

The Ultimate Guide to Classroom, Testing, and Real-Life Accommodations

The Complete Guide to Dyscalculia
Accommodations: What to Ask For, Why It Works,
and How to Advocate





Accommodations 101

What They Are, Why They Matter, and How to Use Them with Confidence

◆ What Are Accommodations (and How Are They Different from Modifications)?

Let's clear this up right away—because schools mix this up all the time.

- **Accommodations** change how your child learns or shows what they know.
- **Modifications** change what they're expected to learn.

For example:

-  Giving a child a calculator is an accommodation.
-  Replacing multi-digit division with single-digit problems is a modification.

Accommodations do not lower the bar.

They remove the barriers that make it harder for your child to reach it.

✦ **Parent Tip:** If your child has average or above-average intelligence but still struggles with math, they likely need accommodations—not modifications.

◆ *Why Accommodations Are Not a Crutch (And Why Some Teachers Still Think They Are)*

**Here's the mindset shift:
Accommodations are not “help.” They're access.**

Think about it like this:

- Glasses don't give an unfair advantage to someone with poor eyesight.
- Ramps don't “spoil” someone who uses a wheelchair.
- And notecards or extended time don't “give away answers.”
- They just level the playing field.

Some educators may unintentionally resist accommodations because:

- They don't understand dyscalculia.
- They assume struggling students just need to “try harder.”
- Or they fear it's unfair to others.
- This is where your clarity and calm confidence will make all the difference.

◆ *The Legal Side: What the Law Actually Says*

Your child has a legal right to accommodations under both federal and state law.

There are two main pathways:

- **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act** → for students with any documented disability that impacts learning
- **IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)** → for students who qualify for Special Education Services and receive an IEP

■ **What both laws guarantee:**

Your child has the right to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)—which includes the supports needed to access learning equally.

If a disability (like dyscalculia) affects your child's ability to participate in math, accommodations must be provided to remove those barriers.

◆ *When to Request Accommodations (And How to Start)*

You don't have to wait for a major problem to request support. In fact, earlier is better.

Signs it's time to request accommodations:

- Your child is spending hours on math and still failing
 - They melt down during homework or tests
 - They know the concept, but can't complete the problems fast enough
 - Their anxiety is impacting their confidence or mental health
-

✍️ *How to Start the Process (in Plain English)*

Here's a simple sentence to get you started:

"I'm concerned about how my child is doing in math, and I believe they may benefit from formal accommodations. I'd like to request a meeting to discuss options under a 504 plan or IEP, and I'm happy to provide any documentation needed."





The Brain Science Behind Dyscalculia & Accommodations

Why These Supports Work—and Why Your Child Isn't "Just Bad at Math"

When a child with dyscalculia struggles in math, it's not because they're lazy or not trying hard enough. It's because their brain processes numerical information differently—and without the right supports, they're being asked to climb a mountain with no rope.

This section will give you a deeper understanding of why accommodations are so essential—and how they directly support the neurological and emotional realities your child is facing.

Dyscalculia and Working Memory: Why They Freeze Mid-Problem

Children with dyscalculia often have significant working memory challenges, especially when it comes to numerical and sequential information.

Working memory is like your brain's whiteboard.

For kids with dyscalculia, the marker dries up quickly—and the numbers start to slide right off the board.

What this means in real time:

- They may understand the concept one minute—and totally blank the next.
- They lose track of steps in multi-step problems.
- They struggle to hold numbers in their mind long enough to complete operations.

How accommodations help:

- ✓ Notecards, formula sheets, guided examples = working memory scaffolds
- ✓ Chunked steps and visuals reduce overload
- ✓ Repetition and review reduce forgetting under pressure



Processing Speed: It's Not About Being “Slow,” It's About Needing Time

Many kids with dyscalculia have normal or above-average intelligence—but their brain needs more time to process numerical relationships.

When we rush them, they shut down.

When we slow it down, they shine.

How accommodations help:

- ✓ Extended time takes away the race
- ✓ Reduced problem sets allow for accuracy without panic
- ✓ Oral responses or multi-modal explanations allow thinking to show through even if handwriting slows them down

Cognitive Load: Why They Can't Just “Focus More”

Cognitive load refers to how much your brain can juggle at one time.

