

Reasonable Accommodations For the Student-Athlete's Return to the Classroom After a Sport-Related Concussion

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1. Excused Absence from Classes

The student-athlete's need to rest must be balanced with the academic work to be done. For the student with intense symptoms, a few days of complete rest may be needed immediately post-injury. Then partial attendance might involve priority attendance at core classes, missing early classes and arriving at school later in the morning for the student who is having sleep difficulty or morning symptoms, or leaving earlier in the afternoon for the student who becomes more symptomatic as the day goes on.

2. Rest Periods During the School Day

Many student-athletes are able to maximize class attendance if they can leave class when symptoms flare up in order to rest in the school nurse's office or other designated area. After half an hour or so of rest and possible use of over-the-counter pain medication, as directed by the physician, many students feel less symptomatic and are able to return to class.

3. Extension of Assignment Deadlines

Allowing extra time for the completion of homework assignments is an appropriate accommodation for student-athletes who are having difficulty with information processing and handling a full workload.

4. Postponement or Staggering of Tests

Taking tests while still symptomatic usually places the recovering student-athlete at a distinct and unfair disadvantage. Furthermore, even if the student is able to achieve passing grades, the mental effort needed to prepare for tests may exacerbate his or her symptoms. Postponing testing until the student-athlete is more fully recovered is therefore ideal. Particular care is necessary to avoid having recovering students take high-stakes tests, such as midterm or final examinations, high school Advanced Placement examinations, or SAT or ACT examinations. Some testing authorities allow students to disregard scores if they have not performed well, but other tests, such as the Advanced Placement examinations, cannot be retaken. During midterm or final examinations, when testing is clustered and more intensive, students may be able to pace themselves by scheduling no more than one examination per day or by allowing extra time between examinations. Student-athletes who are injured in the spring and have disabling symptoms at the time of yearly final examinations sometimes do better to wait until later in the summer to complete coursework and examinations.

5. Excuse From Specific Tests and Assignments

For younger student-athletes, whose current coursework does not have direct ramifications for college entrance or credit determinations, the most appropriate step may be to excuse them altogether from specific tests and assignments while they are symptomatic and to base their grades on homework and test scores achieved up to the

time of injury. This may relieve student-athletes of emotional pressure during and immediately after recovery and allow them to return to the regular flow of their academic lives as soon as they are able. When a student continues with the usual work while symptomatic, another option is to assign less weight to test scores and grades earned during that time, as these are often below the student's usual level of capability.

6. Extended Testing Time

Because diminished information-processing speed is one of the most common post-concussive problems, extended time is frequently needed by student-athletes who are symptomatic but who feel well enough to attempt to continue with their scheduled examinations.

7. Accommodation for Oversensitivity to Light, Noise, or Both

Many student-athletes are unable to tolerate certain types or levels of light or noise while recovering. Fluorescent lighting can be particularly bothersome, as can high-stimulation environments, such as cafeterias and assembly halls. Turning down the lights in one area of a classroom or allowing the student to move away from the source of light or noise may help at times. Allowing the student to eat lunch away from the cafeteria or to skip an assembly should be considered. Permission to wear caps with visors or sunglasses in school can also be beneficial.

8. Excuse From Team Sport Practice and Gym Activities

Avoiding physical exertion is a priority in the early days of recovery, when that time is better spent resting or keeping up with class work. As recovery progresses, however, student-athletes often wish to continue attending practices to be supportive of their team, to stay "in the flow" of team activities and game planning, and to show coaches and fellow athletes that they remain committed to the team. Such attendance is not a problem as long as obtaining needed rest and addressing academic work remain the priorities. Certain student-athletes need to be encouraged to attend only some of the team's practice activities, skipping days or leaving early other days in order to complete homework or rest.

9. Avoidance of Other Physical Exertion

In addition to gym class, other activities that are part of the student-athlete's regular school day can sometimes lead to physical overexertion. Because many students today are accustomed to carrying very heavy loads, backpack weight should be monitored. In schools with more stairs, students should be advised to take elevators, if available, or to climb longer sets of stairs very slowly. Furthermore, those who play wind instruments may find that the demands of breath control provoke symptoms, necessitating a break from playing or at least reduced participation in band activity.

10. Use of a Reader for Assignments and Testing

Many recovering student-athletes find that their symptoms are exacerbated by the visual scanning activity and concentration demands of reading. Thus, a reader for regular assignments or tests (or both) may lessen those information-processing demands. Another option is to use books on tape or CD or to tape record examination questions for the

student to listen to at his or her own pace. If such testing accommodations are being considered, however, it may still be preferable to postpone examinations altogether.

11. Use of a Note Taker or Scribe

Because many recovering students have difficulty listening and taking notes at the same time in class, a note taker can lessen attentional demands and allow the student to focus on the lecture content. Similarly, as a result of the visual and concentration demands of writing, some students may more easily dictate homework essays, papers, and test answers.

12. Use of a Smaller, Quieter Examination Room to Reduce Stimulation and Distraction

During the recovery period, many student-athletes exhibit some of the same characteristics seen in individuals with ADHD, including vulnerability to distraction by routine sights and sounds that occur in examination rooms for larger classes. The opportunity to temporarily join smaller groups of students who regularly receive such accommodations for attentional disabilities during examinations or who are permitted to take examinations alone may therefore be very helpful.

13. Preferential Classroom Seating to Lessen Distraction

Students with attentional deficits tend to focus better when they are seated in front of the classroom or away from doors and windows. In classes with assigned seating, the student-athlete may need to request a seat change. In other classes, the student-athlete should be encouraged to sit at the front of the room. Teachers should be prepared to facilitate such seating changes if a student seated in the back of the classroom seems to have trouble following discussions.

14. Temporary Assistance of a Tutor to Assist With Organizing and Prioritizing Homework Assignments

Student-athletes with concussion-related attentional deficits may have substantial problems organizing and planning their academic work. A brief daily meeting with the guidance counselor or an assigned tutor may help the student maintain academic priorities and keep track of scheduled assignments, quizzes, and tests. Furthermore, this assistance permits monitoring of the student's ability to maintain pace and allows for timely identification of the need for additional accommodations if the student cannot keep up with the assigned work. When more severe symptoms result in an extended absence from school, tutoring may be best started at home to assist the student-athlete in regaining some academic momentum before returning to the challenge and stimulation of the regular school environment.

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Table 1. Reasonable Accommodations for the Student-Athlete Recovering From Concussion

Accommodation	Rationale
Excused absence from class	Several days of complete rest, progressing to limited attendance, may be needed
Rest periods during the school day	When symptoms flare, brief rest and pain medication may allow student to return to class
Extension of assignment deadlines	Information-processing speed and ability to handle full workload may be impeded
Postponement or staggering of tests	Mental effort to prepare and then take test may worsen symptoms
Excuse from (or unweight) specific tests and assignments	Relieves emotional pressure and allows return to regular workload as soon as possible
Extended testing time	Information-processing speed may be impeded
Accommodation for light or noise sensitivity	Fluorescent light and high-stimulation environments may cause symptoms
Excuse from team sport practice and gym activities	No physical activity progresses to limited physical activity, as tolerated. Monitor backpack weight, stair use, playing of wind instruments. Avoidance of other physical exertion.
Use of a reader (or recorded books) for assignments and testing	Lessens visual scanning and concentration demands
Use of a note taker or scribe	Lessens attentional, visual, and concentration demands
Use of a smaller, quieter examination room	Lessens stimulation and distraction
Preferential classroom seating	Lessens distraction
Temporary assistance of a tutor	Assists in organizing and prioritizing assignments