

Read Aloud Guidance for Ohio's New State Tests

Ohio's New State Tests were designed as an inclusive assessment system that provides maximum accessibility to all students. The tests are guided by universal design to meet the specific needs of as many students as possible and minimize the number of necessary accommodations, while acknowledging that the need for accommodations cannot be entirely eliminated. Accessibility and accommodations on Ohio's New State Tests are different from the Ohio Achievement Assessments and the Ohio Graduation Tests. For Ohio's New State Tests, there are many differences in both how read aloud is provided and who may receive a read aloud.

What is read aloud?

Read aloud for statewide testing is when the content of the test is read to a student. In a computer-based testing environment, read aloud is provided through text-to-speech. On a paper and pencil test, it must be provided by a human reader. In rare cases when a student cannot access text-to-speech, a human may read the test to a student taking the test on a computer.

Who can have a read aloud?

Accessibility features are tools or preferences built into the assessment system or provided externally by test administrators. Accessibility Features Identified in Advance are features appropriate for a relatively small number of students in order to meet their particular needs. For the mathematics, science and social studies tests, read aloud is an Accessibility Feature Identified in Advance which means any student who needs a read aloud on these tests may have one.

If read aloud is available to all students for mathematics, science and social studies, can I provide it to all my students?

It is inappropriate to provide Accessibility Features Identified in Advance to every student. Providing too many features to students may lead to ineffective use of the tools and may negatively impact a student's test performance. Not all students benefit from having the test read to them. Some students find having the test read to them distracting, even annoying. Students should have opportunities to have tests read aloud to them prior to testing, via a human reader and through text-to-speech, in order to determine if it is a feature that assists them with accessing content.

Who may have a read aloud on the English language arts test?

Read aloud on the English language arts test is a presentation accommodation, not an accessibility feature. People refer to the read aloud on the English language arts test as a reading access accommodation. It provides access to print or written text in the English language arts/literacy assessments for a very small number of students with disabilities who would otherwise be unable to participate in the assessment because their disability severely limits or prevents them from decoding printed text.

Individualized Education Program or 504 plan teams should only consider providing this accommodation to a student who has a print-related disability that severely limits or prevents his or her ability to access printed text by decoding, or who is blind and unable to access Braille to read text. This accommodation is not intended for students reading somewhat (i.e., moderately) below grade level.

How do teams determine who qualifies for the read aloud on the English language arts test?

IEP teams and 504 plan coordinators should consider whether the student has:

- Blindness or a visual impairment and has not learned (or is unable to use) Braille;
- OR

- A disability that severely limits or prevents him or her from accessing printed text, even after varied and repeated attempts to teach the student to do so (for example, the student is unable to decode printed text); OR
- Deafness or a hearing impairment and is severely limited or prevented from decoding text due to a documented history of early and prolonged language deprivation.

Teams and coordinators also should consider whether:

- The student has access to printed text during routine instruction through a reader or other spoken-text audio format or interpreter;
- The student’s inability to decode printed text or read Braille is documented in evaluation summaries from locally-administered diagnostic assessments; or
- The student receives ongoing, intensive instruction or interventions in the foundational reading skills to continue to attain the important college and career-ready skill of independent reading.

Teams and coordinators may use the optional form found in [Appendix D: Text-to-Speech, Screen Reader, ASL Video, or Human Reader/Human Signer Guidance for English Language Arts/Literacy Assessments](#) to identify students who may be appropriate candidates to receive read aloud accommodations.

What does “reading somewhat (i.e., moderately) below grade level” mean? What does “varied and repeated attempts to teach the student” mean? What are “locally-administered diagnostic assessments?”

Ultimately, IEP teams and 504 plan coordinators make the decisions about who receives read aloud accommodations. The task of the IEP team and 504 plan coordinator is to interpret what “reading somewhat below grade level” and “varied and repeated attempts” means and to determine what locally administered diagnostic assessments are used to make this determination. The Ohio Department of Education will monitor frequency of use for the purpose of carefully monitoring and determining appropriate decision making. The department will work with districts that have inappropriately high numbers of students receiving the accommodation to help teams and coordinators understand the decision-making process for the read aloud accommodation, accessibility features and accommodations in general.

What happens if a student receives the reading access accommodation? Will the scores count?

