

Guidance for Parents/Guardians, Case Conference Committees (CCC), and 504 teams Regarding Read Aloud for Students in Grades 3-12

What is Read Aloud for Assessment?

Read aloud is when the content of an assessment is read to a student. Read aloud can be provided through text-to-speech in a computer-based assessment or it can be provided by a human reader who is trained and qualified. For a computer-administered assessment, the CCC should consider whether text-to-speech is preferable to a human reader (or vice versa) and list this in each student's individualized education plan (IEP) or 504 plan (e.g., "text-to-speech is preferable, but human reader is acceptable"). On a paper and pencil test, it must be provided by a human reader.

Who can have a Read Aloud? The Read Aloud accommodation for students with disabilities is an accommodation available for the ELA portion of ILEARN (references to ILEARN include ISTEP+) that is to be identified by a student's CCC or 504 team in advance of testing. *It is an accommodation that is appropriate for a relatively small number of students to meet their particular needs.*

This Guidance is offered to support parents/guardians, CCCs, and 504 teams in making decisions that will ensure that state assessments support learning for all students.

Questions to be answered by a student's teacher and to be answered separately by a student her/himself

The questions provided here can assist IEP decision-making teams in determining whether it is appropriate to indicate that students in grades 3-12 should be provided the reading passages for an ELA reading assessment via a text-to-speech or human read aloud accommodation. The questions should be answered by the student's teachers, and by the student himself or herself. Then, the CCC or 504 team should consider the two sets of provided answers, *as well as* other diagnostic information to make a decision about the provision of text-to-speech or read aloud accommodations for ILEARN ELA reading assessment.

Table 1. Guiding Questions with Explanatory Information:

Student Name:

Teacher:

*Responses in **shaded boxes** may indicate a need for the text-to-speech or human reader accommodation for reading comprehension. A **majority of positive indications** should exist rather than one or two marks in the shaded boxes for students to receive the accommodation in grades 3-12 for ELA reading passages. It is assumed that corporations and schools are supporting literacy practices for successful readers as part of daily instruction.*

Question	Yes	No	Comments
<p>1. Does the student have an identified reading disability or health issue that affects the student's decoding, fluency, or comprehension skills?</p> <p>A reading-based disability may affect a student's ability to decode, read with fluency, understand text that is decoded, or a combination of these. Determining the nature of the student's reading challenges can help determine the appropriate intervention approaches, as well as needed accommodations during classroom instruction and during assessments.</p> <p>Having a reading-based disability means that there is strong evidence of the persistence of the disability despite intensive, targeted instruction. There should be documentation of the interventions used and formative assessment data on the effect of each intervention. Evidence of a reading-based disability should have been documented in grades K-2 and reflected in such difficulties as difficulty learning letters or letter sounds, difficulty in learning sight words, and difficulty in phoneme blending. These and other data (for example, student work) should be reviewed by the CCC or 504 team to consider the access effects of the use of the accommodation. The text-to-speech or read aloud accommodation is meant to provide access to the text, not make up for being a slow reader. Being a slow reader does not mean that the student should receive the text-to-speech or read aloud accommodation for the ILEARN ELA reading assessment in grades 3-12.</p>			

<p>2. <i>Have interventions been used over time (e.g., several years) to improve the student's decoding, fluency, or comprehension skills? If so, what approaches have been used to strengthen the student's decoding, fluency, or comprehension skills?</i></p> <p>Documentation of the approaches that have been taken to strengthen the student's decoding, fluency, or comprehension skills is an important step in determining whether a text-to-speech or read aloud accommodation is needed. This documentation should include specific dates with progress monitoring data and interventions implemented. It should demonstrate that continuous, intensive interventions have not been successful in improving student decoding, fluency, or comprehension performance. Only if this can be demonstrated should the text-to-speech or read aloud accommodation be considered for the student.</p>			
<p>3. <i>Does the student use text-to-speech or receive a read aloud accommodation during instruction?</i></p> <p>Students with significant disability-related barriers to accessing text usually have demonstrated these barriers over an extended period. As a result, for instructional purposes, they have used the text-to-speech or read aloud accommodation during instruction to gain access to text. They also may have membership in an organization such as Bookshare, or regularly use assistive technology software to provide them access to text. If the student has not been provided these types of accommodations during instruction, they should not be provided during the assessment.</p>			
<p>4. <i>Does the student use text-to-speech or receive the human reader accommodation during formative assessments?</i></p> <p>Another indicator of the need for text-to-speech or read aloud for the ILEARN ELA reading passages is that the student regularly receives the accommodation during formative assessments.</p>			

