The Difference Between

ACCOMMODATIONS and MODIFICATIONS

Accommodations are instructional or test adaptations. They allow the student to demonstrate what he or she knows without fundamentally changing the target skill that's being taught in the classroom or measured in testing situations*. Accommodations do not reduce learning or performance expectations that we might hold for students*. More specifically, they change the manner or setting in which information is presented or the manner in which students respond. But they do not change the target skill or the testing construct.

For example: a student with a learning disability in reading may have difficulty reading the content and/or the questions on a history test. Therefore, he may not be able to demonstrate what he knows through reading, so a teacher or a test administrator may read the test aloud to him.

Another example: a student with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) who might not be able to concentrate on a classroom assignment if multiple distractions are present may be allowed work in a separate setting.

In both of these examples, a change of presentation or a change of setting enables the students to demonstrate what they know without lowering the learning expectations, and *without lowering the performance expectations or changing the complexity of the target skill* being taught or measured.

Generally, a large number of accommodations can be grouped into five categories:

- **Timing.** For example, giving a student extended time to complete a task or a test item.
- **Flexible scheduling.** For example, giving a student two days instead of one day to complete a project.
- **Accommodated presentation of the material**, meaning material is presented to the student in a fashion that's different from a more traditional fashion.
- **Setting,** which includes things like completing the task or test in a quiet room or in a small group with others.
- **Response accommodation**, which means having the student respond perhaps orally or through a scribe.

Modifications *actually do change that target skill or the construct of interest*. They often reduce learning expectations or affect the content in such a way that what is being taught or tested is fundamentally changed.

Modifications are instructional or test adaptations that allow the student to demonstrate what he knows or can do, but they also reduce the target skill in some way. So if a child is provided with a modification, generally it will lower the performance expectations, and a modification may do that by reducing the number of items required or the complexity of the items or the task required. In essence, a student doesn't demonstrate what he knows or can do in that target skill or that content because the modification changes it to such a degree that the student's product no longer represents what we think it does.

Another way of thinking about this is that the inferences we make about what a student really knows end up being inaccurate, and we may unintentionally overestimate the knowledge and skills that the student actually has.

Three dangers when modifying (and there are probably more):

- First, if we confuse the two and we make changes to the target skill, we end up with incorrect assumptions about what a student truly knows.
- Second, if we provide students with modifications, we're more than likely to reduce our expectations for them. But if we hold all students to the same performance expectations while providing access to the content, through use of accommodations, then we can maintain those similar expectations for students.
- And finally, by providing modifications instead of accommodations, we limit students' opportunity to learn and possibly contribute to learned helplessness in future work environments because we reduce our expectations of kids when we provide them with modifications or "crutches," if you will, around the content.

Teachers, parents, and other people will make an inference about a student's performance such as, for example, "She is proficient at multiplication," or "He understands the process of osmosis." But if that student demonstrates that skill and/or that knowledge with help of a modification, then that inference we make is incorrect.

But if the student demonstrates his skill and knowledge while using an accommodation, then our inferences are, in fact, correct or accurate. Parents and students also need to know that in high-stakes test situations such as state\provincial tests, modifications automatically invalidate a student's score, and this has very negative consequences for students. Parents and students also need to know that in advance of a testing situation. It is also important for students to understand the difference so that they can self-advocate for accommodations as opposed to modifications.

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Taken from:

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http://www.ncld.org/students-disabilities/accommodations-education/accommodations-vs-modifications-whats-difference