

FAQs: Disability-Related Absences and Assignment Extensions

Disability-Related Absences

Q: Who is eligible for Disability-Related Absences?

A: This academic accommodation is provided to students with chronic physical or mental conditions that have unpredictable flare-ups or episodes, to ensure that they are not penalized when they're having an exacerbation of their disability and need to be absent from class.

Q: What does the Disability-Related Absences accommodation allow?

A: This accommodation allows students to be absent from class without penalty to their in-class participation grade, as needed, when unpredictable disability-related circumstances arise. If absent during a quiz or exam, students should be allowed to reschedule without penalty. The accommodation allows the student to miss two times the course allowed absences, as is outlined in the syllabus.

Q: Is the guidelines for “two times the course allowed absences” for this accommodation a strict rule?

A: No. Additional leniency beyond what the guidelines of the accommodation provide is always allowed and encouraged if the instructor feels that it is reasonable and appropriate, without fundamentally altering the course requirements or expectations.

*Q: What is **not** provided by Disability-Related Absences?*

A: Disability-Related Absences **do not** provide for:

- Unlimited excused absences. The accommodation is not a “blanket statement” that excuses any and all absences.
- Retroactive requests for absences after missing class without any communication to the instructor

- Excused absences for non-disability related circumstances (e.g., not intended to cover situations such as work conflicts, personal issues, travel, etc.)
- Excusing the student from any missed in-class activities (e.g., missing labs or missed quizzes must be made up at another time)
- Excusing the student from being responsible catching up on the content that was covered in class that day
- Fundamentally altering requirements for course engagement that other students will be held accountable for

Q: How can students communicate their need for a Disability-Related Absence?

A: When students are experiencing an unpredictable disability-related circumstance and will not be able to attend class, they should:

1. Reach out to the professor as soon as they know you will be absent from class. The student should CC their assigned Access Coordinator on the email every time.*
2. Notify the professor that they will be absent from class, and ask if there are any important assignments, announcements, etc. they may have missed. They may also request a copy of any class notes or slides, if available.
 - a. *NOTE: When requesting a disability-related absence or extension, students are NOT required to go into detail about the specific symptoms or circumstances they are experiencing in their email communication with instructors. They should simply state that they will be making use of their approved accommodation. Here is a sample template that students may use:
 - i. *“I am registered with the DS and I receive an accommodation for disability-related absences. This email is to notify you that my absence on (DATE) was due to disability-related reasons. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this accommodation or its use, please contact my Access Coordinator who I have included in this correspondence.”*
3. Follow up with their Access Coordinator as needed for additional support. Access Coordinators are available to provide clarification for instructors as needed through these email communications, so it is important to CC them each time.

Q: Why does the accommodation require students to communicate with their instructors prior to missing class?

A: Accommodations can never be applied retroactively, which is why we ask that students communicate in advance of a class absence. We recognize that there may be disability-related circumstances which prevent timely communication. Students should communicate with their instructors as soon as they are able and reach out to their assigned Access Coordinator for any additional support needed.

Q: What if an instructor has a zero-absence policy, or has no attendance policy stated in their syllabus?

A: If the instructor does not have an attendance policy or has a zero-absence policy, the student should set up a meeting with their instructor, facilitated by their Access Coordinator, to discuss and settle on an agreed upon amount of acceptable absences. This will be documented and saved on record by the Access Coordinator and signed by both student and instructor.

Q: Is the instructor required to respond or approve the absence before class for the student to be excused?

A: No. Students are only expected to communicate that they will be absent and are making use of the accommodation. Instructor's advanced approval is not required. As long as students are using the accommodation appropriately and copying their Access Coordinator on the email so that Disability Services has record of the communication, Disability Services will support the student in ensuring that their accommodation needs are met.

Q: What if there is an unpredictable disability-related circumstance at the last minute, and a student is not able to communicate their need for an absence prior to class?

A: Due to features of some disabilities, the student may be unable to communicate prior to class and are expected to communicate as soon as they are able. We encourage faculty to be understanding and provide flexibility within reason without fundamentally altering course requirements or expectations. Students should contact their assigned Access Coordinator as soon as possible if they need more support communicating their needs.

Q: What happens when there is an extenuating circumstance, like a hospitalization, where a student cannot communicate with their instructor in a timely manner?

A: In extenuating circumstances such as hospitalizations, students should contact their assigned Access Coordinator directly, as soon as they can, for support.

Q: What if a student is having more disability-related circumstances, and needs more absences than two times the course allowed absence?

A: Students should start by requesting the flexibility they need via email, with their Access Coordinator copied on the email. The instructor's reply to the request should copy the Access Coordinator and, if the request is denied, should include the concerns and reasons for not providing the flexibility. In that case, the Access Coordinator will mediate the situation between the instructor and student. If the additional flexibility is determined to be a fundamental alteration to course expectations or requirements, then Disability Services cannot mandate the additional leniency.

Q: Why is it necessary to have “two times the course allowed absences” specified in the accommodation language? Why can't Disability Services leave it open-ended?

