

Documentation Requirements for MCAT Accommodations

Documenting Physical Disabilities

Introduction

Welcome to the MCAT! The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) encourages all qualified applicants to embark upon the exciting and challenging process of becoming a physician. The AAMC supports the policies of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and is committed to ensuring access to the MCAT for individuals with disabilities, in accordance with the requirements of the ADA.

The AAMC provides reasonable and appropriate accommodations to individuals with documented disabilities who demonstrate a need for accommodations. For example, applicants may request someone to record answers, a separate testing room, extra testing time, or presentation of the material in large print. Requests for accommodations are evaluated by qualified professionals.

The following information is provided for applicants, evaluators, college and university staff, faculty and others involved in the process of documenting a request for test accommodations. Applicants requesting test accommodations should share these guidelines with their evaluator so that appropriate documentation can be assembled to support the request for test accommodations.

ADA defines a person with a disability as someone with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities such as walking, seeing, hearing, or learning. The purpose of documentation is to demonstrate that the individual who is requesting accommodations has a disability within the meaning of the ADA.

Requests for test accommodations are inherently individualized and need to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Consequently, no single type of accommodation (i.e., extra time) would be appropriate for all individuals with disabilities. Moreover, simply demonstrating that an individual has a disability does not mean that the person is automatically entitled to any particular accommodation such as extra time.

The purpose of accommodations is to provide examinees with an opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities on the MCAT. Specific accommodations should be related to the identified functional limitations so that the impairment is mitigated by the requested auxiliary aid or adjustment to the testing format. “Functional limitation” refers to the behavioral manifestations of the disability that impede the individual’s ability to function, i.e., what someone cannot do on a regular and continuing basis as a result of the disability. For example, a functional limitation might be impaired vision which prevents the individual from viewing the examination in the standard font size. An appropriate accommodation might be text enlargement. It is essential that the documentation provide a clear explanation of the current functional impairment and a rationale for the requested accommodation.

MCAT test scores obtained under nonstandard conditions will be noted as such when those scores are reported to you and your score recipients. Nonstandard testing conditions include, but are not limited to, timing modifications, use of a scribe, and the use of a device or aid typically not permitted to the general testing population.

While the use of accommodations in the test activity is intended to enable the individual to better demonstrate his/her knowledge mastery, accommodations are not a guarantee of improved performance or test completion.

How to Request Test Accommodations

1. Read the instructions carefully.
 - Share them with the professional who may be assisting with the preparation of your documentation.
 - **Compare your documentation with the information listed in these guidelines to ensure a complete submission.**
 - Submitting insufficient documentation will delay the processing of your request and may result in denial of accommodations or a delay of your test date.
2. You must submit your registration on-line to take the MCAT. Respond affirmatively to the question of whether you will be requesting accommodations. Read the “Frequently Asked Questions” on the MCAT website for important information regarding deadlines and timeframes.
3. Send 2 copies of all of your documentation.
4. Send all materials **together**. Do not ask your evaluator to send materials to the MCAT Program Office separate from your request. Due to the number of applications received, it is not possible to guarantee that materials submitted separately can be matched.
5. Accommodation requests are reviewed on a rolling basis in the order in which they are received. Apply as far as possible in advance of your preferred test date because it may take up to 60 days to process requests (see the “Frequently Asked Questions” page for specific information regarding deadlines and timeframes). Decisions that are in place on the last day of registration will hold for that test-date, as last-minute changes cannot be accommodated. Submitting your request well in advance of your preferred test date will help ensure that there is sufficient time to arrange for appropriate accommodations. Note that some test centers may be unable to provide certain types of accommodations. You are not guaranteed your first-choice or second-choice test center; however, we will attempt to make time and distance of travel reasonable. It may take up to 60 days to process your request and for you to receive a reply (see the “Frequently Asked Questions” page for more information about deadlines and timeframes).