<p>If a student receives text-to-speech or read aloud for instruction but not for formative assessments, it is likely that the student does not need text-to-speech or read aloud for the ILEARN ELA reading passages.</p>			
<p>5. <i>Does someone (e.g., teacher, paraprofessional, another student, parent) regularly read aloud to the student in school?</i></p> <p>A possible supporting indicator of the need for text-to-speech or the read aloud accommodation is that the student typically is read to instead of the student reading for himself or herself. This indicator should be used with caution. It should not just be because students with disabilities are typically provided text-to-speech or a read aloud accommodation. Instead, it should be that someone reads aloud to the student, rather than the student reading for himself or herself, because it has been determined that the student will lack access to important information due to significant barriers to decoding, fluency, or comprehension. Even when this is the case, it does not necessarily mean that the student should receive the text-to-speech or read aloud accommodation for ILEARN grade 3-8 ELA. There is a risk that some students who are regularly read aloud to in school may not have had appropriate access to high-quality reading instruction; this needs to be ruled out when using read aloud in school as a supporting indicator. Further, instruction should always strive to increase the student’s independent reading.</p>			
<p>6. <i>Is this student recently blind or does this student have a significant visual impairment? If so, is the student learning to read braille?</i></p> <p>A student who is learning to read braille should be assessed in Grades 3-12 with the braille form of the assessment, so that an accurate measure of his or her reading and comprehension skills is obtained. If the student has not learned to read braille, providing the ILEARN ELA reading assessment passages through text-to-speech or read aloud is appropriate.</p>			

<p>7. <i>Is the student an English language learner?</i></p> <p>An English language learner (ELL) is a student who is learning how to read while he or she is learning English. It is important to obtain an accurate measure of his or her decoding and skills in English as the student learns the language, which may take several years. Thus, being an ELL is not a sole reason to receive text-to-speech or a read aloud accommodation for the LEARN ELA reading passages. If the student learning English also has a reading-based disability (as defined in Question 1) or is blind, then the considerations for those disabilities would apply.</p> <p>Only students with an IEP or 504 accommodation plan are eligible to receive the text-to-speech or read aloud accommodation.</p>			
<p>8. <i>Does the student have other needs that might be accommodated by the provision of the text-to-speech or read aloud accommodation?</i></p> <p>In the past, some educators attempted to monitor the pace at which a student went through an assessment by providing the read aloud accommodation. Pacing involved adjusting how fast the administrator read an item, the punctuation used as he or she read, and how much time was provided between each item to allow the student to respond. This is not an appropriate reason to provide the text-to-speech or read aloud accommodation because it masks what the assessment is assessing. Sometimes a student who is not blind or does not have a significant visual impairment, or does not have a reading-based disability, has a disability that may have produced a situation where the child ended up lagging in his or her reading skills. This should be addressed through instruction rather than the assessment. It is important that students with other learning needs not be provided the text-to-speech or read aloud accommodations for the ELA reading passages. CCC and 504 teams should recognize that beginning readers struggle for a variety of reasons. Thus, the team must use student data on the effect of the accommodation during instruction to decide whether the child's struggles are due to the disability. By only offering the text-to-speech and read aloud accommodations to those students with true reading-based disabilities or blindness (for those who have not learned braille) and not providing to students with other learning needs, the assessment system can provide data and information for students with other disabilities needs to have missing skills addressed.</p>			

Although test accommodations should generally be consistent with accommodations used for instruction, **the use of a read aloud accommodation during instruction does not automatically qualify a student to receive the same accommodation on an ILEARN ELA**, *unless* the student meets the criteria described in the Table 1.

CCCs and 504 teams are encouraged to make consistent, appropriate, and defensible decisions regarding the use of read aloud accommodations for each student based on locally administered diagnostic assessments, and to amend the IEPs and 504 plans of students who have been previously designated for read aloud accommodations, but who do not meet the criteria listed in Table 1.