

Carrie Jeruzal: “Making it Work” for Students with Learning Differences

Educational modifications and accommodations are every teacher’s responsibility. They are required as outlined in federal and state law (Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 1997, Reauthorization of IDEA 2004 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973-Section 504).

If you teach students with special needs or learning differences and want to administer a MAEIA assessment, then you will need to apply required modifications and accommodations.

Accommodations are changes in how a student accesses information and demonstrates learning.

Modifications are changes in what a student is expected to learn. Sometimes however, in the arts, it is difficult to know exactly what accommodations or modifications should be applied. This blog post is intended to give arts educators ideas and options of how to best meet the needs of these students by accommodating or modifying MAEIA assessments.

One of the best things about MAEIA assessments is that they were designed and published in a way that teachers can modify or alter them to best fit teachers’ and students’ needs in widely differing arts classrooms around the state. This kind of flexibility naturally lends itself to alterations and changes that need to be made to assessments to comply with Individualized Educational Plans, or IEPs.

The attached document is an example of a MAEIA Visual Arts Assessment called: [*Analyze and Describe*](#), meant for 6th grade students. The accommodations and modifications that I made are described and highlighted in yellow. Some of the changes I made benefit all students and simply make the booklet more accessible, such as the images and color coding that I implemented on the Graphic Organizer, and the option to type the answers rather than hand write them. Other accommodations were only for students with IEPs, such as the option to dictate or “tell” the answers to questions within the space of our school’s resource room with the aid of a Special Education teacher.

Here is a list of additional accommodations and modifications that you may want to consider when administering the MAEIA assessments:

- Download the Student Booklet into Word and rework it to print with fewer items per page or line
- Print the Student Booklet with larger text
- Read and re-read the assessment instructions aloud to the student as needed
- Provide an outline or checklist of the assessment tasks on a separate sheet of paper
- Allow students to give responses in a form (spoken or written) that’s easier for them. For example, they can tell you the answer instead of writing it down or typing. Some computers have a dictate option. The student can dictate answers to a device instead of writing it down.
- Allow the use of a spelling dictionary or digital spell-checker
- Allow students to use notes or handouts from class

- Offer the assessment in a different controlled and quiet setting, such as a Resource Room or library.
- Allow the students to sit where they can perform best (for example, up front near the teacher)
- Use special lighting or acoustics
- Take the assessment in a small group setting
- Use sensory tools such as an exercise band, wiggle seat, yoga ball, stress squeeze ball, etc.
- Give extra time to complete a task or all of the assessment
- Have extra time to process spoken information and directions
- Allow the student to take frequent breaks
- Administer the assessment in several sessions or over several days
- Take sections of the assessment in a different order
- Administer the assessment at a specific time of day
- Use a gentle alarm or chimes to help with time management
- Mark text with a highlighter for organization
- Allow students to answer fewer or different assessment questions
- Select a different standard to assess than other students
- Students may be excused from particular parts of the assessment
- Provide pencil grips and wide-lined paper for writing
- Provide adapted scissors
- Accommodate students with sensory issues by removing art media that triggers them
- Allow the use of earplugs or headphones (without input/hooks) to block out background noise
- Reduce actual clutter in the room and visual clutter on the Student Booklets
- Insert meanings of vocabulary words continuously throughout the assessment and/or on a separate help sheet
- Repeat and rephrase directions
- Reduce multiple choice answer options using white-out tape
- Keep student from distractions by special seating, study corrals, etc.
- Give clear directions and repeat and rephrase them
- Write the assessment workflow schedule on board

Arts teachers are masters at being flexible, finding substitutions, differentiating instruction and in general, “Making it Work!” However you choose to provide accommodations and modifications to students with learning differences, it is important to check-in with your building’s special education educator and review mandates outlined in IEPs.

In any case, documentation and reporting of accommodations and modifications are required by law. Check with your special education teacher to understand the preferred documentation process for your school.

Great resources I found are:

<https://www.understood.org/en>

[http://www.shaker.org/Downloads/Accommodations and Modifications Guide.pdf](http://www.shaker.org/Downloads/Accommodations_and_Modifications_Guide.pdf)