

**LSAT Accommodations Guide
Fall 2010 Edition**

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DISCLAIMER: The following are merely the opinions of law students with disabilities who have been through the LSAT accommodations process. This is not legal advice and following our advice in no way guarantees successful receipt of accommodations.

OVERVIEW

The LSAT

The Law School Admission Test (LSAT) is a standardized test that all American Bar Association-approved law schools, most Canadian law schools, and numerous others require for admission. It provides a standard measure of acquired reading and verbal reasoning skills that law schools use to assess applicants.

The LSAC

The Law School Admission Council (LSAC) is a nonprofit corporation that handles all aspects of the LSAT and virtually all components of the law school application. LSAC also houses the panel that determines who receives what accommodations on the exam.

Take a look at these links to get a better idea of both what the LSAT is and tests, and the role played by the LSAC:

<http://www.lsac.org/LSAT/about-the-lsat.asp>

<http://www.lsac.org/AboutLSAC/about-lsac.asp>

Your Disability and the LSAT

Does your disability qualify you for accommodations? This is the million-dollar question.

If you are thinking that you're a shoe-in for LSAT accommodations since you had accommodations in undergrad, think again. In fact, it is well known that receiving accommodations on the LSAT is very difficult. Why? Well no one but the evaluating panel knows the truth.

But don't give up on your law school dreams just yet! NALSWD created this guide to help you make the best case for getting the accommodations you deserve.

THE PROCESS

After years of vague guidelines and hard to find documents, LSAC has finally created a relatively straightforward outline of how to apply for accommodations.

What we have done is clarified a few potentially confusing items and added some useful insider information.

First and foremost, you must Register To Take The Test. It isn't cheap, but before you can go any further in the process, you must register to take the LSAT.

If you have not yet registered, you might want to do that now and come back to this guide. The accommodations process can take a long time, sometimes up to year, and that process can't start until you've registered for the exam. Registering as soon as you know you want to take the LSAT

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is strongly in your best interests. www.lsac.org. After you have your account, have paid for the test, and have selected your preferred date, you can start the accommodations process.

Start with the FAQ pdf file provided by the LSAC. Read it slowly and carefully, and if need be, take notes on what you feel is important. This file includes contact numbers and email addresses that can be very useful. Some accommodations seekers have even programmed these items into their cell phones for easy access in the days to come.

Next comes the Accommodations Request Packet. This document gives you dates and deadlines and a handy checklist to ensure you filled everything out correctly. Learn to love this form. Print it out and tape it to your refrigerator. Remember if you forget to send something in, the review of your file will be delayed. The accommodations process is stressful enough when your request is processed in a timely manner, so do all you can to avoid delays on your end. Besides, the LSAC rarely gives a freebie, so think of this checklist as a gift.

Now on to the Candidate Form. Here you'll fill out all sorts of personal details about yourself. This is one of the many times you will do this. Every law school asks for this info, so get used to writing it. At this point you will also begin to explain your disability and how it affects your exam taking ability. Take your time to plan out this explanation. **BE SPECIFIC!**

Example of a too Broad Explanation:

I have weak muscles so I need extra time to write.

Example of a Good, Narrow Explanation:

Due to the fatigue associated with my neurological physical disability (Spinal Muscular Dystrophy), I have to take several short breaks to regain strength for writing. As a result I am requesting 15 extra minutes on the Analytical Reasoning section to compensate for this.

See the difference?

It is OK to be redundant. Just be clear and try to keep it short. Use headings and bold font to make important information stand out. Attach documents that support your petition. Tailor everything you are writing to what will happen if you do not receive the accommodation. You may want to consult a professional for advice, such as a disability services specialist at your local university.

If you had testing accommodations on the SAT or ACT, you will also need to get a letter from College Board verifying this. Be sure to ask them to send you copies by BOTH snail mail (to include in your packet) and email (so you'll have a convenient digital copy in case you ever need the same letter in the future). If you had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or other types of disability accommodations in school, LSAC requires you also send them copies of those. Ask for at least two copies, or make copies, and hold on to a set, as you will definitely need these same documents again to get accommodations on the bar exam.

Finally, you will need an accommodations verification letter from your university. If you utilized accommodations for anything in college, then try to see if a disability support counselor can summarize those accommodations for you in a letter.

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The Evaluator Form is next on the list and should be completed by a qualified/licensed evaluator who diagnosed your disorder/condition and is familiar with its impact on a major life activity that affects your ability to perform on the LSAT. This form can be tricky. You need a doctor (who is not likely to be familiar with the LSAT and probably has not taken a standardized test in decades) to explain in laymen's terms your disability and why you require the accommodations you requested. The more concrete detail they can provide that clearly connects the impairment with the requested accommodation, the more effective the letter will be.

Depending on your condition, the Evaluator Form may be filled out in conjunction with the Cognitive Impairments form, the Vision Evaluation report, and/or the Physical Evaluation report. So the same doctor may complete up to four different forms for you.

The ideal situation would be to visit with your doctor and discuss these forms in person. That way you can get immediate feedback and give him or her time to craft great responses. If you don't have a regular doctor familiar with your disability, try contacting a local hospital and finding a specialist that would be able to help you. If you can't get to your regular doctor, email should be fine, but definitely try to arrange a time to at least speak with him/her or an associate at one point in the process. You want to see the forms/letters before you get the official copy to send in to LSAC, in case any changes need to be made to make the letter stronger.