For students with dyscalculia, math tasks often exceed their mental bandwidth—especially when you stack word problems, visual layout, operations, and vocabulary on top of each other. Imagine trying to solve a puzzle while the pieces keep sliding off the table. That's what math can feel like.

How accommodations help:

- ✓ Visual supports (charts, color coding, step-by-step layouts) reduce the burden
- ✓ Manipulatives make abstract concepts concrete
- ✓ Strategic breaks and guided setups help them reset before overload hits



★ Math Anxiety: The Hidden Barrier That Makes Everything Harder

Dyscalculia and anxiety are a two-way street:

- The more they struggle, the more anxious they feel
- The more anxious they feel, the harder it is to access what they do know

This can show up as:

- Avoidance
- Test panic
- Outbursts or shutdowns during math class
- Perfectionism or total disengagement

How accommodations help:

- ✓ Calm, supported testing environments reduce panic
- ✓ Self-created supports like notecards build confidence
- ✓ Breaking problems into bite-sized pieces creates momentum

🧠 Parent Insight:

You're not just asking for accommodations to make math easier.
You're asking for them because they are a neurologically appropriate response to a brain that works differently.



Signature Accommodations (with Deep Dives)

What to Ask For—and How to Explain Why It Matters

Not all accommodations are created equal. These are the most powerful, research-backed accommodations that consistently support students with dyscalculia. For each one, you'll learn:

- ✓ What it is
- ✓ Why it works (with brain-based reasoning)
- ✓ How to explain it in a meeting
- ✓ How to tell if it's helping

1. Student-Created Notecard for Tests

What it is:

A small (typically 3x5") handwritten notecard made by the student, allowed during math assessments.

Why it works:

- Reduces working memory overload
- Promotes active review and metacognition
- Eases math anxiety during testing
- Empowers students to feel in control of their learning

How to explain it:

"My child struggles with memory retrieval and working through multi-step problems. Creating a notecard helps them internalize strategies and gives them an anchor during tests."

How to use:

- One example problem (fully worked out)
- Key formulas or steps
- Personal cues or tricks they've practiced
- Student must write it themselves

2. Use of Calculator When Conceptual Understanding Is the Goal

What it is:

- Use of a calculator for classwork or tests—not for basic facts, but for multistep or conceptual problems.

Why it works:

- Reduces the strain of slow fact retrieval
- Allows student to demonstrate conceptual mastery
- Builds confidence and reduces avoidance

How to explain it:

- “My child understands the concept, but calculation delays get in the way of showing what they know. A calculator helps isolate their true understanding.”

3. Access to Formula Sheets or Reference Charts

What it is:

- A math “cheat sheet” that includes visual cues, key vocabulary, and step-by-step strategies.

Why it works:

- Supports long-term retrieval in students with memory or language difficulties
- Reduces anxiety by offloading cognitive load

How to explain it:

- “My child struggles to recall procedures under pressure. Having a reference tool helps them access what they’ve learned.”

4. Chunked Assignments and Tests

What it is:

Breaking down tasks or tests into smaller parts (e.g., 5 questions at a time instead of 20).

Why it works:

- Reduces cognitive fatigue and overwhelm
- Improves focus and task persistence
- Makes feedback loops faster and more effective

How to explain it:

“My child gets overwhelmed when given too much at once. Chunking helps them manage their focus and stamina.”

5. Oral or Visual Explanations Instead of Written Work

What it is:

- Allowing the student to explain math verbally or visually, rather than in writing.

Why it works:

- Supports students with fine motor, language, or dysgraphia overlap
- Allows for more accurate assessment of conceptual understanding

How to explain it:

- “My child knows how to solve the problem, but writing slows them down or gets in the way. An oral or video response better reflects what they actually know.”

✦ 6. Manipulatives and Visual Models

What it is:

- Using hands-on tools or visual aids like base-10 blocks, fraction bars, or algebra tiles.

Why it works:

- Grounds abstract concepts in something concrete
- Aligns with the CRA model (Concrete → Representational → Abstract)

How to explain it:

- “My child needs to see and touch math before they can internalize it. Manipulatives help bridge that gap.”

