

Practical Tips for the Classroom

1) What we need to know about accommodations

Not all students learn in the same way. This is a fact. And we, teachers, must be ready to make certain accommodations to suit their needs. We may need to change some materials, the way we deliver the lesson or the speed at which we talk, for example. These are accommodations that we make to help a certain student achieve the same goals as their peers. In this respect, accommodations change how a student learns the material, responding to a strategic plan. These are usually called just 'accommodations' or 'not significant accommodations', and are often associated with mixed ability or different learning styles.

However, when students cannot cope with the curriculum, when they cannot aim at the same goals as the rest in the class, we need more significant accommodations. These are often referred to as 'modifications' and usually require formal authorization, as certain notions have to be skipped or reduced, prioritizing just basic, nuclear content.

In this short guide, we will focus on a few strategies that help us approach some special educational needs such as dyslexia, attention deficit disorders or autistic spectrum disorders.

It is nonetheless important to bear in mind that each child is unique, that what works for one student may not work for another and that if we want to help, we will probably need time to observe and discover what helps whom.



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II) Simple strategies that tend to prove effective

To adjust the way we teach to our students' needs, we may consider the following:

a) Special seating arrangement

Students with special needs should sit near you but never at your desk. If possible, they should be next to or surrounded by the classmates they get along with and that can help them with assignments, for instance. This will make them feel confident and more relaxed.

b) Time awareness

Some children may have time issues. They may take too long to complete tasks or be totally unable to finish them. A clock at the front may help. If we time activities, making sure we show on the clock how long they have to complete each, students will become more aware. You may say for instance, 'When the long hand gets to number 5, your time will be up.'



c) Segmentation

Very often, some students have difficulty copying from the board, may take too long to write answers or just get distracted easily. Their notebooks show a collection of incomplete tasks. If you spot these needs, it is advisable to teach them how to go step by step. Stand near them and ask them to read the instructions silently. Once they have finished, have them answer the first two questions. Monitor their work closely; stand by them helping them to focus. Remember 'one thing at a time' is the golden rule.

Segmentation is often essential when we want to test the class. Students with special needs may require shorter and simpler instructions, perhaps fewer questions or they may even need to be given one exercise at a time. Sometimes, they may need to do the test on two or three different days. We ought to be ready to cater for this.

d) Opportunities to get ready

Written tests usually include reading texts. In order to help students with special needs get a sense of achievement, we may give them the text in advance to read at home. It may be them the very same text they will find in the test or a very similar one. If the students have time to analyze word by word, they will not feel pressed for time at the test, which will give them the chance to perform better. Some teachers also give them ten questions out of which they choose just five to include in the test.



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e) Variety and movement

Variety will usually lead to a good pace in the lesson. This is very important as it will help students remain focused. Variety refers to skills - it is not advisable to plan a one-skill lesson. Every lesson should involve different skills. It also refers to the balance between aural and written activities, and to different levels of difficulty. Besides, some kind of movement is highly advisable. This may take the form of TPR activities, singing and dancing, a game in which students have to stand up and run to the front to reorder words, coming out to the front to play with a dice, etc.

f) Digital materials

Most textbooks nowadays bring a digital component that allows teachers to project whole pages or just an exercise on a whiteboard or wall. This helps because it adds variety to the lesson and fosters a heads-up methodology. Also, the enlarged projected images definitely look more vivid than a small picture or sentence on a book page. Digital materials help dyslexic and ADD students.

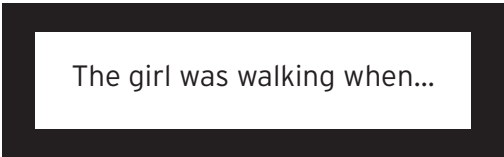
g) Fonts

When we test students or hand out a photocopy, we ought to bear in mind that some students may require special fonts. Open Dyslexic is a free font and it is very useful, although students who are not dyslexic do not find it clear enough. So perhaps it is worth considering other options such as Comic Sans and Arial, which are recommended by the British Dyslexia Association, if possible in a size that is bigger than 14.

h) Other aids

Some simple objects may also come in handy, for instance:

- **The reading window:** a cardboard rectangle with a rectangular hole in the middle that serves as a window as you place it on a text. It acts as a kind of frame to help students focus as they read. This is very useful specifically for dyslexic students, who often report 'dancing letters'.



The girl was walking when...

- **Pencil grips** let students hold pens and pencils properly, making their writing easier and less demanding, thus allowing them to focus on what they write.



- **Technological devices** are undeniably practical. Mobile phones and computers allow students to avoid spelling mistakes, for example, so they are useful tools. There are also very interesting apps that may help students write and study as well, for example: *Leo - Recording and transcription* (to transcribe recordings into texts) or *Reading Machine* (for reading practice). However, our real life scenario may not include a technological device 24/7. We should then train students to do without them as well.
- **Colours** also help. Some dyslexic learners say they 'see better' when the background is not white. We may then have some activities printed on yellow sheets. However, the truth is that while some students prefer yellow, others will find light-blue more practical. So be ready to experiment!

In all cases, it is important to highlight that there are no perfect recipes. A lot will depend on our effort, patience and management.

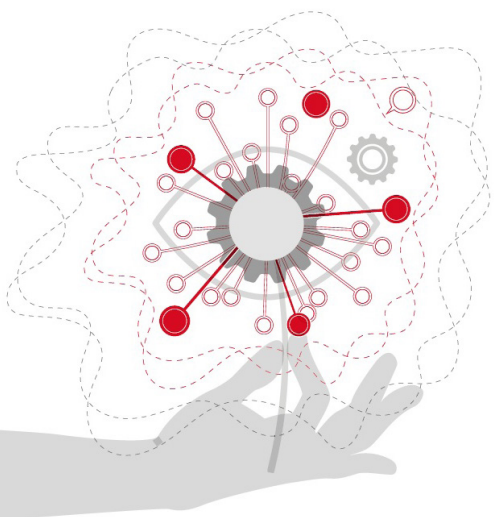
We wish you all the best!

The Macmillan Argentina Team



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Alejandra Ottolina is a highly experienced teacher trainer who has taught all levels in both public and private sectors. She has lectured in Argentina as well as in neighbouring countries, and has authored several Teacher's Books: *For Winners*, *Insights* and *Phases*, among others. She is Macmillan's Academic Consultant and is currently doing a degree in Educational Therapy.



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