

Frequently Asked Test Accommodations Questions about the New York State Alternate Assessment (NYSAA)

1. What test accommodations are allowed on NYSAA?

All test accommodations that are provided to other students with disabilities are also allowable for students with severe disabilities taking NYSAA.¹ Test accommodations must be specified in the individualized education program (IEP). Teachers must distinguish between test accommodations that adjust testing procedures to allow students to demonstrate their skills, understanding and knowledge on the test construct versus testing modifications that adjust test constructs or procedures to substitute for students' lack of skills, knowledge or understanding.

Test accommodations provide equivalent ways for students with disabilities to demonstrate mastery of the skills, knowledge and understanding that are being tested, so that the student is not unfairly prevented from demonstrating mastery solely because of the functional effects of his or her disability (ies).

Accommodations are generally grouped into the following categories. Others are possible.²

- Presentation (e.g., repeat directions, read aloud, large print, Braille, etc.);
- Equipment and material (e.g., calculator, amplification equipment, manipulatives, assistive technology, etc.);
- Response (e.g., mark answers in booklet, use scribe to record response dictated by the person, pointing, etc.);
- Setting (e.g., study carrel, separate room, etc.); and,
- Timing/Scheduling (e.g., extended time, frequent breaks, etc.).

New York State's policy clearly states that test accommodations are neither intended nor permitted to:

- alter the construct being measured or invalidate the results, nor
- substitute for knowledge or abilities that the student has not attained.³

The constructs assessed by NYSAA are the Alternate Grade Level Indicators (AGLIs) that relate to Essences of the Core Curriculums at each grade level for the academic content areas of English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science and social studies. AGLIs are found in the NYSAA Frameworks.

¹ Test Access and Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Policies and Tools to Guide Decision-making and Implementation, May 2006, NYS Education Department, found at <http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/policy/testaccess/policyguide.htm>

² National Center on Educational Outcomes Special Topic Area: Accommodations for Students with Disabilities, 2006, found at <http://education.umn.edu/NCEO/TopicAreas/Accommodations/Accomtopic.htm>.

³ Op Cit, NYSED Test Access and Accommodations guidance, page 3 (PDF version).

NYSAA does not permit changing assessment constructs, and requires adjustments to the student's rating(s) of independence and accuracy when cues or prompts are provided that in whole or part substitute for the student's ability to accurately and/or independently demonstrate the knowledge, skills and understanding defined by the AGLIs.

2. Is there any difference in test accommodations for NYSAA versus general education assessments?

No. Both types of assessments allow for individualized accommodations as long as these assure fidelity to the construct being assessed and assure that the student's real abilities are reflected in his or her reported results.

3. When is using a calculator or assistive technology device an allowable test accommodation and when is it a prohibited modification?

Following the NYSAA Test Blueprints, teachers choose the AGLI that is most appropriate for assessing the student. The wording of some AGLIs and sample tasks provided in the Frameworks for each content area already includes the use of tools, manipulatives and technology. Several mathematics AGLIs and sample tasks, for example, already include references to the use of manipulatives and calculators, particularly at the less complex level of the available choices. It is recommended that teachers consider using the AGLIs and sample tasks that already allow for tools, manipulatives and technology; or, if there is a need to write additional AGLI-related tasks, spin off the Frameworks and substitute the tool mentioned in the Frameworks for the use of a tool or technology that is unique to the student.

Beyond this, where additional, new tasks need to be written that embed the use of tools or technology, teachers must be precisely faithful to the AGLI construct. The caution is that misplacement of the reference to the accommodation or tool may inadvertently misdirect the assessment away from the student's mastery of the AGLI construct and onto the student's mastery of the accommodative tool or technology. Thus, care needs to be taken both in wording tasks that reflect the appropriate AGLI construct and in rating student performance appropriately.

Example of Wording:

High School Science Standard 4 Key Idea 1 (The Living Environment), AGLI 21107 indicates "The student will recognize that humans have organs that are connected.

- Appropriately stated task using technology as an allowable accommodation: "Student will identify components of the circulatory and respiratory systems and their functions, using an augmentative communication device to indicate responses."

- Inappropriately stated task using technology: “The student will use an augmentative communication device to identify components of the circulatory and respiratory systems and their functions.”

NYSAA Test Accommodation Examples

Incorrect Usages of Accommodations	Correct Usages of Accommodations
<p style="text-align: center;">• Waiving Punctuation Incorrectly</p> <p><u>AGLI</u>- Use the writing process in composing text (21207) Grade 6.</p> <p><u>Proposed Task</u>: Student will use a sentence structure guide for capitalization and punctuation to write a three-sentence summary of an activity he participated in.</p> <p><u>Explanation</u>: Use of the accommodation is not appropriate here because the AGLI is measuring the use of writing processes, which includes proofing for punctuation and capitalization. The accommodation is altering the construct of the test by negating the student’s need to perform the item being assessed.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">• Waiving Punctuation Correctly</p> <p><u>AGLI</u>- Identify main ideas in texts with multiple paragraphs (21201) Grade 6.</p> <p><u>Proposed Task</u>: Student will write sentences identifying the main idea/s of each paragraph read, using a sentence structure guide for capitalization and punctuation.</p> <p><u>Explanation</u>: Use of the accommodation is appropriate here because it does not interfere with what the AGLI is testing, i.e., the student’s ability to identify a main idea. Since this AGLI does not measure the student’s ability to use writing processes, the accommodation does not alter the construct.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">• Using Calculator Incorrectly</p> <p><u>AGLI</u>- Solve one-step and/or two-step equations (42303) High School</p> <p><u>Proposed Task</u>: Student will use a calculator to solve simple problems involving one step.</p> <p><u>Explanation</u>: Use of a calculator in this instance alters the construct of the test because the AGLI addresses computation as part of the student’s ability to solve problems.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">• Using Calculator Correctly</p> <p><u>AGLI</u>- Solve one-step verbal/written problems using one or more strategies. (42204) High School</p> <p><u>Proposed Task</u>: Student will use a calculator to solve simple problems involving one step.</p> <p><u>Explanation</u>: Use of the calculator in this instance is acceptable because the AGLI includes the use of strategies in solving the problems. Using a calculator is a strategy, so there is no impact on the test construct.</p>