

Reasonable Accommodations in Certificate Examinations (RACE)

for learners sitting the Junior Cert or Leaving Cert exams¹

Purpose of RACE

The purpose of RACE is to remove, as far as possible, the impact of a disability on the candidate's performance in an exam and enable them to demonstrate their full level of attainment in the subject. The objective is to reduce or eliminate the disadvantages that result from the disability without giving them any unfair advantages over other candidates.

Accommodations

The special arrangements available under RACE are tailored to particular disabilities or difficulties which can interfere with a student's ability to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. The following are examples of the kinds of accommodations that are granted:

- Positioning a candidate with a hearing impairment close to the superintendent
- The granting of breaks or rest periods in examination sessions warranted by the physical or medical condition of the candidate (the time taken under this type of arrangement may be compensated for at the close of each examination period up to a maximum of 20 minutes)
- Allowing a candidate to take medicine, food or drinks into the examination centre where this is required for medical reasons
- Allowing the use of a special desk or chair
- Modified question papers (e.g. in relation to graphs and diagrams, Braille versions, low vision aids and enlarged print)
- The use of aids such as drafting machines, drawing boards and smaller drawing sheets (in Design and Communication or Technical Graphics examinations)
- Allowing the candidate to move within the centre
- Allowing a candidate with an emotional behavioural difficulty or autistic spectrum disorder to sit the paper in a separate exam centre (i.e. room or space)
- Ten minutes extra time per scheduled hour for candidates using a scribe or a mechanical aid
- An exemption from an element of an examination and having the grade determined on the balance of the work in the subject (when an exemption is given an explanatory note to this effect appears on the candidate's certificate)
- The reading of the examination papers to the candidate (also involves an explanatory note)
- The use of a computer or word-processor
- Dictation of answers to a person acting as a scribe
- The candidate allowed to sit in a separate room and use a tape recorder

For learners with a physical, sensory or medical disability, the RACE application needs to be supported by an appropriate medical report which attests to the difficulties and needs of the candidate. When the need for an accommodation arises from dyslexia or specific learning difficulty (SLD) the staff may be able to provide all the necessary information to support the RACE application.

¹ Accommodations are also available under FETAC assessment processes (for information refer to your ETB. Under the FETAC Quality Assurance Policy providers have responsibility for ensuring equity and access; p15 http://www.fetac.ie/fetac/documents/Quality_Assuring_Assessment_Guidelines_for_Providers_May_2007.pdf)

Accommodations for learners with SLD / dyslexia

SLD or dyslexia impacts on a learner's literacy skills and in particular their basic reading and writing abilities. In reading, the focus is on the learner's ability to read the text – to say the words accurately – rather than to comprehend what they are reading. The relevant skills are word recognition and decoding ability, along with a minimum level of reading speed. The accommodation for a learner with poor basic reading skills is the provision of a **reader*** who will read the exam papers to them. The reader simply reads or rereads the paper to the candidate and may not engage in any explanations or suggestions about how the candidate should interpret a question or how they might go about answering it.

In writing, the focus is on the capacity of the learner's script to convey what they know. An adequate grasp of spelling, grammar and punctuation is necessary if their scripts are to be capable of communicating information and meaning successfully to the examiner. A minimum level of writing speed is also necessary if they are to convey their knowledge within the time they have available for the paper. Writing accommodations can take a number of forms:

- Spelling and grammar waiver in language subjects
- Computer / word processor*
- Tape-recorder*
- Scribe*

With a **spelling and grammar waiver** the learner's spelling, grammar and punctuation are not being examined and they lose no marks for these elements. This accommodation – which is given automatically to all candidates sitting the LCA – only pertains to language subjects (such as English, Irish and French) and the precise application depends on the language being examined. However, their exam certificate will contain an explanatory note to state that spelling and grammar aspects were not assessed. Learners who have illegible or very slow handwriting and are more used to typing on a PC or laptop may benefit from using a **computer or word processor** in the exam. A learner who lacks both handwriting and typing skills might find it easier to convey their knowledge orally by using a **tape recorder**. However, the organisation and sequencing of one's thoughts without any visual written aids require a high level of skill in thinking, planning and oral expression and learners need considerable experience in producing answers in this way if they are to benefit from this accommodation. To have access to a **scribe** the learner must demonstrate difficulty with the speed or legibility of their handwriting and, in addition, have speech that is largely unintelligible to those who are unfamiliar with them or to be sitting a subject where a tape recorder or word processor may not be suitable e.g. maths. See Appendix A below for the evidence criteria required for these accommodations.

