

# SAT/Standardized Tests

## Summary of College Board Information for Students with TS

by Kathy Giordano, TSA Education Specialist

### Introduction

(Editorial Note: direct quotes from the College Board website (<http://www.collegeboard.com>) are *italicized*; TSA comments are in normal font.)

The process of applying for Standardized tests accommodations for students with disabilities can be complex. For students with TS, this often involves requests for additional information as well as significant and time-consuming documentation.

It is advisable to begin the process as early as possible. For example, if your child is taking Advanced Placement (AP) classes in high school, you will want to speak with your child's counselor and apply for accommodations the year prior or as soon as school begins. For SAT tests, it is wise to begin the process during the year before the student will be taking the test.

TSA recently had an opportunity to meet with representatives from the College Board. They strongly recommended that parents 'paint a picture' of the child and specifically describe interfering symptoms. In other words, relating precisely how symptoms impact the student during test taking instead of only using labels allows for a better understanding of the accommodations which would be most appropriate. As an example: '*The student occasionally has symptoms that involve screeching and walking around the desk. These symptoms increase in volume and frequency during testing and reduce the amount of time dedicated to the testing process. Additionally, attempts at suppressing these symptoms to reduce the distraction they cause other students can significantly impact this student's ability to concentrate.*' This statement describes the need for a separate location and possibly additional time or breaks as needed in a manner that is more precise than writing 'student has vocal and physical tics'.

This article is intended to be a summary of the information from the College Board website that may be helpful. Information has been included that pertains specifically to students with TS but we strongly encourage you to visit the website at <http://www.collegeboard.com/ssd/student> for complete information since the process can be different for each individual.

The College Board makes it clear that the use of accommodations in school, including those that are included in an Individual Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan, does not necessarily qualify a student for accommodations on College Board tests. Ask your school counselor for assistance and let her/him know that students with TS are often denied accommodations due to lack of documentation regarding how symptoms specifically impact test taking. It is a good idea to be precise when listing, documenting and discussing symptoms in your application to the College Board, and how they interfere with test taking. What may seem obvious to you, and even to school personnel may not be obvious to others who are not as familiar with the complexities and difficulties that a diagnosis of TS can present.

## Application Process

### **1. When is Documentation Required?**

#### **a. Documentation must be provided:**

- i. for every student whose disability is “other health impairment”, or the student has been declassified or has no formal plan in place;
- ii. the student has not had an official educational plan and/or used the requested accommodations in the past four school months;
- iii. the testing is not current;
- iv. school documentation does not include results from both a cognitive ability test and an academic achievement test;
- v. the student needs more than 100 percent extended time;
- vi. the student needs the use of a computer or individualized testing;
- vii. the student needs testing accommodations not commonly provided

### **2. What Documentation is Required?**

**a.** Under most circumstances, scores from nationally normed, individually administered testing must be submitted. Include the student's standard or scaled scores, as well as scores from all subtests. (Age/grade equivalents and/or percentiles are not sufficient.) Documentation must be current. (In most cases, documentation must be within five years for academic testing and updates within one year for psychiatric disabilities.)

**b.** Please note that the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT), Nelson-Denny, Wechsler Abbreviated Scale of Intelligence (WASI), and/or Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test (K-BIT) alone are not sufficient, without other documentation.

**c.** In addition to test scores, applicants should also include:

- i. the report from their most recent psycho-educational evaluation,
- ii. a rationale for each of the requested accommodations,
- iii. and an indication of how the accommodation is being used in school.

## Eligibility guidelines for use of a computer on College Board tests

Many students who take College Board tests are accustomed to using a computer in school for written assignments. Certain SAT Subject Tests™, AP® Exams, and the essay on the SAT™ are to be handwritten, similar to what most students do for classroom tests.

There are students who, because of a disability, may need to use a computer for written language expression on College Board tests. Only they may take College Board written tests using a computer.

