



Access Arrangements — What Every Member of Staff Needs to Know

What Are Access Arrangements?

Adjustments made before an exam that allow a student to demonstrate their knowledge on equal terms with peers.



What They Are

A formal, regulated process by JCQ. Available for GCSEs, A-levels, and vocational qualifications. Applied for by the school, not the student or parent. Requires evidence of need from a specialist assessor.



What They Are Not

- ✗ Not a reward for effort or behaviour.
- ✗ Not an unfair advantage.
- ✗ Not available on request — evidence is essential.
- ✗ Cannot be arranged last minute.



Key message: Access arrangements level the playing field. They allow a student to show what they know, not how quickly they can process.

Why Students Need Access Arrangements

Exams are timed, text-heavy, and require rapid processing — exactly the conditions that create the greatest barriers for dyslexic learners.



Processing Speed:

Many dyslexic students process written information more slowly. A standard timed exam disadvantages them before they have written a single word. Extra time compensates for slower decoding, not slower thinking.



Reading Fluency:

Decoding text takes conscious effort that neurotypical readers apply automatically. A reader provision removes the barrier entirely, allowing the student to focus cognitive resources on answering the question.



Written Output:

Spelling, handwriting speed, and organising written ideas simultaneously can overwhelm working memory. A scribe or word processor removes the mechanical barrier so subject knowledge can be demonstrated.



Key message: Without access arrangements, the exam tests the disability, not the student's knowledge. That is not valid assessment.

Key Provisions — What They Do

Each provision targets a specific barrier. Not every student needs every arrangement — the need must be identified and evidenced individually.

Provision	What It Removes	Who It Helps Most
25% Extra Time	The time pressure that penalises slow decoding and processing	Students with processing speed or reading fluency difficulties
Reader / Reading Pen	The decoding burden of written text	Students whose reading fluency is significantly weak
Scribe	The physical and spelling demands of handwriting	Students with very slow writing speed or severe spelling difficulties
Word Processor	The legibility barrier; aids organisation of written ideas	Students with handwriting difficulties or poor written organisation
Rest Breaks	The cognitive fatigue of sustained, high-effort processing	Students for whom concentration and stamina are significantly affected



Key message: Each provision has specific evidence criteria. Your SENCo and an external assessor can advise on what applies to each student.

The Normal Way of Working

JCQ regulations require that any arrangement applied in an exam must also be used routinely in the classroom. This is the "normal way of working" requirement, and it directly involves every teacher.



What This Means in Practice:

If a student has a reader provision, they should be offered read-aloud support during lessons and in-class assessments. If a student uses a word processor in exams, they should be permitted to use one in timed class tasks too. Without classroom evidence, the school cannot apply for the arrangement at GCSE or A-level.



Why It Matters:

The provision must reflect genuine, ongoing need, not something used only at exam time. SENCo and subject staff are both responsible for creating and recording that evidence across the school year. A student identified in Year 10 with no classroom record of use may be refused an arrangement at GCSE.



Key message: Classroom teachers are not observers in this process. The evidence you create day-to-day is what makes an access arrangement possible at exam time.



In Summary

Access arrangements remove barriers, not advantage. They require evidence, not request. Every member of staff has a role in creating that evidence through the normal way of working in their own classroom.