🔴 7. Reduced Problem Sets

What it is:

- Completing fewer problems that still demonstrate mastery (e.g., 10 well-done problems instead of 30)

Why it works:

- Avoids fatigue, frustration, and burnout
- Focuses on quality over quantity
- Preserves time for feedback and reteaching

How to explain it:

- “My child can show mastery with fewer problems. This prevents frustration and keeps them engaged.”

🔧 8. Extended Time for Classwork and Assessments

What it is:

- Allowing more time to complete math work without penalty.

Why it works:

- Supports students with processing speed delays
- Reduces panic and promotes accuracy
- Allows more room for self-monitoring

How to explain it:

- “My child can complete the work—but they need more time to process and plan. Without that, they shut down or make mistakes they wouldn’t otherwise make.”

✦ **BONUS TIP: Stack Accommodations Strategically**

These work even better when paired:

- Notecard + chunked test + extended time
- Manipulatives + oral explanation + fewer problems
- Calculator + visual reference sheet + quiet testing room



Tiered Accommodations Menu by Grade Band

What to Ask For at Every Stage of Your Child's Math Journey

This menu blends developmental needs with research-backed strategies. You'll find:

- Instructional supports
- Testing accommodations
- Executive function tools
- Assistive tech suggestions
- Grade-specific scaffolds All aligned with current best practices for dyscalculia from K–12.

Organized by grade band, this makes it easy for parents to locate exactly what accommodations fit your child's developmental and academic needs.



Grades K–2: Foundations for Numeracy

Focus: Visual-spatial
skills, concrete
number sense,
anxiety prevention,
structure

Instructional Supports

- Use of manipulatives (counters, cubes, rekenreks, base-10 blocks)
- Color-coded materials for place value, operation signs, multi-step steps
- Number paths and visual-tactile number lines (floor tape, finger tracing)
- Step-by-step verbal directions with modeling
- CRA Model: hands-on → pictures → numbers
- Use of songs, rhythm, and finger counting for fact development
- Number talks and choral counting to build fluency
- Oral instruction paired with visuals and demonstrations

Testing Supports

- One-on-one or small group assessments
- Allow student to respond orally or through manipulatives
- Flexible response formats (drawings, pointing, matching)
- Read-aloud of all instructions and word problems
- Break tests into short segments
- Extended Time/No timed tests

Classroom/Homework

- Reduce problems per page (3–5 max)
- Provide guided examples for homework
- Math centers for skills reinforcement
- Use of visual aids (charts, mats, posters)

EF/Processing Support

- Visual schedules with icons
- Work/break timers (e.g., 10 min work, 5 min movement)
- Step checklists with simple icons (scaffolding independence)
- Movement-integrated tasks (write the number, then jump it out!)
- Frequent feedback and verbal praise

Tools

- Enlarged paper with clear spacing
- Finger-counting visuals, visual 10-frames
- Magnetic numbers, felt boards, touch math
- Rekenreks, tactile number lines, felt numbers
- High-contrast visuals for number concepts
- Audio math stories (for patterns, shapes, time)



Grades 3–5: Strategic Fluency

Focus: Building on
foundations,
learning strategies,
reducing anxiety,
supporting
metacognition

Instructional Supports

- Anchor charts for math vocab & operations
- Step-by-step templates for problem solving
- CRA continued with base-10, fraction models, arrays
- Math strategy notebooks or journals
- Use of visual aids (multiplication charts, fraction strips)
- Daily preview and reteach of math vocabulary with visuals
- Color-coding for place value and regrouping steps
- Sentence frames for explaining math thinking

Testing Supports

- Student-created notecard with worked examples
- Access to number lines, visuals, and fraction bars
- Small group setting with extended time
- Give partial credit for correct setup even if computation is incorrect
- Use of manipulatives during assessments (if conceptually appropriate)
- Option to read problems aloud or explain answers orally

Classroom/Homework

- Reduced assignments with mastery focus (e.g., 10 problems instead of 30)
- Option to explain verbally, via video, or typed
- Sentence stems or graphic organizers for math writing
- Highlighted key words in word problems
- Chunking of multi-step problems into guided phases

EF/Processing Support

- Color-coded cue cards or graphic organizers
- Math checklists: “Did I read it? Did I draw it? Did I solve it?”
- Timed work bursts followed by self-check
- Visual “math maps” for multi-step procedures

