug usage
 - Alternate setting for eating
 - Take-out food options
 - Food delivered to room
 - Leave/arrive to class early/late to avoid noisy hallways
 - Limit volume of devices, speakers, and headphones/earphones

Accommodations for Sensitivity to Light

- Wear sunglasses
- Alternate area with low/dim lighting
- Avoid sitting in direct sunlight

Accommodations for Sleep Difficulties

- Priority registration to avoid early courses
- Drop early courses
- Frequent rest breaks

Accommodations for Visual Problems

- Limit computer use
- Reduce/shorten reading assignments
- Record lectures
- Auditory learning/adapting apps
- More listening and discussion opportunities (instead of readings)
- Increase font size on computer/projection screens
- Use Flux app on laptop

Accommodations for Concentration/Memory Problems

- Place main focus on essential academic content/concepts
- Postpone standardized testing
- Postpone exams
- Allow extra time for assignments, quizzes, projects, and exams
- Modify class assignments and homework
- Limit to one exam per day

- Pre-printed notes
- Note taker
- Reader to provide for oral test taking
- Provide oral and written instructions/additional clarification of instructions
- Provide an outline/study guide when available
- Computer with spelling/grammar checks for assignments and note-taking
- In grading, reduced emphasis on spelling/grammar (unless it is the purpose of the assignment)

Accommodations for Dizziness/Lightheadedness

- Arrive/leave class early/late to avoid crowded hallways
- Provide an escort to/from courses
- Lay head on desk in class

Accommodations by Setting

General Accommodations

These refer to general strategies that may apply in your academic or day-to-day life.

- Priority registration
 - e.g., to avoid early courses or courses that may exacerbate symptoms
- Excused absences
- Schedule changes
- Drop a class/classes
- No physical education, band, or choir classes
- Avoid loud classes/labs
- Reduce quantity of work in favor of quality
- Arrive/leave class early/late to avoid crowded hallways
- Provide an escort to/from courses
- Use a planner (not strictly an accommodation but helps with many symptoms)
- Wearing sunglasses
- Rest breaks as needed
- Limit computer use
 - e.g., provide alternate formats for assignments/tests/quizzes
- Be provided with oral and written instructions/additional clarification of instructions
- Be provided with an outline/study guide when available

Accommodations In Class

These can be implemented in a classroom setting.

- Short in-class breaks
- Record lectures
- Provided note taker
- Preferential seating in accordance with accommodation needs
 - e.g., areas with dimmer lighting, avoiding speakers or direct sunlight
- Exempt students from reading out loud when applicable
- Lay head on desk in class
- Earplug or noise-canceling headphone usage
- Ask instructors to be conscious of volume levels
- More listening and discussion opportunities (instead of readings)
- Pre-printed notes/access to in-class presentation notes
- Spelling/grammar check software for assignments and note-taking
- Arrive/leave class early/late to avoid crowded hallways
- Be provided with an escort to/from courses

Accommodations for Assignments

These are geared towards in and out of class assignments.

- Modify or cancel assignments
- Extended time on assignments/quizzes
- Reduce/shorten reading assignments
- Auditory learning/adapting apps
- More listening and discussion opportunities (instead of readings)

Accommodations for Testing

These accommodations refer to tests associated with college courses. Standardized tests should have their own accommodation procedures—look for more information on the respective test's website. Taking standardized tests while recovering from a concussion is not recommended, so waiting until the return-to-learn process is complete or symptoms are minimal may be a better course of action.

- Additional time to complete tests
- Modify, cancel, or postpone tests
- Quiet, individual testing room

- Break up long tests into smaller sections with breaks in between
- Alternate assessment forms
 - e.g., oral with scribed responses instead of written, paper instead of digital
- Assess knowledge using multiple choice, instead of open-ended, questions
- Allow student to clarify/explain responses on exams/assignments
- Reference sheet for exams with formulas (unless memorizing formulas is required)
- Permit use of a calculator
- Permit use of a dictionary or thesaurus in written responses
- Spelling/grammar check software in written responses
- Rescheduling a test if there are multiple on the same day
- Earplug or noise-canceling headphone usage
- Limit to one exam per day

Instructor-Specific Accommodations

These refer to things an instructor can do to make their classroom more accessible for students affected by concussion. Not all of them may be formal accommodations, but they can be something you bring up with a professor to consider trying. You may also refer instructors to [Concussion for College Educators](#) for more information about academic accommodations for concussions in college.

- Increase font size on computer/projector screens
- In grading, reduce emphasis on spelling/grammar (unless it is the purpose of the assignment)
- Place main focus on essential academic content/concepts
- Provide oral and written instructions/additional clarification of instructions
- Provide an outline/study guide when available

Accommodations for Non-Academic Life

These are ways the college environment can be more accessible to students with concussions.

- Move to quieter floor/building
- Contact Residential Assistants to better manage noise/quiet hours
- New roommate agreement to reflect symptoms
- Alternate eating space (quieter, dimmer, or less overwhelming)
- Take-out meal options
- Meals brought to room
- Eat in the dining hall at less busy times

References

- Bevilacqua, Zachary, et al. "Educator Perspectives on Concussion Management in the College Classroom: A Grounded Theory Introduction to Collegiate Return-to-Learn." *BMJ Open*, vol. 11, Apr. 2021, p. e044487. *ResearchGate*, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-044487>.
- College Accommodations After a Traumatic Brain Injury (Concussion) | Gillette Children's*. <https://www.gillettechildrens.org/your-visit/patient-education/college-accommodations-after-a-traumatic-brain-injury-concussion>. Accessed 1 Aug. 2022.
- Concussion – Parachute*. <https://parachute.ca/en/injury-topic/concussion/>. Accessed 1 Aug. 2022.
- Frost, Gail, and Maureen Connolly. "Managing the Transition from Concussion to Return to Learn in Postsecondary Education: Strategies Based on Principles of UDL." *Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching*, vol. 11, June 2018. *ResearchGate*, <https://doi.org/10.22329/celt.v11i0.4976>.
- Holmes, Acacia, et al. "Return to Learn: Academic Effects of Concussion in High School and College Student-Athletes." *Frontiers in Pediatrics*, vol. 8, Mar. 2020, p. 57. *PubMed Central*, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fped.2020.00057>.
- Johnson, Brian R., et al. "Return-to-Learn: A Post-Concussion Academic Recovery Program at the U.S. Air Force Academy." *Military Medicine*, vol. 183, no. 5–6, May 2018, pp. 101–04. *Silverchair*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/milmed/usx106>.
- Sandel, Elizabeth. *Shaken Brain: The Science, Care, and Treatment of Concussion*. Harvard University Press, 2020.
- "Section A: Concussion Recognition, Initial Medical Assessment, Management." *Living Guideline for Pediatric Concussion Care*, <https://pedsconcussion.com/section/a/>. Accessed 1 Aug. 2022.