

Template for Requesting Accommodations From Tournaments



Created by 1AC-CESSIBILITY

Visit lac-cessibility.com for more information.

For ideas about possible accommodations in speech and debate [visit this page](#).

Email one.ac.cessible@gmail.com with questions.

Published September 5th, 2021

A few notes on requesting accommodations to disabled participants and parents

Requesting accommodations is an important part of accessibility.

There are a lot of legal complexities to understand with the Americans with Disabilities Act (the law that makes accommodations legally required at school and work). How this law applies to extracurricular activities is something that 1AC-CESSIBILITY is still trying to figure out. We will be updating our sources as we learn more. (I am a speech and debate alumni, not a lawyer, and this is not professional legal advice).

One resource that has been helpful in understanding how the ADA might apply to K-12 extracurricular activity is “A School Board’s Obligation to Provide Accommodations so Students with Disabilities Can Effectively Participate in Extracurricular Activities,” which has been published in the peer-reviewed journal Education Law Reporter.¹

To date, there is not a substantial amount of case law on the topic of eligibility rules. Still, it is safe to say that courts will order school districts to provide accommodations similar to those provided during the school day so that students with disabilities can participate in extracurricular activities on an equal basis with their peers who are not disabled.

This is not a definitive answer and there are complications when you consider competing at tournaments which are outside the jurisdiction of a participant’s school district. I would recommend [reading the full article here](#), if this is particularly interesting to you. Still, this might help empower you to request accommodations, at the very least, from your coach so that you or your child may benefit from them at practices and tournaments your school may host.

¹ Osborne, A.G. & Russo, C.J. (2015). “A School Board’s Obligation to Provide Accommodations so Students with Disabilities can Effectively Participate in Extracurricular Activities.” Education Law Reporter, Vol. 322, No. 1, 1-9.

Chances are, tournament directors are not lawyers either. Some may have a little knowledge of the ADA from faculty training seminars and try to tell you definitively that they are not required to give you anything for this legal reason or another. That is to say, if a tournament director tries to deny your request for accommodations under the guise of the ADA, it is okay to keep trying and advocating for your or your child's needs because it is possible they are wrong.

One key phrase that will help you, though, due to the precedent set by the ADA, is this: "These accommodations do not represent a fundamental alteration to this academic activity. Receiving these accommodations is necessary for creating an equal opportunity for my participation in this event." Those answer two of the questions in many flow charts that determine if someone grants accommodations or not.

Additionally, it is essential to note that as of 2021, accommodations are not commonplace in speech and debate, and a director may deny your request because it is simply a new concept or they were never trained to implement them.

It is crucial to keep in mind that any tournament director has the power to grant you or your child accommodations if they really want to. The ADA is a federal law that sets forth what is essentially the bare minimum (and many times, not even that) in terms of accessibility—not the maximum. What is legally required and what is ethical are not the same thing. They may use the shield of the ADA to tell you they are not legally required to grant you or your child an accommodation, but that does not mean you or your child do not deserve one. At the end of the day, tournament directors design every aspect of the tournament, and they can implement accommodations if they want to.

Another area of concern is the ethics of disclosing a disability. You do not owe anyone your or your child's private, personal information. No one should ever be forced to give away information about themselves that they do not feel comfortable sharing. Although, it is highly likely that in the process of requesting accommodations, you will be asked to disclose your disability and along with particular details about its nature (unless you luckily bump into a tournament designed by a disability rights advocate).

Nondisabled people are often unfamiliar with the concept of accessibility, and explaining the nature of a disability or medical condition can sometimes help them understand why accommodations are necessary. You are free to rephrase these templates and omit the name of your disability or medical condition if that makes you more comfortable.

This is all not to say that your request will be denied. You may run across a helpful director who approves your request right away. However, I am familiar with the ableism in these institutions. I have encountered ignorance several times and had my access needs disrespected. What I have

learned from those experiences is that it is important to keep trying. This is the one time I endorse “speaking to the manager.” Sometimes issues need to be escalated, rebutted, and persisted to get what you deserve.

