



Planning Guide: Certification and Licensure Exams

**National Deaf Center
on Postsecondary Outcomes**



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 *Symbol for glossary terms*



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Overview



This step-by-step guide explains how to request and use accommodations on tests to help meet career goals. There are a variety of tests you may need to take to get a job or advance in your career. Credentialing tests help you show what you know related to a certain job or industry. If you pass a credentialing test, you receive a **credential**  such as a license, certificate, or badge. Employers use credentials to evaluate the qualifications of an individual for a specific job or role. For many deaf¹ individuals, accommodations can reduce testing barriers and allow a fair chance to show their knowledge and skills.

Know Your Rights

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) was one of the first disability civil rights laws to be established in the United States. It bans discrimination of individuals with disabilities from programs or activities that receive federal money. Programs and activities that receive federal money include many public organizations and some private organizations.

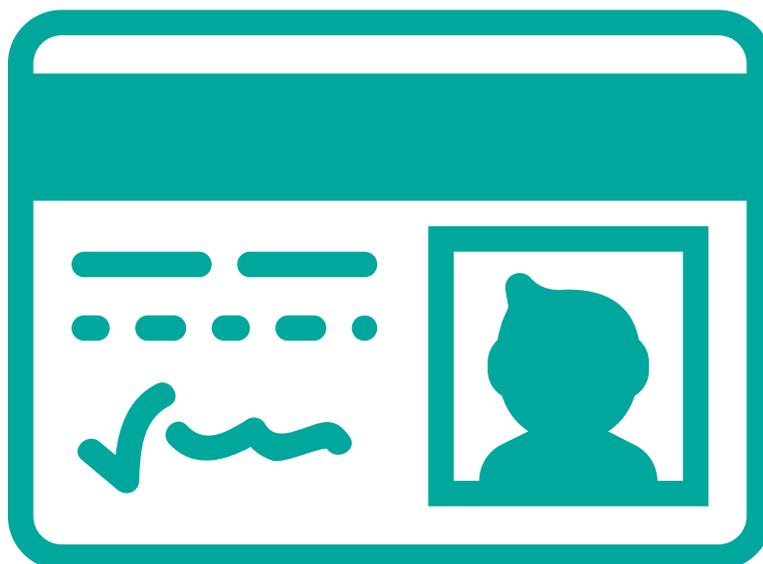
Established in 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a civil rights law that bans discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including employment, education, transportation, and all public and private places. Title I prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities during pre-employment and employment activities, such as job applications, interviewing, hiring, promotions, and training.

The ADA and Section 504 require that individuals with disabilities have equal access to the job application process. These two laws allow deaf job seekers to request reasonable accommodations during the job application process and any required testing or training (from the company that provides it). “Reasonable” is defined on a case-by-case basis and includes several factors, such as how much the employer can afford and the size of the company (ADA Title I applies only to companies with 15 or more employees). Many court cases have decided that a deaf person is entitled to an interpreter or captioning during interviews, tests, or preparatory courses, among other situations.²

People who have experienced employment-related discrimination because they are deaf should contact the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the federal agency responsible for enforcement of Title I of the ADA and Section 504. The EEOC also investigates discrimination by employers on the basis of race, religion, sex, national origin, and age, which was made illegal by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other related laws. For any other discrimination on the basis of disability, people can file an ADA or Section 504 complaint with the U.S. Department of Justice or seek legal representation.