Tools

- Multiplication apps/games for low-pressure fluency
- Dry erase boards for scratch work
- Foldables, flipbooks, or interactive notebooks
- Digital visual manipulatives (Math Learning Center, Brainiaccamp)
- Graph paper, math grid paper
- Fraction strips, area tiles, fact triangles

 Instructional Supports

- CRA for decimals, percents, and intro to algebra
- Worked examples + color-coded steps
- Access to reference cards for formulas and vocabulary
- Interactive notebooks with guided templates
- Metacognitive scaffolds: think-alouds, check-yourself rubrics
- Re-teaching time built into weekly schedule
- Preview of vocabulary and task structure before instruction

 Testing Supports

- Notecard with worked examples, vocabulary, and formulas
- Access to calculator (except where basic computation is the objective)
- Extended time (1.5x to 2x)
- Reduced items, with alternate demonstrations (charts, visuals, oral)
- Use of scratch paper, graph paper, and workspace organizers
- Small group or distraction-reduced room
- Option to respond in writing, audio, or typed format

 Classroom/Homework

- Modified expectations (e.g., choose 5 out of 10 problems)
- Multimodal response options (typed, oral, sketched)
- Homework in smaller chunks with embedded examples
- Project-based assessments instead of timed tests
- Google Slides with drag-and-drop components
- Visual scaffolds for equation building

 EF/Processing Support

- Planner scaffolds (e.g., “What do I need? When is it due?”)
- Explicit self-monitoring tools and checklists
- Peer editing or math study buddy system
- Digital reminders and guided workspace setup
- Color-coded organizers for solving expressions or equations
- Check-in meetings with case manager or mentor teacher
- Digital planner tools: Notion, Google Calendar, or custom tracker

 Tools

- Graphing software (Desmos, GeoGebra)
- Algebra tiles, geometry shape cutouts
- Screen readers for word problems
- Timers and virtual math notebooks



Grades 6–8: Concrete to Abstract Thinking

Focus: Decimals,
ratios,
proportions,
negative
numbers, pre-
algebra,
executive
function

Instructional Supports

- Personalized examples in notes (previous tests/homework corrections)
- Flipped lessons or video-based re-teaching
- Access to formulas and solved problems during lessons
- Scaffolded guided notes with visual supports
- Pre-access to complex word problems with time to annotate
- CRA principles applied to algebra, geometry, trig, and statistics
- Use of assistive tech for modeling and real-world application

Testing Supports

- Extended time (2x time standard in some cases)
- Small group testing with calming accommodations
- Notecard (student-created and teacher-approved) with formulas and examples
- Calculator allowed unless computation skill is primary goal
- Use of colored pencils or highlighting to organize multi-step problems
- Pre-approved reference sheets for standardized exams (if allowed)
- Alternative assessment options (project, oral defense, visual model)

Classroom/Homework

- Project-based learning alternatives
- Option to present math concepts orally or visually
- Reduced problem sets with full-credit options
- Clarified rubrics and exemplars
- Open-note or take-home quizzes

EF/Processing Support

- Time management coaching (e.g., Google Calendar, paper planner hybrid)
- Task initiation strategies (e.g., “start with easiest problem”)
- Metacognitive tracking (error logs, what went well/what didn’t reflections)
- One-on-one check-ins with learning specialist or case manager

Tools

- Desmos, WolframAlpha for graphing & computation
- Voice-to-text or screen reading for word problems
- Math Glossaries, visual study guides
- Access to digital formula banks + equation viewers



Grades 9–12: Advanced Application + Independence

Focus: Complex equations, math as gatekeeper, neurodiversity and real-world performance

 **Reminder: Accommodations are not “cheating”—they’re what make math possible for a brain that processes differently. Whether your child is 6 or 16, these tools are designed to unlock their brilliance, not lower expectations.**



How to Advocate for These Accommodations

Confidently Communicate, Request, and Follow Through

✓ When and Why to Request Accommodations

- Your child is working harder than peers but still falling behind
- Math is a source of daily stress, anxiety, or frustration
- There's a diagnosis or observation of a learning difference (even if informal)
- Accommodations have been tried, but aren't documented or fully effective

✍️ How to Request Accommodations

Start by requesting a meeting to discuss support options. Use language that is calm, assertive, and specific.