The final issue I would like to address is the concept of self-advocacy. Within the disability rights movement, the phrase “nothing about us, without us” is shorthand for communicating the belief that no policy or action that impacts disabled people should be decided or created without the direct participation of disabled people themselves. Too often, nondisabled people, no matter how good their intentions, misunderstand disabled people’s access needs. I believe this principle extends to requests for accommodation.

This matter is complicated, though, when one considers the young age of speech and debate participants. It takes time to nurture the strength, confidence, and knowledge that is required to successfully self-advocate. Some children may not yet have the confidence to persist in the face of telling someone their request is denied—but some may. Interdependence is vital for getting accommodations, sometimes. Perhaps a child may benefit from having a parent or coach advocate *alongside* them in this endeavor. In these collaborative instances, I would emphasize that listening to the disabled participant’s desires, goals, and needs is of the utmost importance.

I am aware that coaches expect to exclusively handle accommodations for disabled participants on their team in the status quo. Because of the number of tournaments, some disabled people may not desire to do this for every competition they wish to attend, and this arrangement may work nicely. However, your coach does not have the sole right to advocate on your or your child’s behalf. If you prefer to self-advocate or advocate in conjunction with a parent or guardian, then that is absolutely the path you should take. Even if your coach gets annoyed.

I wish you the best of luck in the process of seeking equal access.

Best,

Alanna Cronk
Founder of 1AC-CESSIBILITY

Accommodation Request to a Tournament Director

Template

Make sure to CC your parent(s). You may also CC your coach if you feel comfortable. If you are a parent, just switch around the pronouns and this template can work for you too.

Hello [insert title and name],

Warm greeting

I hope you are doing well.

Introduction

My name is [insert your name], and I am a registered participant at your upcoming tournament, [insert name of tournament], in [insert event]. I am writing today to request [an/some] accommodation[s] for this tournament.

If you have accommodations through your school, use this paragraph.

At my school, [insert full name of school], I receive accommodations. [Insert a brief description of the accommodations, how they translate to the tournament environment, and how they relate to your disability]. I would like for these accommodations to be implemented at your event as well. Counselors at my school have assessed these accommodations do not represent a fundamental alteration to academic activity. Additionally, these measures have been previously determined in an academic environment to be necessary to create an equal opportunity for participation.

If you do not have accommodations through your school, use this paragraph

I have [insert name of medical condition/disability]. This impacts my ability to [insert what this condition/disability means in terms of limiting or altering functions relating to the activity]. In the context of speech and debate, this means that [further elaborate specifically how the condition or disability impacts a specific thing at a tournament]. At your tournament, I would like to have an accommodation for [detail the accommodation]. These accommodations do not represent a fundamental alteration to this academic activity. Receiving these accommodations is necessary for creating an equal opportunity for my participation in this event.

Do not send sensitive medical information over email without it specifically being asked for and consulting a parent/guardian

If you have any questions or require documentation, feel free to contact me along with my parent[s].

Best/Sincerely/Respectfully,

[Your full name]

Accommodation Request to a Tournament Director

Sample

Make sure to CC your parent(s). You may also CC your coach if you feel comfortable. If you are a parent, just switch around the pronouns and this template can work for you too.

Hello Ms. Cisneros,

I hope you are doing well.

My name is Alanna Cronk, and I am a registered participant at your upcoming tournament, The Wintergreen Invitational, in policy debate. I am writing today to request some accommodations for this tournament.

If you receive accommodations at school look at these two paragraphs

At my school, Redbrook High School, I receive accommodations. The first is for short breaks during class. I have chronic migraines and occasionally need to take medication, drink water, and spend a few moments in a quiet environment to help alleviate the pain. Policy debate rounds are two hours long, and I may need to take a short five minute break in the middle to manage my condition. I would not like this time to come out of my prep, which is why I need your assistance in implementing this arrangement. Additionally, I receive 1.5X on all of my exams at school. I have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and have difficulty focusing, which means it takes me longer to complete some tasks than it may for others. At the tournament, I would like to have my prep time extended by 1.5X.

Counselors at my school have assessed these accommodations do not represent a fundamental alteration to academic activity. Additionally, these measures have been previously determined in an academic environment to be necessary to create an equal opportunity for my participation.

If you do not receive accommodations at school, look at these two paragraphs.