6. If you submit documentation sufficiently early, the MCAT Program Office might be able to communicate with you regarding omissions in your documentation in time for you to send supplemental material by the deadline.
7. Send 2 copies of your request for test accommodations and supporting documentation to:

Association of American Medical Colleges
MCAT Office of Disability Services, Attn: Saresa Leftwich
2450 N Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037

Documentation sent by electronic format will not be accepted.

The MCAT Office of Disability Services will notify you if your request is granted or denied. If granted, you may be contacted by an MCAT representative to make specific arrangements.

8. The MCAT Office of Disability Services will evaluate documentation submitted by examinees who request accommodations and make the final judgment as to whether the sufficiency of the documentation.
9. If you are denied accommodations, your registration materials will be processed as a standard registration at the Test Center that you chose. If you prefer a different location and there is a seat available there, then you may transfer at no additional cost. If for any reason you decide not to attend the test, the standard rules regarding refunds will apply. Consult the section regarding refunds in MCAT Essentials for more information about requesting a refund.

Overall Guidelines

The following guidelines are provided to assist the applicant in documenting a need for accommodation based on an impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

Confidentiality

All documentation submitted in support of your request for accommodations is confidential. To protect the applicant, the MCAT Office of Disability Services will not accept inquiries from third parties regarding an applicant or his/her accommodation request, unless specifically authorized so to do by the applicant. The MCAT Office of Disability Services will not release any part of the documentation without the candidate's written consent or under compulsion of legal process, except for the purpose of determining eligibility for test accommodations.

Required Documentation

To support a request for test accommodations, please submit the following:

1. Your own written request for accommodations, preferably in the form of a cover letter. Include a detailed description of your disability and indicate specifically the accommodations you believe are necessary for you to take the MCAT. Please include a telephone number where you can be reached during the day. You are encouraged to also provide a fax number and e-mail address (see the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) webpage for specific instructions regarding registration and deadlines).
2. Records of academic history should be provided. Because many disabilities are most commonly manifested initially during childhood, relevant records detailing difficulties in elementary, secondary and post-secondary education should be included. Records such as grade reports, Individual Education Plans, 504 Plans, transcripts, teachers' comments should be provided to substantiate self-reported past and current academic difficulties.

Whenever possible, AAMC documentation specialists will indicate what (if any) specific pieces of documentation are missing in order to make an informed decision about testing accommodations. Time permitting, candidates who submit documentation that is outdated, incomplete, or otherwise insufficient may be asked to update and/or supplement their documentation.

Your request and documentation will not be returned to you. We advise you to retain copies of everything you submit.

General Requirements of the Medical Evaluation

Any diagnosis of a physical disability must be based on the aggregate of history, test results (if applicable), and level of current functioning, along with clinical judgment.

Qualifications of the Examiner

A qualified professional must personally examine and evaluate the applicant. Therefore, it is not appropriate for students or trainees to conduct the evaluation even if the final written report is signed by a qualified professional.

An individual is deemed to be qualified to conduct a medical or health-related evaluation if s/he has had comprehensive training and experience in the relevant medical specialty, and has appropriate licensure/certification.

The name, title, and professional credentials of the evaluator must be clearly stated in the documentation, along with evidence of formal training and experience in the relevant specialty. The evaluator should present evidence of comprehensive training and direct experience in the diagnosis and treatment of adolescents and/or adults with physical disabilities. The MCAT Office of Disability Services reserves the right to request evidence from an evaluator of their professional qualifications. Diagnoses and documentation provided by family members will not be accepted.

Currency

Because the provision of reasonable accommodations is based on assessment of the *current impact* of the applicant's disability on the testing activity, and because of the changing nature of some physical disabilities, it is critical that documentation be current. The diagnostic report should be less than six months old; documentation that is 6-24 months old will be accepted if it is accompanied by a letter from a qualified professional that provides an update on the diagnosis, the examinee's current level of functioning, changes since the previous evaluation, current treatment, and continued rationale for the requested accommodations. Reports of diagnostic assessments that are older than 24 months will be helpful in establishing history and precedent, but will not be acceptable in establishing *current* impact.