## Dysgraphia

Many students with TS have significant difficulties with written language and require the use of a computer. Since the College Board defines Dysgraphia as a fine motor deficit, it may be more effective to document

the student's difficulties as a learning disability. Typically Dysgraphia for students with TS is not due to fine motor delays but is a learning disability that involves difficulties putting thoughts on paper for a variety of reasons including interfering tics, organization deficits, etc. The School Psychologists should view the College Board websites to determine the guidelines that are used to determine Dysgraphia as a learning disability. Below is a sampling of the information found on the College Board website regarding this important issue:

### **Language-based learning disability (severe)**

*There are some severe learning disabilities that affect a student's overall language-based skills, both in reading and writing. To be eligible for computer accommodation on College Board tests, the student should submit comprehensive cognitive and academic testing that meets College Board guidelines.*

*The documentation should demonstrate severe deficiencies in organization, presentation of ideas, richness of language, complex sentence structure. Learn more about specific testing information at Learning Disabilities on the College Board website.*

### ***What documentation is needed to substantiate learning disabilities?***

*To be eligible for accommodations on College Board tests, a student with a disability must provide documentation that meets the College Board's Guidelines for Documentation, including evidence of functional limitation. We suggest that parents become familiar with the specific of what documentation is necessary and discuss this with the school counselor or psychologists as this may eliminate time wasted if all the documentation that the College Boards requires is not provided. There is a great deal of valuable information at the following sections on the College Board website.*

- *Documentation Guidelines*

*<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/testing/ssd/application/guide/guidelines>*

- *Functional Limitations*

*<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/testing/ssd/application/guide/limitations>*

### **Extended Time**

How it works on College Board tests – excerpted from the website:

*A commonly requested accommodation on College Board tests is extended time. When requesting it, schools are asked to indicate the specific subject area(s) in which extended time is needed (reading, written expression, mathematical calculations and speaking), as well as the amount of time the student needs. Students who request more than 100% extended time must provide documentation of their disabilities and their need for accommodations for the College Board's review.*

*Schools and students should be aware that, when taking College Board tests such as the SAT, students with approval for extended time must sit for the entire test. Students cannot continue to a new section if they complete a section before the time ends, and they cannot*

*leave early.*

*How long is a test with extended time?*

*On the SAT, time frames for tests with extended time are as follows:*

*50% extra time = 5 hours and 25 minutes*

*100% extra time = 7 hours (school testing; conducted over 2 days)*

*The College Board may ask if accommodations other than extended time may be more appropriate to accommodate a student's disability. For example:*

- A student with a physical disability that causes them to write slowly may request a large block answer sheet (which does not require students to "bubble in")*
- Some students with ADHD find that the accommodation of a small group setting helps to reduce distractions.*
- Counselors are encouraged to see Other Accommodations for a list of other examples of accommodations provided by the College Board.*

***Documentation guidelines for extended time:***

*Please keep in mind that a student's documentation must demonstrate not only that he or she has a disability, but also that the student requires the accommodation being requested. Therefore, a student who requests extended time should have documentation that demonstrates difficulty taking tests under timed conditions. In most cases, the documentation should include scores from both timed and extended/untimed tests, to demonstrate any differences caused by the timed conditions.*

The Website provides information regarding how to document that extended time is necessary.

*A low processing speed score alone, usually does not indicate the need for testing accommodations. In this instance, it would be important to include documentation to support how the depressed processing speed affects the student's overall academic abilities under timed conditions.*

For students with TS, it is important to describe specific symptoms in detail and precisely how they interfere to the extent that extended time is required so that students with TS have equal opportunity to demonstrate their abilities. However, extended time may not be appropriate and careful consideration regarding other accommodations such as 'breaks as needed' that will not require the student to remain in his seat if he finishes early. The website states:

- When extended time is requested, applicants are encouraged to include scores from both timed and untimed academic tests. Applicants also are encouraged to consider whether accommodations other than extended time, such as extra breaks, small group testing, or a large block answer sheet, might be more appropriate to serve the student's needs.*

- Schools are asked to indicate the specific subject area(s) in which extended time is needed (reading, written expression, mathematical calculations and speaking), as well as the amount of time the student needs. Students who request more than 100% extended time must provide documentation of their disabilities and their need for accommodations for the College Board's review.