Types of Credentialing Tests

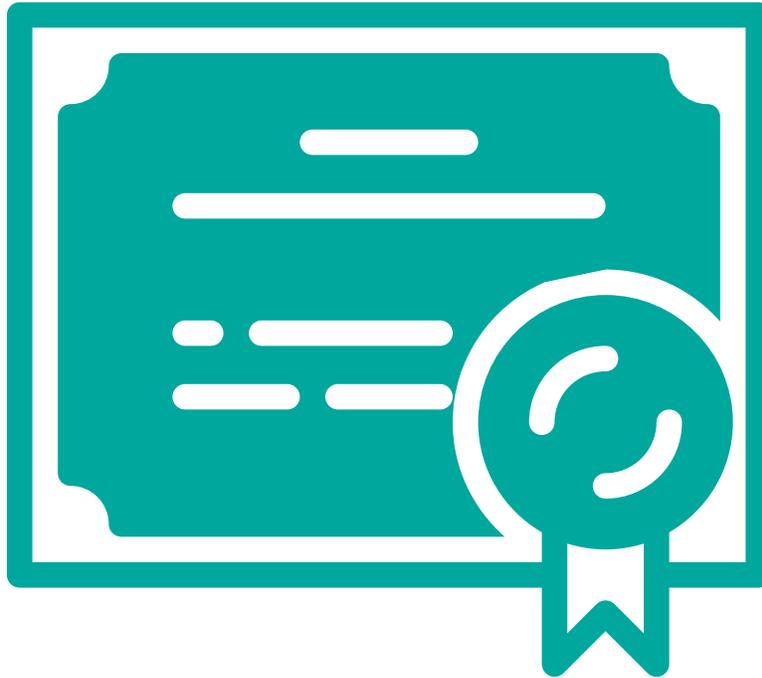
Tests are used to measure an individual's knowledge, skills, and/or abilities within a particular area. Credentialing tests are similar to educational tests but tend to be more focused on adults who are seeking jobs or advancement. Unlike academic tests, most credentialing tests are not directly linked to education or training within a content area. The two most common types of credentialing tests are those used for **licensure** (?) or **certification** (?).



Licensure tests are often mandated by state law or other requirements to work within a specific career. A licensure test may be just one requirement of many for earning a license or it may be the only requirement. The test content and passing score for licensure exams are set by the licensing board, which is often a government agency. Different licenses have different requirements—be sure to research any requirements for a license within a field of interest.

For example, to become a teacher, you would need to take *Praxis*[™] exams as part of the application process for a teacher preparation program and then pass more *Praxis* exams during your time in the program. In many states, to apply to become a teacher, you have to show proof of graduating from a teacher preparation program and proof of passing certain *Praxis* tests, depending on the job you are applying for. To become a deaf educator, you may have to take the *Special Education: Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students Praxis* exam.

Another example is in the medical field. Dentists must be licensed to practice dentistry. A dentist must meet specific requirements specified by each state, which include educational requirements and earning a specific score on each of the dental licensure exams.



Certification tests are often **voluntary** (?) and allow people to show their knowledge within a specific area. One must earn a specific score on the test(s) to obtain the certification. Certifications are shown in many ways: certificates, badges, credentials, and more. Certification programs have many different requirements; most certification programs are unique, so be sure to research the specific program for more information. Some certification programs have eligibility requirements for an individual to register for or enter the program; others are more open, where anyone can register for the program and earn a certification. For example, to become an ultrasound technician, you would take the national exam to become a certified diagnostic medical sonographer. Certification isn't always **mandatory** (?), but depending on the job, an employer may require it.

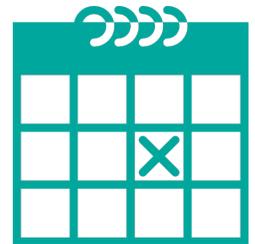
The Certification Finder (www.careeronestop.org/toolkit/training/find-certifications.aspx) from the U.S. Department of Labor's CareerOneStop can help you find certifications available for a variety of jobs. For each certification, there is a certifying group. For example, if you wanted to become a certified bicycle technician, several certifying bodies offer a certification. These certifying groups often offer courses with the certification test. Make sure that you choose the certification that is accepted in your state or by your future employer.

The content and required passing score for certification exams are typically decided by the certification program owner (e.g., company, group of companies, certifying boards).

Step 1: Gather Information About the Test

Start planning early! Certification and licensing tests are often given at a test center. Different tests have different procedures. Typically, registration information such as testing dates, costs, and accommodation request procedures can be found on the certification/licensing program website.