When the English language arts test is read to a student, that student’s ability to demonstrate foundational reading skills is not being assessed, rather it is instead assessing listening skills. The reading access accommodation is available to students who otherwise are unable to access the test. When a student is provided the reading access accommodation, all confidential score reports to the school and parent will state that the student received the reading access accommodation and therefore no claims can be concluded regarding the student’s ability to demonstrate foundational reading skills.

The scores of students who qualify for this accommodation will count just like any other student. On statewide tests, when a student receives an accommodation he or she is not entitled to, that student’s test may be invalidated. For students who do not meet the guidelines for the reading access accommodation, the student’s score may be invalidated and the score will not be counted in the overall assessment results.

I heard only 6-10 percent of students with disabilities qualify for this accommodation. Where did this number come from?

The [Reading Access White Paper](#) explains the reading access accommodation. It states that 1-1.5 percent of the total tested population should qualify for this accommodation. Approximately 15 percent of Ohio students have disabilities. Since only students with disabilities may receive this accommodation and 1-1.5 percent of the total population may qualify, then statistically in Ohio, 6-10 percent of students with disabilities may qualify for the reading access accommodation.

Do we need to have special permission from the Ohio Department of Education to provide the reading access accommodation?

No. IEP teams and 504 plan coordinators determine who needs the accommodation and documents it on the IEP or 504 plans. No permission is required from the department.

Why is read aloud an accessibility feature for mathematics, science and social studies but considered an accommodation for very few students for English language arts?

This is because of what each test measures. The mathematics, science and social studies tests do not assess students on their ability to read. Therefore, read aloud is an accessibility feature because reading ability should not be a barrier for any student to show what they know and can do in these content areas. On the English language arts test, a student's ability to read is being directly assessed so no part can be read to a student unless they qualify for the reading access accommodation.

Why can't I read the questions and answers but not the passages to students like we used to on the OAA and OGT?

All elements of the new English language arts test are considered part of the assessment instrument and therefore reading any part of the English language arts test to a student who does not qualify for the reading access accommodation will invalidate the test. The reading access accommodation for the English language arts test is "all or none."

When is it appropriate for a human reader to provide a read aloud on a computer based test?

Only in rare cases is a human reader appropriate for computer-based testing. Documented student need and not teacher or school preference or unsupported ideas of what might benefit students determines who receives a human reader. Students who read lips or students who are physically unable to navigate the online testing environment are example situations when a human reader might be appropriate. To provide a human reader for a student who is "easily distracted" in order to "keep them on task" is generally not justified. Instead, test administrators should redirect students who need help staying on task to the test as needed. Noise buffers, study carrels and small group administrations are other strategies that may be used. Information collected during the field test shows that students who take the test on the computer are more engaged by the testing platform than students who take the paper and pencil test.

Can we give the paper and pencil version of the test instead of the computer-based test to students with disabilities?

The department does not recommend districts and schools give paper tests to students with disabilities when all other students are taking the tests on computers. First, it is an issue of equity. Districts and schools should not deny students with disabilities an opportunity that they afford other students without disabilities. Second, information we received during the field test indicates that computer-based testing is better for students, especially students with disabilities. There are many more accessibility features embedded into the online platform than can similarly be provided for paper and pencil. We know from post-test feedback, surveys and cognitive labs during the field test that students, including students with disabilities, prefer the online testing roughly 2 to 1 over paper testing. Students with disabilities specifically were more engaged, liked the format (for example, having the reading passage on the same screen as each question), and appreciated the embedded tools such as flagging responses for later review and masking.

There are specific scenarios when students should take paper and pencil tests instead of computer-based tests. In the case of students with disabilities, only students who truly need paper and pencil testing due to their disabilities should. Please refer to [Appendix A: Accessibility Features and Accommodations for Students Taking the Paper-Based Assessments](#) for cases when a paper version of the test may be appropriate.

How do we document read aloud on the IEP or 504 plan?

All statewide and district-wide testing information for students with disabilities is documented in section 12 of the IEP or the testing section of the 504 plan. Allowable testing accommodations must always be documented. Accessibility features and some administrative considerations (for example, small group administration), are not

required to be documented on the IEP or 504 plan since they are allowed for all students. However, the department recommends that IEP teams and 504 plan coordinators include accessibility features and administrative considerations into IEPs and 504 plans to ensure that students receive them during testing. Including accessibility features and administrative considerations on IEP and 504 plans also helps schools plan for testing needs in advance and provides information for future IEP teams and 504 plan coordinators about what students used during previous testing.