Definition of SLD for the purposes of RACE

There are differences in how SLD is defined by psychologists. A common definition involves a discrepancy between a learner's cognitive ability (or IQ) and their performance in literacy tasks such as word reading and spelling. A learner's reading or writing skill might be within the normal range but if their cognitive ability is in the exceptionally high range the discrepancy between their ability and their performance allows them to be diagnosed as dyslexic. For the State Examinations Commission (SEC) however, the existence of a specific learning difficulty in itself does not automatically entitle a candidate to special arrangements because a second criterion of *below average* performance in reading or spelling also needs to be met. If a candidate's level of word reading or writing ability is essentially within the normal range they will not be eligible for RACE.

* All asterisked accommodations require a separate exam centre (i.e. another room or space)

The SEC guidelines define SLD for the purposes of RACE as

1. A marked failure to achieve expected levels in basic skills such as reading, spelling and writing
and
2. A history of such failure that is not directly related to factors such as poor attendance, poor motivation and problems in social interaction which may affect attainment
and
3. An observed level of difficulty that is inconsistent with the candidate's ability as demonstrated in their knowledge of course content and knowledge of other areas of the curriculum.

Deciding if a learner might benefit from RACE

If a learner has more knowledge and skill in a subject than they are able to demonstrate under normal exam conditions you should consider whether an accommodation under RACE might help them get the marks they deserve. For instance

- Would having a reader lessen the chances that they would misread a question?
- Would using a computer rather than a pen help them to write their answers more easily and quickly?
- Would speaking their answers be better than handwriting or typing them?
- For learners doing the Leaving Cert rather than the LCA (where spelling and grammar are not assessed), would it be worth their while having a waiver for the spelling, grammar and punctuation aspects of the exam (even if it will be noted on their exam certificate) rather than lose most or all of the marks which are allocated to spelling, grammar and punctuation? This is only of value when the quality of a learner's spelling, grammar and punctuation is significantly poorer than the quality of the content of their answers. (Since most, and in the case of non-language subjects all, of the marks in the exams are allocated for content it is important to remind learners that they should always write answers that are as full as possible and not confine themselves to words they know how to spell.)

Deciding if a learner might be eligible for RACE

1. In the first instance test the learner's word reading and spelling on a standardised measure of literacy. These results must be recent – i.e. obtained within the last 12 months. See Appendix B below for advice on testing.



Generally if the standard score in word reading is above 85 there is no point in applying for a reader. In exceptional cases a candidate with average or greater IQ who has a standard score of between 86 and 89 may be eligible, but only if their reading speed is not above 90 words per minute (wpm).



If the standard score in spelling is above 85 there is no point in pursuing a spelling and grammar waiver, computer / word processor or tape recorder.

2. Obtain a measure of the learner's cognitive ability either by referring to a psychological report or by assessing them using a test of ability. These results do not need to be very recent. The evidence required to show an SLD for the purposes of RACE is a statistically significant discrepancy between cognitive ability and literacy attainments.



Although a significant discrepancy between IQ or cognitive ability standard score and word reading or spelling standard scores can be smaller in learners with below average IQs, the rule of thumb for a significant discrepancy to indicate an SLD is around ten or more points in favour of IQ. If the discrepancy is not at this kind of level there may be no point in pursuing any accommodation.

3. For a reading accommodation, if the standard score in word reading is at or below 85 test the number of errors made in reading a continuous passage at a suitable level of difficulty (e.g. a past exam paper at the highest level that they are doing in the exam) and test the time it takes them to read it. Compute their reading error rate and their reading speed.



If the reading error rate is 7% or less **and** the reading speed is greater than 90 wpm go no further in pursuing a reader.

4. In relation to an accommodation for writing if the standard score in spelling is 85 or below, count the number of spelling, grammar and punctuation errors made in a sample of writing to compute the error rate. Keep an account of the time it took them in order to establish their writing speed.



If the error rate is less than 8% go no further in pursuing a waiver.