- Test dates available: _____
- Test registration deadline: _____
- Accommodations request deadline: _____
- Test fees: _____



Test Structure

1. Is the test given on paper or on a computer? _____
If given on a computer, can you skip a question and go back to it later? (Y / N)
2. Is there a time limit? (Y / N) If Yes, how much time do you get? _____
3. How is the test scored? Will points be taken off for wrong answers, or is it OK to guess if you don't know the answer? _____
4. Is audio or video material used during the exam? (Y / N)
5. Will you be required to respond to questions verbally? (Y / N)

Question Format



Essay



Short answer



Multiple choice or true/false



Performance



Other: _____

What score do I want?

For many exams, certain scores are required. Knowing the score or score range you need can help you practice for the test (when available) and help you get your goal score!

My Goal Score	Actual Score

Step 2: Request Accommodations

Employers are required to give a job test in a way that does not require the job seeker to show hearing or listening skills, unless the test is designed to measure that skill. **Employers are required to provide reasonable accommodations to a deaf job seeker.**

It is important that you understand what testing accommodations are the best fit for **you**. Talk with people involved with the credential program, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and even those who have already earned the credential to see whether specific **test accommodations**  are right for you.

Each credentialing group decides what can be accommodated. For example, one bicycle technician certifying group expects you to be able to identify quiet noises while repairing a bicycle. You can still take the exam, but you will need to ask for accommodations or modifications. However, you should think about what accommodations you will need to successfully take the test or show your skills. For many years, the U.S. Department of Transportation banned deaf truck drivers from getting commercial driver's licenses, but now, the department is granting exemptions to those who cannot meet the hearing requirements!

If you have experience with test accommodations, think about what has been helpful: What have you used on other tests? Before requesting accommodations, be sure you know how to describe the testing accommodations you need and **why** you need them. If you are requesting an interpreter, include information about interpreter certification and your preferred signing style.

Request an accommodation for the test as early as possible to allow enough time to arrange for the accommodation.

For more information, see "Why Test Accommodations Are Important for Deaf Students" (nationaldeafcenter.org/testaccommodations).

Practice Describing the Accommodations You Need

"I am requesting [extended time, a separate testing room, an assistive listening device, a sign language interpreter] for this test because _____

Rules for requesting accommodations are typically found on the credential program's website. If you cannot find this information, contact the credential program and/or test center directly. Often, to request accommodations because of a disability, test takers must provide documentation of their disability and how it is expected to affect their ability to take the test under standard conditions. Here are things to consider when requesting accommodations:



- **What** accommodations are generally accepted for this test?
- **To whom** should the request(s) be submitted?
- **How/where** will the request be submitted?
- **When** must requests be submitted?
- **What** documentation do you need to submit with your request?
- **What** do you need to bring (or what can you bring) with you to the testing center?
- **When** will you be informed whether the request was approved?
- **How** will the approved accommodation request be communicated to the testing center?
- **How** will a denied request be communicated, and is there an appeal process?
- **Whom** do you contact with questions?

Accommodation request forms generally have a write-in space for adding accommodations that are not listed. Contact the credentialing program if you need an accommodation that is not listed.

Common Accommodations for Testing

Extended Time



Separate Room



Assistive Listening Devices



Sign Language Interpreters



Equipment: In some cases, you might need to bring your own equipment to the testing center such as your hearing aid, cochlear implant, or assistive listening system (FM/DM system). Some equipment might require help to set up (e.g., FM system), so be sure to check with the test center ahead of time if you have questions.

Interpreters: If the credentialing program has approved a sign language interpreter, contact both the credentialing program and testing center to understand the rules for the interpreter. Be sure to ask the following:

- Can you meet with the interpreter before the test day to practice?
- Can you meet the interpreter on the day of testing before the test?
- Which parts of the test can you use the interpreter for? Can you use the interpreter for instructions only, test questions, etc.?

Audio, Video, or Speaking Portions of an Exam



Audio and video components should be accessible to all test takers. When making a request for accommodations, ask the credentialing program about the following:

- Audio-only sections: Is a transcript available for all test-takers? If not, request access to a transcript.
- Video sections: Are the videos captioned and available to all test-takers? If not, request access to closed captioning.
- Speaking sections: Are verbal responses required? If so, and you prefer to use American Sign Language or an alternative method such as writing a response, include that in your request for accommodations.