I have chronic migraines and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. These conditions cause intense pain and sensitivity to light and impact my ability to sustain long periods of intense focus, respectively. In the context of speech and debate, this means that I have a disproportionate chance of running out of in-round preparation time, and I may need to take a short (around five minute) in-round break. At your tournament, I would like to have accommodations for 1.5X extended in-round preparation time, so I may be equally prepared for speeches, as well as an allowance for a short in-round break so that I might take medication if the need arises.

These accommodations do not represent a fundamental alteration to this academic activity. Receiving these accommodations are necessary for creating an equal opportunity for my participation in this event.

Conclusion

If you have any questions or require documentation, feel free to contact me along with my parent.

Respectfully,

Alanna Cronk

To a team coach, from a student. Template

Make sure to CC your parent(s). You may also CC your coach if you feel comfortable. If you are a parent, just switch around the pronouns and this template can work for you too.

Hello [insert title and name],

Warm greeting

I hope you are doing well.

Introduction, can vary slightly if you already have an established relationship.

My name is [insert your name], and I am a new member of the [insert school name] speech and debate team. I am writing today to request [an/some] accommodation[s] for my time at practice, as well as your support in requesting these accommodations from tournaments in the future.

If you have accommodations through your school, use this paragraph.

Here at school, I receive accommodations. [Insert a brief description of the accommodations, how they translate to the tournament environment, and how they relate to your disability]. I would like for these accommodations to be implemented at practice as well.

Counselors here have assessed these accommodations do not represent a fundamental alteration to academic activity. Additionally, these measures have been previously determined in an academic environment to be necessary to create an equal opportunity for participation.

If you do not have accommodations through your school, use this paragraph

I have [insert name of medical condition/disability]. This impacts my ability to [insert what this condition/disability means in terms of limiting or altering functions relating to the activity]. In the context of speech and debate this means that [further elaborate specifically how the condition or disability impacts a specific thing at a tournament]. At practice and future tournaments, I would like to have an accommodation for [detail the accommodation]. These accommodations do not represent a fundamental alteration to this academic activity. Receiving these accommodations is necessary for creating an equal opportunity for my participation in this event.

If you have any questions or require documentation, feel free to contact me along with my parent[s].

Best/Sincerely/Respectfully,

[Your full name]

To a team coach, from a student. Sample.

Make sure to CC your parent(s). You may also CC your coach if you feel comfortable. If you are a parent, just switch around the pronouns and this template can work for you too.

Hello Ms. Matsuda,

I hope you are doing well.

My name is Alanna Cronk, and I am a new member of the Redbrook High School speech and debate team. I am writing today to request some accommodations for my time at practice, as well as your support in requesting these accommodations from tournaments in the future.

If you have accommodations through your school, look at these two paragraphs

At my school, Redbrook High School, I receive accommodations. The first is for short breaks during class. I have chronic migraines and occasionally need to take medication, drink water, and spend a few moments in a quiet environment to help alleviate the pain. Policy debate rounds are two hours long, and I may need to take a short three to four minute break in the middle to manage my condition, and I do not want this to come out of my prep time. Additionally, I receive 1.5X on all of my exams at school. I have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and have difficulty focusing, which means it takes me longer to complete some tasks than it may for others. At practice and future tournaments, I would like to have my prep time extended by 1.5X.

Counselors here have assessed these accommodations do not represent a fundamental alteration to academic activity. Additionally, these measures have been previously determined in an academic environment to be necessary to create an equal opportunity for participation.

If you do not have accommodations through your school, look at these two paragraphs

I have chronic migraines and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. These conditions cause intense pain and sensitivity to light and impact my ability to sustain long periods of intense focus, respectively. In the context of speech and debate, this means that I have a disproportionate chance of running out of in-round preparation time, and I may need to take a short (around five minute) in-round break. At practices and future tournaments, I would like to have accommodations for 1.5X extended in-round preparation time, so I may be equally prepared for speeches, as well as an allowance for a short in-round break, so that I might take medication if the need arises.

These accommodations do not represent a fundamental alteration to this academic activity. Receiving these accommodations is necessary for creating an equal opportunity for my participation in this event.

If you have any questions or require documentation, feel free to contact me along with my parent.

Best,

Alanna Cronk