If the error rate is less than 20% **and** writing speed is 12 or more wpm, go no further in pursuing a computer, word processor, tape recorder or scribe.

5. Consider the intelligibility of the learner's speech – could it be understood by an examiner who has never met them?



If speech is intelligible, only pursue a scribe if they are eligible for a tape recorder but the subject/s they are doing make use of a tape recorder inappropriate.

Making an application

Youthreach centres and CTCs should apply for reasonable accommodations through their education provider (ETB). External candidates should apply directly to the SEC. Applications must be made on the prescribed application form, which is available through education providers or directly from the SEC.

In making an application you are stating that

1. The learner has a specific learning difficulty and is eligible for accommodations (as borne out by evidence)
2. The learner is “effectively” unable to read or spell or write

Checklist for making an application (See page 7 of the application form)

- ✓ Copy of psychological report or school screening results
- ✓ Samples of written work (if applicable)
- ✓ Up to date standardised literacy test scores (obtained within 12 months of making the application)
- ✓ Calculation of spelling error percentage (if applicable)
- ✓ Calculation of reading error rate or wpm (if applicable)
- ✓ Calculation of writing speed in wpm (if applicable)
- ✓ Principal's signature
- ✓ Part B – signed by parent/guardian/candidate

Explanatory notes

When an element or elements of an examination have been waived or the method of examination significantly altered this will be indicated by the presence of an explanatory note on the candidate's certificate (e.g. "All elements of the language subject in question were assessed except the spelling and grammatical elements").

You need to ensure that the parents and learner are aware of the annotation on the results form and the possible implications for the future, e.g. impact on employers.

Appeals process

- A letter is sent by the centre or parents to the State Exams Commission
- Parents can access the SEC Summary Report
- The file is examined by an independent appeals group
- A response is made: YES or NO

Further Information

State Examinations Commission
Cornamaddy
Athlone
Co. Westmeath
Main Phone Number: 090-6442700
Main Fax Number: 090-6442744
www.examinations.ie

Entries and Applications:

Email: entries@examinations.ie
Phone: 090-6442702, 6442703, 6442706
Fax: 090-6442709

Reasonable Accommodations:

Email: sec.specialneeds@examinations.ie
Phone: 090-6442781, 6442783
Fax: 090-6442744
<http://www.examinations.ie/index.php?l=en&mc=ca&sc=ra>

Department of Education and Skills

Circulars S40/94, S11/2000 and S70/00

Appendix A: Accommodation criteria



Eligibility for a reader

Evidence of an SLD **and** word reading attainments at a standard score of 85 or below and evidence of difficulty reading continuous text (word reading errors greater than 7%) **or** a word reading rate of less than 90 words per minute (wpm). Candidates with IQ scores above 90 who are accurate but slow readers may be eligible with a slightly higher word reading standard score (up to 89) if their reading rate is 90 wpm or below.



Eligibility for a spelling and grammar waiver

Evidence of an SLD **and** attainments at a standard score of 85 or below on a spelling test **and** a significant error rate in spelling, grammar and/or punctuation of 8% or more.



Eligibility for computer or word processor

Evidence of an SLD **and** attainments at a standard score of 85 or below on a spelling test **and** illegible writing (due to errors at 20% or more in spelling / grammar / punctuation) **or** a spelling error rate of 8% or more **and** a writing speed of less than 12 wpm.



Eligibility for tape recorder

Evidence of an SLD **and** attainments at a standard score of 85 or below on a spelling test **and** illegible writing (due to errors at 20% or more in spelling / grammar / punctuation) **or** a spelling error rate of 8% or more **and** a writing speed of less than 12 wpm.



Eligibility for a scribe

Evidence of an SLD **and** illegible writing (due to a frequency of spelling / grammar / punctuation errors of 20% or more) **or** exceptionally slow handwriting speed (less than 12 wpm) **and** where the intelligibility of speech would make it difficult to decipher a tape-recorder response or where difficulties with auditory processing make the use of a tape recorder inappropriate or where the subject does not lend itself to the use of a tape recorder (e.g. maths, business studies).

Appendix B: Testing for eligibility for RACE

1. Tests of literacy attainment

The **Wide Range Achievement Test-4 (WRAT-4)** [Psychological Assessment Resources Inc] measures word reading and spelling (as well as sentence comprehension and maths computation). Level II is normed for people aged 12 to 64 years.

