

Sarah Crowther

Sarah Crowther is the Director of Student Success and First-Year Programming at Culver-Stockton College in Canton, MO. She previously worked in admissions at Landmark College. Sarah's area of expertise is executive function disorders in college students and has presented on the topic at domestic and international conferences, including the TSA national conference in 2008. Sarah will present again at our 2010 national conference and continues to work with TSA, helping students make successful transitions from high school to college.

My son gets excellent grades but his TS, and related disorders, make test-taking a nightmare. Is it possible for him to get accommodations on the SATs and other college entrance exams?

Yes, it is possible to get accommodations on exams, but there are very specific documentation needs in order for accommodations to be implemented. First, the psycho-educational documentation of a disability must be made within three years of the accommodation request. This generally includes cognitive and achievement testing as well as a clear diagnosis from the DSM-IV. The cognitive testing is the IQ test, and the achievement testing measures reading and writing fluency. For cognitive testing, the preferred tests are the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale or the Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Cognitive Abilities. For achievement testing, the tests that tend to be preferred are the Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement III or the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test II. Along with the tests and diagnosis, there must be clear recommendations from the evaluator about accommodations needed. For example, if your son is easily distracted due to TS and/or ADHD, or has increased anxiety because of trying to control tics in public, then undistracted testing space might be recommended by the evaluator. In my experience, families and guidance counselors have had great experiences with the ACT (The American College Testing Program) when trying

to secure accommodations, so I would recommend contacting ACT, as well. Please keep in mind that college entrance exam organizations have the right to refuse accommodations that they consider to be unreasonable. Before you submit documentation, call the exam organizations to ask if your documentation is sufficient and if the accommodations sought are considered reasonable.

I'm studying for the PSATs right now and I get good scores on the 'fake' tests. I'm worried because I get stressed out before normal tests in school. What can I do to feel less stressed about the most important test of my life?

Test anxiety is one of the most difficult problems to overcome, but it can be done!

You're already on the right track by taking the PSAT because it is a preview of what to expect on the SAT. By familiarizing yourself with the test and the test format, you won't have the element of surprise working against you, which can be a major source of stress. The next step is not to pull an all-nighter before the test. Make sure you get plenty of sleep the two nights before the test so you'll be well rested. Also, make certain that you eat well before the test. Even if you're nervous, eat some whole grains and lean protein for energy and to stay full during the test. Being hungry during the test will affect your attention and energy negatively, which will increase stress.

The next steps are for during the test: If you have trouble on a question, move on. Don't waste time and energy on one problem, but do go back later with "new eyes." Keep a positive attitude throughout the test and encourage yourself as you go. If you go into the test assuming you'll do terribly, you probably will. Please do not cram — it increases anxiety. This might sound obvious, but make sure you breathe! Many people get stressed and take shallow breaths, which stresses the body because of lack of oxygen. If you feel yourself getting more stressed, take deep breaths and try to regulate your breathing so you breathe from the bottom of your lungs, not just the top.

On multiple-choice tests, your first answer is usually the best answer. Don't change your answer unless you have an excellent and logical reason. Underline key words in the questions to help you keep focused on what is being asked and check your work again if you have time at the end of the test. Use all of the time given to you and don't pay attention to those who finish early. Good luck!

I'm a pretty good student and study hard all the time. I try not to let TS get in my way, but I had a bad period of time and got some bad grades. Now that I'm applying for college I'm wondering if I should tell the admissions people that I have TS. Will it hurt my chances of getting into a good school? Or, worse, will it make people feel sorry for me and get me into a school that wouldn't otherwise accept me?



Most of us have rough patches in our academic careers and most admissions counselors understand bumps along the way. However, by law, you are not obligated to disclose this to the admissions office or to the college during the application process. It is illegal for a college or university to refuse admission based on disability. You can be refused because you do not meet the student profile, but not specifically because of TS. Explaining academic difficulty and not mentioning how TS factored into poor grades is also acceptable. It is perfectly legitimate to say you had a period that was difficult academically, but you did (insert specific examples here) to rectify your academic problems.

Colleges and universities admit students that they believe will be successful at their institution, not students they feel bad for. Most colleges and universities are interested in diversity — this means diverse people and diverse minds. Admittedly, there are still misperceptions about TS, so do what feels most comfortable. If you interview and have a noticeable tic, you may want to disclose to the admissions counselor so that there isn't a misunderstanding, but again, the choice to disclose is yours. ●

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