A: Providing a guideline for the appropriate usage of the accommodation is necessary and important **to ensure that all students are consistently being provided with a base-level of flexibility from all instructors, without having to negotiate**. Many rulings by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) have found that it is problematic to place the students in a position to have to negotiate the terms of their accommodations with their instructors due to the power dynamics at play. Clarifying that twice the amount of the course allowed absences, **at minimum**, is expected to meet the needs of the accommodation ensures that students are not unduly denied their right to access this accommodation. **If an instructor is comfortable providing more flexibility with their attendance policy than this, then this accommodation would defer to the most flexible policy.**

Q: Why doesn't Disability Services just facilitate these conversations between students and their instructors as standard practice, instead of using these guidelines?

A: Determining reasonable and agreed upon absences through a facilitated discussion for all students and each one of their instructors every semester would not be scalable at a school the size of UMass Amherst. This guidance helps outline a base-level of flexibility

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that instructors should provide at minimum, establishing a floor, and Disability Services will help facilitate a discussion about additional leniency as needed on a case-by-case basis.

Q: I'm an instructor and my course is heavily participation/performance based. How do I handle this accommodation in my course?

A: Instructors who feel that “two times the course allowed absences” is not suitable for the unique structure or requirements of their course should reach out to Disability Services as soon as possible. Disability Services is happy to work with instructors to outline a policy for students with attendance flexibility that balances students’ needs with the class's requirements and expectations.

Disability-Related Assignment Extensions

Q: Who is eligible for Disability-Related Assignment Extensions?

A: This accommodation is provided to students with chronic physical or mental conditions that have unpredictable flare-ups or episodes, to ensure that they are not penalized when they're having an exacerbation of their disability and thus cannot meet an assignment deadline.

Q: What does the Disability-Related Assignment Extensions accommodation allow?

This accommodation allows the student to request an extension of up three days. The extended due date is proposed by the student and must be accepted by the instructor, in writing, via email communication, prior to the assignment due date. This accommodation also applies to rescheduling exams if the disability-related circumstance arises on the day of a test/quiz/exam.

Q: Is the guidelines for “up to three days” for an extension a strict rule?

A: No. Additional leniency beyond what the guidelines of the accommodation provide is always allowed and encouraged if the instructor feels that it is reasonable and appropriate, without fundamentally altering the course requirements or expectations.

*Q: What is **not** provided by Disability-Related Assignment Extensions?*

A: Disability-Related Assignment extensions **do not** provide for ~~permit~~:

- The unlimited acceptance of late work. The accommodation is not intended to be used on a regular basis. It is not a “blanket statement” that applies to all assignments.
- Retroactive requests for extensions (i.e., request for extensions after the due date has passed)
- Extensions for non-disability related circumstances (e.g., not intended to cover situations such as work conflicts, personal issues, travel, etc.)
- Extensions that would present a fundamental alteration to the course expectations or requirements
- Extensions that would pose an unfair academic advantage

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Q: How can students communicate their need for a Disability-Related Assignment Extension?

A: When students are experiencing an unpredictable disability-related circumstance and will not be able to meet an assignment deadline, they should:

4. Reach out to their professor as soon as they know they will need an assignment extension or that they will be absent from class. They should CC their assigned Access Coordinator on the email every time.*

5. Propose a new assignment due date that is within three days of the original due date and ask if the instructor agrees to the proposed date.
 - a. *NOTE: When requesting a disability-related absence or extension, students are NOT required to go into detail about the specific symptoms or circumstances they are experiencing in their email communication with instructors. They should simply state that they will be making use of their approved accommodation. Here is a sample template that students may use:
 - i. *“I am registered with the Disability Services and I receive an accommodation for disability-related assignment extensions. This email is to request an extension for (ASSIGNMENT NAME) originally due (DATE) for disability-related reasons. With your permission I would like to submit it on (DATE). If you have any questions or concerns regarding this accommodation or its use, please contact my Access Coordinator access advisor who I have included in this correspondence.”*

6. Follow up with their Access Coordinator as needed for additional support. Access Coordinators are available to provide clarification for instructors as needed through these email communications, so it is important to CC them each time.

Q: What does “up to three days” mean?

A: “Up to three days” means that it would be reasonable for a student to request a 1-day, 2-day, or 3-day extension, depending upon the disability-related circumstances they are experiencing. Instructors are expected to provide this level of flexibility **at minimum**. The

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student should propose a new due date based upon their disability-related needs, and the instructor should either agree, or if it will not be reasonable/appropriate, communicate the reasons why to the student and their Access Coordinator.

Q: Why does the accommodation require students to communicate with their instructors prior to the assignment deadline?

A: Accommodations can never be applied retroactively, which is why we ask that students communicate in advance of an assignment deadline. We recognize that there may be disability-related circumstances which prevent timely communication. Students should communicate with their instructors as soon as they are able and reach out to their assigned Access Coordinator for any additional support needed.

Q: Can faculty make a blanket-statement policy that they will only provide one day extensions?