Structure of the Medical Evaluation

The preferred structure for a diagnostic report is suggested below; alternative report-formats are acceptable if they cover the same content and meet the same criteria.

Identifying Information

The first page of the report should be printed on the evaluator's letterhead and should provide relevant identifying information, including the examinee's name, date of birth, the evaluation dates, age at the time of the evaluation, and grade and school (if applicable).

History & Background

1. The report should include a summary of a comprehensive diagnostic interview that includes relevant background information. This includes relevant historical information regarding the individual's academic history, with emphasis on the previous educational impact of the disability (if any).
2. The report should provide evidence that other impairments with symptom-overlap have been investigated and ruled out;
3. The report should describe relevant employment history (if any) and discussion of where the physical disability has impacted job performance (if applicable).

Include documentation regarding accommodations that have been made in the past, including elementary or secondary school, during college, or for other standardized examinations. Note, however, that the fact that an accommodation has been granted on a previous occasion does not guarantee similar accommodations for the MCAT. If available, provide score reports for other standardized admission tests, such as the SAT or ACT, and indicate what accommodations, if any, were allowed. If you lack documentation of accommodations or special assistance you received in elementary or secondary school, describe the accommodations in your cover letter. If no prior accommodations have been provided, you and your evaluator should each provide a detailed explanation as to why no accommodations were given in the past and why accommodations are needed now.

The report should indicate whether or not relevant educational, medical, or psychological interventions have been or are currently being used to manage the symptoms of the impairment, the extent to which these have been successful in diminishing the functional limitation, and whether or not these interventions were used during the evaluation itself.

Other Reports

This section should include results of any previous psychological, psychoeducational, or neuropsychological testing that is relevant to the basis for the accommodation request (e.g., that might demonstrate an educational impact from the impairment).

Diagnostic Criteria

The evaluator must establish that the examinee in fact has a physical impairment based on diagnostic criteria that are generally and widely accepted. For example, diagnostic criteria for medical conditions are found in the International Classification of Diseases-Tenth Edition (ICD-10).

Test Results

The report should list any objective tests that were administered, with accompanying scores, and detailed interpretation. The report should describe in detail the individual's *functional limitations* due to the disability, including the potential impact on the MCAT.

1. **Demonstration of evidence of a physical disorder.** The report should provide objective evidence from medically-relevant testing of the existence of a significant physical impairment.
2. **Demonstration of significant current impact.** The report should provide evidence of the current impact on a major life activity (such as hearing or seeing), and demonstrate that, even with compensatory strategies (such as medication, eyeglasses, or prosthetic devices), there continues to be a significant, current limitation from the impairment.

The description should include discussion of how the physical impairment impacts a variety of domains, with the understanding that rarely does a physical disability impact only test-taking abilities.

The impact on a major life activity should be discussed in terms of the person's actual functioning with coping strategies, and not in terms of how the person might function without compensatory strategies.

NOTE: In situations where an individual is thought to have two or more disorders, such as a learning disability and a vision disorder, the diagnostic report must clearly describe the unique impact of each disorder, and diagnostic criteria must be met for each disorder.

Summary

The report should include a summary of the background information, test results, and conclusions.

Diagnosis

The report should include a specific diagnosis of the disability following ICD-10 guidelines. There should be an indication that various possible alternative causes for the presenting problem have been ruled out.

Recommendations

1. It is essential that the recommendations be individualized; it is critical that the recommendations logically follow from the evidence of the history, the test results, and the related documentation. Not all examinees are the same; not all physical disabilities are the same; the impact from the disorder is not always the same; therefore, accommodation needs will not always be the same.
2. The recommendations should describe the rationale for each accommodation or modification, which should be based on evidence from the testing and clinical history. This should include a detailed explanation of why each accommodation is needed and how it will reduce the impact of the identified functional limitations, specifically in relation to the MCAT.
3. The evaluator should recommend specific accommodations and/or assistive devices. If additional time is requested, the evaluator must specify a precise amount of additional time (e.g. time + 25 percent or time-and-a-half). The rationale for each requested accommodation should be included. A request for an untimed exam, or simply “extra time”, is not sufficient.