Will all accommodations be approved?

No. Accommodations may not be provided for specific sections or questions on the test. Also, a credentialing program may not allow a particular accommodation if it changes what the test is measuring. For example, during a reading comprehension section, using a sign language interpreter may not be allowed because the translation could change what is being measured from comprehending English to comprehending sign language.



How to Appeal a Denial of Accommodations

Sometimes, the credentialing program will say no to an accommodation request. You can **appeal** (?) a **denial** (?) of your accommodation request. Keep in mind that it will take time and effort.

1. Review the reasons given for the denial of accommodations.
2. Research the credentialing program's information about appealing denials, either found in the letter to you or in their informational materials, such as on their website.
3. Write the appeal request.
4. Send the appeal paperwork to the credentialing program.

If an employer or credentialing program has denied your request for reasonable test accommodations because of discrimination, you or a representative on your behalf should contact the EEOC. The EEOC enforces the laws and has offices in many locations. Contact the EEOC for counsel about filing a claim as soon as you can, within 180 days from being denied your request. For federal jobs, a shorter period of 45 days is allowed.

Step 3: Create a Study Plan

Review the **content**, as defined by the credentialing program, and **types of questions** (selected response, essay, short answer, performance, other) that you will need to practice.

Set a schedule of weekly test preparation (study) time and what you will focus on each week.

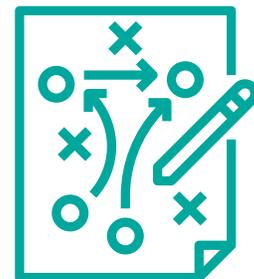
Build in times to take **practice tests** (if available) to see what you need to study more.

Test-Taking Strategies

Sometimes the credentialing program will provide practice questions and/or practice tests. It's a good idea to use any available practice materials because you will get an accurate feel for what the test is like. If possible, practice with approved accommodations so you feel more comfortable when using them on the real test. Depending on how much time you have to prepare and what materials are available, before the test, try breaking down and practicing each portion of the test and then attempting a complete mock test when you feel ready. This practice will give you a sense of how much time it takes you to answer questions.

Remember, practice makes perfect!

- Study and practice before the test over an extended period of time and avoid cramming!
- Follow directions given to you before the test.
- Read all instructions carefully.
- When given answer options, get rid of answers you know are wrong first.
- Mark answers clearly and as instructed.
- Write any handwritten responses clearly.
- Pace yourself during the test, especially if it is a timed test.



Step 4: Prepare to Take the Test

Before the Test

- Test location address: _____
- Test room: _____
- Check with the credentialing program and test center about what you can and cannot bring into the testing room (e.g., food, water, calculator, smartphone, headphones).
- Prepare your equipment ahead of time so that it is ready and in working condition.
- Make sure to get a good night's rest the night before your test.
- What to bring:
 - Copy of your accommodations approval letter (email or written letter)
 - Copy of your test registration confirmation (email or written letter)
 - Driver's license or other identification card (if required)
 - Extra batteries for hearing aids, cochlear implants, and FM/DM systems
 - Any permitted testing supplies (e.g., scratch paper, pens and pencils, calculators)
 - Snacks and water bottle (if permitted)

Test Day

- Arrive at the test site early, with enough time to find your testing room and check in.
- Sign in and provide your accommodations approval letter to the test **proctor**. (?)
- Meet with the interpreter beforehand if possible.

What if your approved accommodation was not provided during the test?

Be prepared to advocate for yourself if an accommodation approved for you is not available on the day of the test. If you do not get the approved accommodations you need, register a complaint with both the test center and the credentialing program. Ask the test proctor how to register a complaint, in case you have to file a complaint while on site. If you can't file a complaint on site, contact both the testing center and credentialing program as soon as possible about not receiving an approved accommodation during the test. Be sure to follow up if you do not receive a response.