### **Teacher Survey on Student's Classroom Learning Behavior**

The Teacher's Survey is important documentation for students with TS. Even though this document is not a requirement in the application process, we suggest that this be completed by teachers who can provide documentation and insight as it will help the College Board better understand and accept that TS symptoms can have a significant impact on testing.

The website states:

*This survey is designed to help educational professionals provide qualitative information that documents the student's nature and degree of daily school-based functional limitations in subject areas such as reading, writing, and math, resulting from the diagnosed disability. The survey also asks for information related to the student's use and effectiveness of the requested accommodation/s based on classroom observation and assessments. (Note: You are not required to complete this survey to meet College Board documentation guidelines. This is a supplement to help substantiate a student's need for accommodations.)*

### **Guidelines for breaks on College Board tests**

For some students with TS, breaks are necessary. The website reads:

*Most students who are approved for extra breaks have their needs met by breaks **between test sections**. Additional breaks of a standard length (usually 5 minutes) are given at scheduled times.*

- A.** *Some students with medical conditions require breaks as needed. When a student is in this category, breaks are granted as requested by the student. The student notifies the proctor by raising his or her hand and the timing of the test must stop. When the student is ready to continue, the student again notifies the proctor, and the timing will continue.*
- B.** *Students may also be approved for extended breaks between a section or subject, or an extra break before the end of a section or subject (e.g., to test blood sugar or use the restroom). In most cases, such extended breaks are for twice the standard time.*

### **Separate Location**

This is often one of the most important accommodations for students with Tourette syndrome. A separate

location can:

- Reduce the level of anxiety and concentration used in attempting to suppress symptoms so as not to disturb other students
- Typically reduces the number and intensity of symptoms due to reducing anxiety and effort regarding the suppression of symptoms
- Allows symptoms to be expressed which allows full concentration on test
- Eliminates the possibility of distracting a large number of other students who are taking the test as a group.
- Reduces distractions that may be due to ADD
- Reduces the need to hurry through test due to symptoms of finishing first

## **Summary**

For students with TS, seeking accommodations on the SAT and other standardized tests is a complicated process. It should be initiated early. It is more effective to involve appropriate school representatives in the process, in determining requirements, and in obtaining documentation.

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of providing extensive documentation which makes the clearest case for accommodations. Describing the impact of symptoms rather than only providing diagnoses and labels will be more effective in obtaining necessary accommodations. Documentation should be provided by a variety of professionals familiar with the student's difficulties and should clearly demonstrate how these symptoms will interfere with the taking of the test.

TSA Education Specialists, members of the Education Committee, Chapter leaders and other resource volunteers can be available to discuss Tourette syndrome symptoms if this would be helpful for a student to receive appropriate accommodations for these critically important tests.

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Link to Application for Accommodations: <http://www.collegeboard.com/ssd/student/index.html>

College Board Contact Info: College Board SSD Program  
P.O. Box 8060  
Mt. Vernon, IL 62864-0060  
Phone: (609) 771-7137 Fax: (866) 360-0114 TTY: (609) 882-4118  
Email: [ssd@info.collegeboard.org](mailto:ssd@info.collegeboard.org)

Additional Reading: *Accommodations Angst*, NY Times, Abigail Sullivan Moore, 11/04/2010:  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/07/education/edlife/07strategy-t.html?pagewanted=1&tntemail0=y&\\_r=2&emc=tnt](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/07/education/edlife/07strategy-t.html?pagewanted=1&tntemail0=y&_r=2&emc=tnt)

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