

Documentation Guidelines for Evaluators - Psychological and Psychiatric Disorders

Introduction

The Appraisal Institute is committed to ensuring access to its examinations for all individuals with disabilities.

The Appraisal Institute provides reasonable and appropriate accommodations to individuals with documented disabilities who demonstrate a need for accommodations. For example, applicants may request someone to record answers, a separate testing room, extra testing time, or presentation of the material in large print.

Purpose of Accommodations

The following technical information is provided for the evaluators who prepare documentation for Candidates as part of their request for test accommodations. Candidates requesting test accommodations are asked to share these guidelines with their evaluator so that appropriate documentation can be assembled to support the request for test accommodations.

Requests for test accommodations are inherently individualized and need to be considered on a case-by-case basis. Consequently, no single type of accommodation (i.e., extra time) would necessarily be appropriate for all individuals with disabilities. Moreover, simply demonstrating that an individual meets diagnostic criteria for a particular disorder does not mean that the person is automatically entitled to accommodations.

The purpose of accommodations is to provide Candidates with an opportunity to have full access to the test. However, accommodations are not a guarantee of improved performance or test completion.

Specific accommodations should be related to the identified *functional limitations* so that the impairment is mitigated by the requested auxiliary aid or adjustment to the testing format. For example, a functional limitation might be mobility, resulting in wheelchair use. An appropriate accommodation might be a height-adjustable computer workstation. It is essential that the documentation provide a clear explanation of the current functional limitation and a rationale for the requested accommodation.

Detailed Documentation Requirements

Candidates who are requesting accommodations based on a diagnosis of a psychological or psychiatric disorder must provide a report of a current, comprehensive psychiatric or psychological evaluation. The diagnosis of a psychological or psychiatric disorder and recommended accommodations must be based on the aggregate of relevant history, levels of current functioning, clinical judgment, and optionally, objective test results.

Note that meeting diagnostic criteria for a particular disorder does not necessarily mean that the individual will be found to be disabled.

The evaluation must:

1. Be performed by a qualified evaluator (see Note #1).
2. Be current (< 1 year; see Note #2).

The detailed letter or report must:

1. Include identifying information:
 - a. The first page of the detailed letter or report should be printed on the evaluator's letterhead, and should provide relevant identifying information, including the examinee's name, date of birth, the examination dates, and age at the time of testing.
 - b. The last page of the report should be signed by the evaluator.

2. Include a comprehensive history:
 - a. Age that symptoms of the disorder first appeared.
 - b. Educational history.
 - c. Psychosocial history.
 - d. Relevant medical history.
 - e. History of the condition.
 - f. History of the impact of the condition (not just past use of accommodations).
 - g. Summary of psychological test results (if any).
3. Include information about the current impact of the disorder on academic performance, employment (if relevant), and other daily activities.
4. Include specific recommendations for accommodations (see Note #3 below).
5. Include a specific rationale for each recommended accommodation.

Meeting DSM-IV-TR criteria for a psychological or psychiatric disorder

1. In order to be diagnosed with a psychological or psychiatric disorder, there must be evidence that the symptoms cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. The evaluator’s documentation must include discussion of how this diagnostic criteria has been met.
2. In order to be diagnosed with a psychological or psychiatric disorder, there must be evidence that the symptoms attributed to the disorder cannot be better accounted for by another disorder or other explanation. The evaluator’s documentation must include discussion of how this diagnostic criteria has been met.

NOTES:

- #1** A qualified professional must administer the tests in the evaluation. An individual is deemed to be qualified to assess an individual for a psychological or psychiatric disability if s/he has had extensive graduate-level training in the area of psychiatric or psychological assessment of adults. In most cases, the evaluator should have a M.D., Ph.D., or Psy.D. Degree. The name, title, and professional credentials of the evaluator must be clearly stated in the documentation, along with evidence of formal training and experience in the identification of behavioral disorders in adults. The evaluator should be prepared, if asked, to provide evidence of comprehensive training and direct experience in the diagnosis and treatment of adults with psychological or psychiatric disorders. The Appraisal Institute reserves the right to request evidence from an evaluator of their professional qualifications. Note that simply having a particular degree or license does not automatically mean that the evaluator has had sufficient formal training and expertise in psychological or psychiatric disorders. Assessment by family members, even if otherwise qualified, will not be accepted. If a graduate-trainee is conducting some or all of the evaluation, for example as part of a university-based assessment practicum, we will consider the results if both the clinician and the faculty supervisor sign the written report. The Appraisal Institute reserves the right to contact the faculty supervisor and/or the graduate trainee/clinician to inquire about the level of supervision during the assessment.
- #2** Currency: Psychological or psychiatric disorders are conditions that may change significantly over a short time, both in terms of its treatment as well as its functional impact. Because the provision of reasonable accommodations is based on assessment of the current impact and current functional limitations caused by the applicant’s disability, the Appraisal Institute requires current documentation. The psychological or psychiatric evaluation must have been administered no more than 1 year prior to the anticipated test date.
- #3** Examples of specific recommendations for accommodations could include “50% extra time” or “Testing in a distraction-reduced setting”. Non-specific recommendations such as “extra time” or “the maximum allowable time” are not acceptable. Note that the purpose of extra time is not to ensure that the Candidate finishes the test (many non-disabled test-takers do not finish the exam).

NOTE: In situations where an individual is thought to have two or more disorders, such as a psychiatric disorder and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), the diagnostic report must clearly describe the unique impact of each disorder, and Documentation Requirements must be met for each disorder.