Step 5: Review Scores and Additional Materials

There are a couple things you can do after you receive the scores from the test.

Review your scores and think about what they mean. If the test scores were lower than what you expected and you don't believe that they appropriately reflect your knowledge, skills, or abilities, you might want to take the test again. Review any available materials to determine what knowledge, skills, or abilities you may need to improve and study or gain the needed experience and then try taking the test again.

If the test scores are being used for a job application, consider that test scores are not all of the information that you will submit as part of the application process. Most companies look at many things when making a hiring decision. If the test score is a barrier for consideration, you may want to reach out to the hiring company's human resources department to discuss the test results and other options to be considered for employment.

Often, hiring decisions are made by using other materials, not just test scores. These other materials include the following:

- Personal statements
- Letters of support (professional references)
- Transcripts of coursework (if applicable)
- Work samples and portfolios (if applicable)
- Awards and honors
- Related experience

Additional Resources

Why Test Accommodations Are Important For Deaf Students

nationaldeafcenter.org/testaccommodations

National Center on Educational Outcomes: Accessibility and Accommodations for General Assessments

https://nceo.info/Assessments/general_assessment/accommodations/overview

Student Planning Guide: Testing and Accommodations

nationaldeafcenter.org/testplanning

National Deaf Center #DeafSuccess Stories

nationaldeafcenter.org/deafsuccess

Civil Rights and Employment Law

National Association of the Deaf

www.nad.org/resources/civil-rights-laws

Office for Civil Rights: Students With Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education

www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html

EEOC: Questions and Answers About Deafness and Hearing Impairment in the Workplace and the ADA

www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/qa_deafness.cfm

EEOC field office locations

www.eeoc.gov/field/index.cfm

U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section: ADA requirements and testing accommodations

www.ada.gov/regs2014/testing_accommodations.pdf

U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Federal Contract Compliance Program, Fact Sheets (English and other languages): Disability Rights, Workplace Rights, Veterans' Rights

www.dol.gov/ofccp/regs/compliance/factsheets/index.htm#Q1

U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Federal Contract Compliance Program: State offices directory

www.dol.gov/ofccp/contacts/ofnation2.htm

More information on this topic can be found at nationaldeafcenter.org/resources

Glossary

Appeal is the process of formally challenging a denial, which may include several different methods, such as submitting additional evidence, setting up a hearing, or providing further justification for a request.

Certification is the process to demonstrate that one has a defined level of knowledge or skills within a particular area.³

Credential is a representation, such as a license, certificate, or badge, granted to an individual by an appropriate authority, signifying an acceptable level of performance in some area of knowledge or activity.³

Denial is the rejection of an accommodation request.

Licensure is a type of credential typically granted by a government agency (or oversight board) that provides authorization (or legal authority) to practice an occupation or profession.³

Mandatory certification is a credential required by law to practice certain occupations.

Proctor is a person who manages the testing site and keeps watch over test takers during an examination.

Test accommodations are changes in testing materials or procedures that reduce barriers to access without changing the meaning of what is measured by the test.

Voluntary certification is a way to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and abilities for a particular job or industry that is not required to have the job or work in the industry.

Notes

1. In this report, the term *deaf* is used in an all-inclusive manner to include people who identify as deaf, deafblind, deafdisabled, hard of hearing, late-deafened, and hearing impaired. NDC recognizes that for many people, identity is fluid and can change over time or with setting. NDC has chosen to use one term, *deaf*, with the goal of recognizing the shared experiences of people from diverse deaf communities while also honoring their differences.
2. Court cases that concern accommodations for testing include the following:
 - United States v. Becker C.P.A. Review (1994): The order stressed the importance of providing an equal opportunity for a deaf person to participate in the complete educational experience.
 - Williams v. Kaplan (2013): A deaf student sued Kaplan for not making preparatory exam materials accessible.
 - DeAndrea-Lazarus v. American Heart Association (2014): A medical student sued over captions not being accessible for online training modules.
3. American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education. (2014). *Standards for educational and psychological testing*. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