"I'm concerned about how my child is doing in math, and I believe they may benefit from formal accommodations. I'd like to request a meeting to discuss options under a 504 plan or IEP, and I'm happy to provide any documentation needed. Please let me know the next steps."

📌 Tips:

- Attach a list of specific accommodations you're requesting
- Bring samples of classwork, test scores, or behavior notes
- Remain calm, factual, and focused on your child's needs

● What to Do When the School Pushes Back

You may hear objections. Here's how to respond confidently and keep the conversation moving:

- - “They don’t qualify.” → Ask for a formal evaluation and written explanation
- - “We already do that.” → Ask for it to be written into the plan
- - “We don’t allow that.” → Ask what supports are offered instead
- - “They’re doing fine.” → Use your observations and emotional feedback, not just grades



✨ *Pro Tip: If you feel dismissed, ask for a follow-up meeting or bring a support person. In many states, you're also allowed to record meetings (check your local laws).*

How to Track Whether Accommodations Are Being Used

Create a simple log to track usage and effectiveness:

- - Date accommodations were used
- - Notes on what worked or what was skipped
- - Your child's feedback or experience

Questions to ask your child:

- - “Did you get extra time on your test today?”
- - “Did you use your notecard or calculator?”
- - “Did the teacher give reminders or chunk the work?”

What to Do If the Plan Isn't Working

If accommodations aren't being followed or aren't helping, it's time to adjust:

- - Request a follow-up meeting to revise the plan
- - Bring updated examples of what's not working
- - Add measurable goals or check-ins to monitor progress
- - Consider bringing in an educational advocate or outside expert



Your Advocacy Roadmap

Next Steps to Get
Support In Place—And
Keep It There



✓ What You Now Have in Your Toolkit

- A clear understanding of what accommodations are (and aren't)
- Brain-based reasons behind the supports your child needs
- A grade-level breakdown of recommended accommodations
- Scripts, strategies, and checklists to advocate effectively
- A plan to track, revise, and improve your child's support system

✦ What to Do Next (Action Checklist)

- ☐ Schedule a meeting to review or initiate accommodations
- ☐ Print or bring your top-requested supports from this guide
- ☐ Ask for a written plan that outlines accommodations
- ☐ Follow up 4–6 weeks later to monitor progress
- ☐ Keep copies of everything in your advocacy binder
- ☐ Revisit this guide often—it's your reference, not a one-time read

💬 Remember This

*"You are not being difficult. You are being diligent.
Your child deserves access to learning that matches how they think, grow, and shine.
And no matter what the system says—you **are** the expert on your child."*



Your Personalized Advocacy Plan



A Guided Reflection to Help You Take
the First Step

✓ What I've Learned

3 things that surprised me or changed how I think about
my child's learning needs:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

🎯 What My Child Needs

Based on this guide, I believe my child needs support
with:

- ☐ Working memory
- ☐ Math anxiety
- ☐ Processing speed
- ☐ Multi-step problem solving
- ☐ Executive functioning

My top 3 accommodation priorities are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

✉ My Advocacy Action Plan

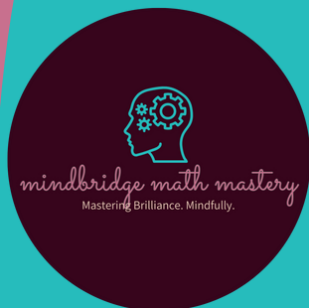
- ☐ Schedule a 504/IEP meeting
- ☐ Submit a written request for accommodations
- ☐ Track how current accommodations are being used
- ☐ Follow up on previous plan
- ☐ Ask for a formal evaluation

Planned action: _____

Target date: _____

💬 Final Encouragement

*"When I feel nervous, I will remind myself
that advocating isn't confrontation—it's
protection. I'm not demanding special
treatment. I'm asking for access. And I don't
have to know everything—I just have to
speak up."*



Supporting Your Child with Dyscalculia: The Ultimate Accommodations Guide

Need help advocating for your child's support plan?

• Scan the QR code or visit [mindbridgemath.com](https://www.mindbridgemath.com)



© 2025 MindBridge Math Mastery

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