

Test Anxiety and Disability Documentation and Accommodations

Test anxiety occurs when symptoms of anxiety substantially impair academic performance, preventing students from demonstrating their true abilities. Some degree of anxiety is normal when an individual is faced with a demanding situation with an uncertain outcome. Common indicators of stress are physical shakiness, increased heart rate, difficulty breathing, “blacking out,” panicking, and gastrointestinal symptoms.

Students with academic accommodation needs should initiate a request for services through the Access Center. Students are required to provide written documentation of their disability before services can be provided. Test anxiety is something for which an accommodation may or may not be given, depending on whether the student’s condition is severe enough to constitute a disability under state and federal laws.

An evaluation must determine whether one’s symptoms are within the normal range or whether they are clinically significant. The student should be evaluated by an appropriate health care professional who can provide documentation that supports the assertion that the student’s test anxiety is a disability. Under Washington law, in order to constitute a disability, the condition must be a “sensory, mental, or physical impairment” that is medically cognizable. An impairment includes any “mental, developmental, traumatic, or psychological disorder.” RCW 49.60.040.

Documentation must clearly show that a “mental, developmental, traumatic, or psychological” disorder has been assessed by an appropriate health care provider, e.g., therapist, psychologist. More importantly, it must also describe how the student’s functioning is specifically impacted or limited by this condition.

As clinicians/medical professionals undergo the assessment process, it is suggested that the following points, when relevant, be considered:

- **Treatment:** Is the student seeking or receiving counseling/treatment for test anxiety? Is the student taking medication for anxiety? How long has the student been in treatment?
- **Severity of Symptoms:** What are the symptoms and how severe are they? Is the severity proportional to the demand of the situation?
- **Pervasiveness:** Does the student’s test difficulty encompass more than one subject area or more than one type of exam format?
- **Duration:** How long has the test anxiety persisted? Has the student dropped courses due to test anxiety?
- **Ability:** Is there evidence of aptitude or ability that can be seen in non-anxiety-producing evidence of the student’s knowledge such as homework, papers, or informal discussions?
- **Preparation:** Is the student adequately prepared for tests? Are they utilizing sound study strategies?
- Do they seek academic assistance on campus?

Documentation should be from a qualified healthcare provider and include:

- Contact information
- License number
- Signature or electronic signature

Disability and medical information is confidential and is not shared except where disclosure is required by law or is necessary to facilitate legitimate University processes, including granting appropriate accommodations, addressing direct threats, or investigating claims or charges.

Questions or concerns regarding documentation requirements can be directed to Jane Summers at 509.358.7537 or jane.summers@wsu.edu. Documentation may be scanned and emailed to jane.summers@wsu.edu or faxed to 509.358.7983 (confidential fax).