The **Wechsler Individual Achievement Test – UK for Teachers 3rd edition (WIAT-3)** [Pearson PsychCorp] measures single word reading and single word spelling (as well as reading comprehension, reading speed and reading rate).

Other acceptable tests of literacy attainment are listed on the Department of Education’s website (see <http://www.education.ie/en/Advanced-Search/?q=approved%20tests>).

2. Tests of cognitive ability

The **Cognitive Abilities Test – 3rd or 4th edition (CAT-3 or CAT-4)** [GL Assessment] measures verbal, quantitative, non-verbal and spatial reasoning and produces both subtest scores and a full scale cognitive standard score which can be easily compared to a reading or spelling standard score. Level G covers the age range from 15:00 to 17:11 years. Irish norms are available for the CAT-3 on <http://www.edev.ie/>.

The **Differential Aptitude Tests – 5th edition (DATs)** [Pearson] measure a combination of cognitive (e.g. verbal reasoning, numerical ability, abstract reasoning) and other kinds of abilities or aptitudes (e.g. perceptual speed and accuracy, space relations, language use). They were developed for use in vocational guidance and are restricted to professionals with a guidance or psychometric qualification. Standard scores in the reasoning subtests can be used to give an indication of a learner’s cognitive ability or IQ.

Other acceptable tests of cognitive ability are listed on the Department of Education’s website (see <http://www.education.ie/en/Advanced-Search/?q=approved%20tests>).

3. Testing reading error rates and speed

Testing reading error rate: Ask the learner to read a passage of continuous text using a past paper in a subject where you will find a piece that is at least 500 words long. Use a paper that is at the highest level of difficulty they are attempting in the exam (e.g. a higher level paper if they are sitting one of their subjects at that level). Have a copy of the same text for yourself and mark every error they make as they read aloud to you. Count the number of errors and divide by the total number of words in the passage. Convert this fraction into a percentage. This gives you a reading error rate.

Testing reading speed: Time the learner when you are testing their reading error rate and count the total number of words they read. Divide this by the total number of minutes they took to read the passage to get the average number of words per minute. This is their reading speed.

4. Testing spelling, punctuation and grammar error rates and writing speed

Testing spelling, punctuation and grammar error rate: Ask the learner to write the answer to a question in a relevant past paper under exam conditions in order to collect a suitable sample of their written work that is at least one A4 page in length. Identify all misspellings except in proper names, counting each form of misspelling once and not every time it occurs (e.g. ‘girl’ spelled as ‘gri1’

and 'glir' represents two errors but 'girl' spelled as 'gril' three times counts as only one error). Count all punctuation errors (including missing capitals at the beginning of sentences, in titles, in proper names and for the first personal pronoun – I); and missing or incorrect use of punctuation marks such as full stops, commas, question marks and apostrophes) and count grammatical errors such as incomplete sentences. Compute the number of errors as a percentage of the total number of words in the written passage. This is the spelling / punctuation / grammar error rate.

Testing writing speed: Time the learner's writing of this sample and compute the number of words written by the number of minutes it took them, to arrive at a writing speed in words per minute (wpm). Alternatively, use the **Hedderly Sentence Completion Test** (<http://www.dyslexia-international.org/content/Informal%20tests/Sentencecompletion.pdf>) to obtain a sample of writing and compute the wpm as above.

5. Testing writing legibility

A spelling, grammar and punctuation error rate of 20% or above is considered to render the writing essentially illegible. The way errors are counted for writing legibility is different to that for a spelling and grammar waiver. For testing writing legibility each spelling error is counted as a separate error e.g. 'girl' spelled as 'gril' three times in the passage is counted as three errors.

6. Testing speech intelligibility

There is no formal educational measure for this. The question is whether a person who had never met the learner – in this case the examiner – would be able to understand what the learner is saying when listening to a recording of their voice.

Acronyms

CTC	Community Training Centre
ETB	Education and Training Board
GC&PS	Guidance, counselling and psychological services
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
LCA	Leaving Cert Applied
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
RACE	Reasonable Accommodation in State Examinations
SEC	State Examinations Commission (SEC)
SLD	Specific learning difficulty
wpm	Words per minute

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NEPS

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