The Evaluator Form is very straight forward and in reality, it is best if you fill this out ahead of time and just have your doctor review and sign it. The Cognitive Impairments form, Vision Evaluation report, and the Physical Evaluation report however, require more planning and effort. These three forms are very detailed so we won't go into their content, but one piece of advice is that whenever possible, have your doctor write a free flowing letter as opposed to filling in the individual boxes. This way they aren't limited to the space provided. But make sure they address ALL of the form's boxes in their letter. There are more tips for physicians at this site: www.LSAC.org/LSAT/accommodated-testing.asp

Finally, there is a pdf that gives an overview of the above documents, provided by the LSAC, here: <http://www.lsat.org/pdfs/accommodatebrochure.pdf>

Note: if you have a visual impairment, LSAC can send you copies of the forms in larger print or another format. Just call or email them...this is where having all that contact information for LSAC comes in handy!

WOW!!! That is a lot of forms!

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Whether to Apply With Accommodations

After seeing all that needs to be done in order to be considered for accommodations, you may be having second thoughts about applying for accommodations. For some students taking the LSAT without some form of accommodations would be impossible (and thus clearly you need to

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apply), but for others the situation may not be so cut and dried. If you think that with the proper preparation you can take the exam under normal constraints, really think if the accommodations process is worth the uncertain outcome. As a student with a disability, you have a legal right to appropriately accommodated testing, but sometimes – with LSAC, often – vindicating that right can take a lot of effort and may be only partially successful. Take time to consider what you need, what it will take to obtain that, and what the trade-offs might be. Time you have to spend fighting for appropriate accommodations is the time you won't have studying for the actual exam. Also remember that exams taken with extended time are flagged for review (See <http://www.lsac.org/LSAT/accommodated-testing.asp> for more details. Though what affect the flag might have on admissions will likely vary greatly by school and by score).

If you decide to try to go without, be sure to take numerous practice exams without accommodations to make sure that you can still achieve a score that accurately demonstrates your abilities. Also beware that if you take the LSAT without accommodations and receive a score that is above average (about 150 or above), and then decide to request accommodations for your second LSAT, LSAC may take your first score as evidence that you do not require accommodations. Even though a 150 might be way below the score you would achieve given the appropriate accommodations, LSAC might focus on the fact that it is above average when assessing your accommodations request. Also, taking the LSAT without accommodations (especially if you do well, or at least “well enough”) may undermine your ability to receive accommodations on the bar exam later.

Almost none of these ramifications of getting or not getting accommodations on the LSAT are fair and it is a very difficult decision to make. We at NALSWD want every student to be treated fairly, but we also want you to have realistic information and to consider all of your options, so that you can make the best decision for you.

Hire Legal Counsel If Denied

Seems funny to possibly hire a lawyer just to take the exam to become a lawyer, right? If you are denied accommodations or are not accommodated to the extent you requested, you have the right to appeal your decision. While you can compose an additional letter of need, ask for additional physician recommendations, etc, being represented by legal counsel may be helpful.

A lawyer will know the law and if there is any way to apply statutes or precedent from previous cases to your situation. Of course, there is no guarantee that anything will come of this effort, but having a lawyer attached to your file will make certain your case is reexamined.

The way it may play out:

Once you hire a lawyer, he/she will likely become your official voice to LSAC. You will no longer be able to contact LSAC as they will only deal with your legal counsel. This can take some of the burden off you in a sense, but remember that lawyers aren't free (usually) so you might be charged for the communication they have with LSAC. Your lawyer should compose an additional letter asking LSAC to reconsider their initial decision. A tip is to always ask your prospective lawyer if they would be willing to withhold the retainer fee they often charge.

MISCELLANEOUS TIPS

Apply Early

Can't stress this enough! The sooner you get everything in order the easier it will be to balance your studying with the application process. We recommend NOT taking the LSAT during the December administration, if at all possible. The reason is that this time can serve as a buffer should you need to take the test twice. June or September are the best dates because they give you time to get your items in order. Quite often, notification of your denial or approval of final accommodations comes VERY close to your test date. Be psychologically prepared for this. Have multiple backup test dates in mind in case you are denied accommodations at the last minute and need to appeal. Since most law schools have rolling admissions, the earlier you apply, the better your chances.

Check List

Once you have all the necessary documentation, we recommend adding a cover letter and checklist to the front of the packet you will send to the LSAC. Just a simple ordered list of the content you have on the following pages. It makes everything more organized.

Follow Up

It can take up to 14 days for LSAC to process your paperwork once they receive it. Make a note on your calendar to call LSAC two weeks after you send in your items just to be sure they have your documents.

Be Polite

Without a doubt, the accommodations process can be very frustrating. It can be really tempting to vent your frustration on the LSAC representative on the other end of the phone. But stay cool. Even if you feel like they are treating you unfairly, yelling at them certainly won't make them want to treat you any better. Remember that the LSAC really does want qualified people to receive accommodations so they can do well on the exam. Just remain as patient as you can and focus on how happy you will be once you are all done with the process.

Keep Files / Make A Record

All the forms you get, the doctors' notes, disability letters, IEPs, SAT/ACT reports, make a copy of EVERYTHING! Keep it for reference in a big yellow envelope. Again, you'll need to produce at least part of it for the bar exam and it is good practice for a future lawyer to store these kinds of important records.

Also, every time you call or email LSAC, write down a note of who you contacted, when, and about what. Keep any correspondence LSAC sends you too. These records may be needed if

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you decide to appeal your decision. If you end up hiring a lawyer, they will also want all of these documents.

Remember It Is Only A Test

If you are denied accommodations and do not perform the best you could have, not all hope is lost. Please remember this! The LSAT is only one of many components of an application. Many law schools have a designated section where you can mention special circumstances relevant to your application. If denial of accommodations was an issue for you, you may want to include a statement explaining that.

This advice is based on the experiences of NALSWD members. If you have any comments or suggestions for improving future editions of this guide, please email us at nalswd.vp@gmail.com. All of us at NALSWD hope you receive the accommodations you deserve and wish you the best of luck on the LSAT!

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