Additional Requirements for ADA

Having a diagnosed impairment does not automatically entitle someone to accommodations on the MCAT. To receive accommodations on the MCAT, an applicant must not only demonstrate that s/he has an impairment, but that the impairment is a disability within the meaning of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). The following information explains some of ADA's key terms.

Substantially Limits

“Substantially” limits means to a considerable or high degree of limitation.

In determining substantial limitation, performance of the person with the impairment is compared to the performance of the average person in the general population.

In addition, the severity of a person's impairment must be measured while considering both the positive and negative effects of coping strategies such as medication. For example, a person with near-sightedness might be considered “disabled” were it not for his eyeglasses, which essentially corrects his vision to 20/20 and therefore eliminates him from being considered “disabled” under ADA. Likewise, a student with ADHD who takes medication to control the symptoms might have a proper diagnosis of ADHD, but since the medication manages the ADHD effectively, he would not be considered “disabled” under the ADA. What matters under the ADA is the actual functioning of the person—not what the functioning would be without the eyeglasses, medication, or other coping strategies ordinarily used by the person.

Therefore, the diagnostic report should indicate whether or not the examinee was evaluated with the same conditions under which he or she ordinarily functions in daily life. For example, if the examinee uses a coping strategy on a daily basis and indeed he used that coping strategy on the day of the evaluation, then the report should indicate that the examinee was evaluated under the same conditions that s/he functions in daily life. Likewise, if the examinee takes medication on a daily basis but did not take the medication on the day of the evaluation, then the report should indicate that the examinee was evaluated under conditions different from those under which s/he functions on a daily basis, and provide a rationale for why the evaluation was conducted in this manner (under conditions different from those that the examinee normally functions on a daily basis).

In addition, in cases where the impairments are *lifelong conditions*, the examinee should be able to demonstrate a history of limitations. For example, a college student with learning disabilities who has a long record of above-average achievement without receiving accommodations, including scoring above-average on unmodified college entrance examinations, would not have a history of a substantial limitation and would not establish that s/he is a person who is substantially limited in learning.

Major Life Activities

Major life activities include caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working. Major life activities are those that are of central importance in daily life.

Learning is a major life activity and some individuals with a learning disability or ADHD *may* be substantially limited. However, in order to meet the “substantial limitation” criteria of the ADA, there must be evidence that the person is substantially limited in a broad sense, not just in one particular course or subject-area. For example, a person who has “math anxiety” but does not have a generalized anxiety disorder impacting many aspects of her life would not be a person covered under ADA. Conversely, if an examinee with a reading disability can demonstrate that this has a severe negative impact on learning such that he is substantially limited in a broad sense, then he may be covered under ADA.

The Average Member of the Population

In order to establish a disability under the ADA, the individual’s performance in a major life activity must be compared to that of the average person in the general population. It is not sufficient to demonstrate that an individual’s reading achievement is significantly below her IQ; her reading must also be significantly impaired relative to an average person in the general population. That is, her reading scores must be significantly below average. For example, a very bright graduate student may have a legitimate math difficulty, but because she consistently earned above-average grades in college-level math courses without accommodations, and scored above-average on the math portions of the college entrance exams without accommodations, she would not be considered to be substantially limited with respect to the average person in the general population—even if her grades in math courses were lower than her grades in other courses. It is not enough to show that an examinee is frustrated or challenged in one subject compared with others.

When there is an extensive record of significant accomplishment in learning, with no accommodations, it will be difficult to conclude that an individual is substantially limited in learning compared to the average person in the general population.

Concluding Comments

Welcome again to the MCAT. The AAMC is committed to ensuring that all students with ADA-covered disabilities have equal access to the MCAT. We appreciate your efforts to document your disability. Be assured that we will do our best to meet the needs of disabled applicants, while also considering the need to protect the validity and security of the MCAT and the overall integrity of the MCAT program.

Please carefully read the Frequently Asked Questions webpage for important information regarding deadlines, timeframes, and contact information.