A: It would not be appropriate for faculty to issue blanket-statement policies that limit all students to only requesting one-day extensions. Accommodations must be determined on a case-by-case basis and ADA laws discourage the use of blanket-statement policies, which fail to take the student's unique disability needs into consideration. The language of "up to three days" provides a base-level of flexibility that instructors should provide to students with this accommodation, at minimum.

Q: Can an instructor refuse a request for an assignment extension?

A: If an instructor feels that the request for an extension fundamentally alters their course expectations or requirements, they should reach out to the Access Coordinator that is CC'd on the student's email to communicate your concerns.

Q: Why is it necessary to have "up to three days" specified in the accommodation language? Why can't Disability Services leave it open-ended?

A: Providing a guideline for the appropriate usage of the accommodation is necessary and important **to ensure that all students are consistently being provided with a base-level of flexibility from all instructors, without having to negotiate**. Many rulings by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) have found that it is problematic to place the students in a position to have to negotiate the terms of their accommodations with their instructors due to the

power dynamics at play. Clarifying that 1-3 days, at minimum, is expected to meet the needs of the accommodation ensures that students are not unduly denied their right to access this accommodation. **If an instructor is comfortable providing more than three days for extensions, then this accommodation would defer to the most flexible policy.**

Q: Why doesn't Disability Services just facilitate these conversations between students and their instructors as standard practice, instead of using these guidelines?

A: Determining reasonable and agreed upon extensions through a facilitated discussion for all students and each one of their instructors every semester would not be scalable at a school the size of UMass Amherst. This guidance helps outline a base-level of flexibility that instructors should provide at minimum, establishing a floor, and Disability Services will help facilitate a discussion about additional leniency as needed on a case-by-case basis.

*Q: Some instructors allow all students to have a one-week extension. Does this guidance mean that instructors are not allowed to do this, or that they should give a disabled student **less** flexibility than they would give a non-disabled student?*

A: We recognized that instructors may have developed their own policies for deadline flexibility. **This accommodation would defer to the most flexible policy.** Additional leniency beyond what the guidelines of the accommodation provide is always allowed and encouraged if it does not fundamentally alter the course requirements or provide the student with an unfair academic advantage. Instructors are encouraged to use their best judgement and reach out to Disability Services directly with questions or concerns.

Q: What if a student emails their instructor to ask for an assignment extension and they don't respond before the due date?

A: As long as the student is following the expectations to communicate proactively before the deadline, requesting reasonable extensions, and copying your Access Coordinator on the email so that we have record of your attempts to communicate, Disability Services will support the student in ensuring that their accommodation needs are met.

Q: What if there is an unpredictable disability-related circumstance at the last minute, and the student is not able to request the extension before the due date?

A: Due to features of some disabilities, the student may be unable to communicate prior to the deadline and are expected to communicate as soon as they are able. We encourage faculty to be understanding and provide flexibility within reason without fundamentally altering course requirements or expectations. Students should contact their assigned Access Coordinator as soon as possible if they need more support communicating their needs.

Q: What should I do if there is an extenuating circumstance, like a hospitalization, where I cannot communicate with my instructor in a timely manner?

A: In extenuating circumstances such as hospitalizations, students should contact their assigned Access Coordinator directly, as soon as they can, for support.

Q: What if my disability-related circumstance will require an assignment extension that is longer than three days?

A: Students should start by requesting the extension they need, proposing a new deadline by email to the instructor, with their Access Coordinator copied on the email. The instructor's reply to the request should copy the Access Coordinator and, if the request is denied, should include the concerns and reasons for not providing the flexibility. In that case, the Access Coordinator will mediate the situation between the instructor and student. If the additional flexibility is determined to be a fundamental alteration to course expectations or requirements, then Disability Services cannot mandate the additional leniency.

Q: Does this accommodation provide extensions for long-term assignments, such as a senior capstone or a graduate literature review?

A: No. Under ADA laws, accommodations are provided to disabled students to ensure that they have access to the same opportunities as their non-disabled peers, while holding them accountable to the same academic standards and expectations. Accommodations cannot fundamentally alter course expectations or requirements, and they cannot pose an unfair academic advantage over other students. Moreover, accommodations are not intended to guarantee success.

The accommodation is intended to mitigate the impact of unexpected flare-up symptoms. It is generally not intended for students who take longer to complete assignments because of issues with executive functioning (e.g., time management, organization, focus, processing speed, regulating effort, motivation, regulating actions/behaviors, etc.) or have learning disabilities. Students with these areas of limitation typically will require extensions on all assignments consistently, all the time. This is beyond the scope of what this accommodation can reasonably provide before it presents a fundamental alteration, or an unfair academic advantage. For most courses, curricular material for each week builds on the learning goals from prior weeks; therefore, accumulating incomplete assignments weekly throughout the semester hampers a student's readiness to digest the new material. Requesting assignment extensions beyond a reasonable limit, regardless of whether it is covered by an accommodation or not, will inevitably set the student behind in the course and have implications on their ability to demonstrate progress towards learning objectives. Taking a reduced credit load is more appropriate to remove the barrier to access for students who will consistently take longer to complete tasks.