“Read aloud” is a general term that includes both text-to-speech and human read aloud. If IEP teams or 504 plan coordinators write read aloud into an IEP or 504 plan, it can refer to either mode of delivery. However, it is recommended that IEP teams and 504 plan coordinators be specific about this testing accommodation and specify text-to-speech or human read aloud.

If we have accommodations listed in the IEP or 504 plan but it has been determined that the student no longer qualifies for the accommodation or the accommodation no longer applies, do we need to update the IEP or 504 plan?

IEP teams or 504 plan coordinators must document accommodations in the IEP or 504 plan to be allowable and should update IEPs or 504 plans to be accurate if a student no longer qualifies for an accommodation. If a student qualified for read aloud on the OAA or OGT reading test but no longer qualifies for the accommodation on the new English language arts test, then that change must be made. If a test administrator provides an accommodation to a student on a test that the student does not qualify for or is not allowable, even if IEP teams or 504 plan coordinators documented it on the IEP or 504 plan, the test will be invalid. For example, on the OAA/OGT reading tests, the rules did not permit test administrators to read passages aloud to students. Even if the IEP or 504 plan stated that a test administrator would read the passages to a student, if the test administrator read the passage, the test was invalid. If a student no longer qualifies for read aloud on the new English language arts test, even if it is on the IEP or 504 plan, the test is invalid if it is read to the student.

If a human provides the read aloud, is there a read aloud script?

No. Read aloud scripts are not available for any of Ohio’s New State Tests. Human readers providing the read aloud accommodation must refer to [Appendix B: Test Administration Protocol for the Human Reader Accommodation for English Language Arts/Literacy Assessments, and the Human Reader Accessibility Feature for Mathematics Assessments](#) for administrative guidance. This appendix should also be used when providing a human read aloud for the science and social studies tests.

Human readers should refer to [Appendix I: PARCC ELA Audio Guidelines](#) and [Appendix J: PARCC Mathematics Audio Guidelines](#) for specifics on how to read the tests. The guidelines for English language arts and mathematics also apply to the science and social studies tests. For example, guidelines on how to read maps and timelines can be found in the English language arts audio guidelines and information on how to read symbols and tables can be found in the mathematics guidelines.

Can we group students to receive a human read aloud (including oral language translation)?

Yes. Both PearsonAccess Next (for English language arts and mathematics) and TIDE (for science and social studies) allow for schools to group students in order to provide human read aloud and oral language translations. Please refer to the test coordinator’s manuals for each testing system for details.

If students receive a human read aloud in a group, is there a maximum number of students allowed in the group?

No. Ohio does not set a specific number of students for testing groups. We recommend that small groups typically contain two to eight students. When providing a human read aloud, the reader must read the entire test in a linear fashion, like a recording. This means the reader must read at a speed that is slow enough for the slowest workers. The reader must present the test at the same rate to all students. This can be challenging for groups with mixed abilities.

If a school is administering paper and pencil tests, can students with disabilities take the tests on a computer?

Yes. In the same way that some students might take the paper and pencil test due to their unique needs, if a student is unable to take the paper and pencil tests effectively, the student may take the test on a computer when other students are taking paper and pencil tests. This would be analogous to the word processor method used on the OAA and OGT. Students who use text-to-speech during daily instruction would benefit from this allowance.

So how does the text-to-speech feature work?

Text-to-speech is student directed. Students can choose to have the text read to them in a linear fashion by clicking on the text-to-speech icon. They also can highlight words or phrases and only have the selection read to them. The two testing systems, PearsonAccess Next and the AIR Student Testing Site, work slightly different from each other. Students should have opportunities to become familiar with each system prior to testing. Practice for the English language arts and mathematics tests can be located at <http://parcc.pearson.com/>. Practice for the science and social studies tests can be located at <http://oh.portal.airast.org/ocba>. In order to use the science and social studies text-to-speech features, students must access the practice tests using the AIR Secure Brower or App. Additional resources for practicing with online tools can be located at http://www.pearltrees.com/brandi_young/infohio-skills-online-testing/id12112629.