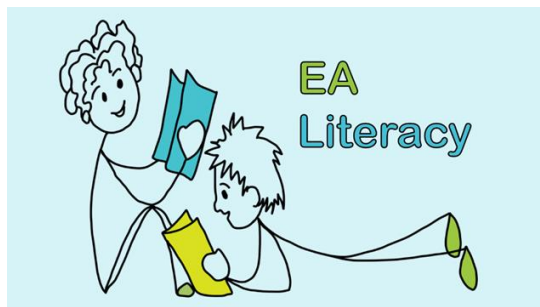


EA Literacy

JCQ access arrangements 2024/2025 for pupils with literacy difficulties

Overview



This document has been developed by EA Literacy (Northern Ireland). The information provided has been collated from the JCQ website with additional examples and interpretations provided by EA Literacy. It is intended for parents/carers/staff who may be supporting a child or young person with literacy difficulties. The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the access arrangements approved by the JCQ for external examinations, for pupils with literacy difficulties. We hope you find some of the content helpful and informative – however please be aware that ultimately the centre/school is responsible for ensuring the integrity of examinations.

EA Literacy

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Please Note: The information provided in this document is based upon the 2024/25 edition of the JCQ’s publication, Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments. Centres should ensure they follow and use the most up-to-date guidelines, proformas and templates when determining eligibility and/or applying for access arrangements. The JCQ publish annual updates with regards to access arrangements. The vast majority of GCSE and GCE level qualifications in Northern Ireland are under the regulation of the JCQ.

“SENCOs may wish to consider the use of technology to a much greater extent instead of readers and scribes. Computer readers, examination reading pens, speech recognition technology and word processors not only allow candidates to work independently but are also a better preparation for Further and Higher Education and the world of employment”.

(JCQ, 2020, p.4) Available from: [Important supplementary information for SENCOs and assessors](#).

In this document you will find a summary and signposting to access arrangements that may be relevant for pupils with literacy difficulties. The information that follows is based upon the 2024/25 edition of the JCQ’s annually updated publication, Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments. For more information, please visit the [JCQ](#) website to download the 2024/25 edition of [Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments](#). You can also [subscribe to regular e-newsletters & bulletins](#) from the JCQ.

Access Arrangements Applications

“Schools, colleges, universities and awarding bodies are legally required to make access arrangements and reasonable adjustments”.

NDCS, 2021

Please visit the JCQ’s [CAP \(Central Admin Portal\)](#) for information on how to process access arrangements online, order modified papers as well as access interactive JCQ documentation. Additional information is provided in the [Access arrangements online FAQ 2024](#).

The JCQ provides various template forms to complete to support a centre’s application for [Access Arrangements, Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration](#). Forms that may be applicable for pupils with Literacy Difficulties include:

- ❖ **Form 8:** Profile of learning difficulties
- ❖ **Form 8RF:** Evidence to accompany Form 8 when a pupil progresses from GCSE to GCE qualifications (and other Level 3 qualifications)
- ❖ **Form 9:** Profile of need

“Access arrangements are not automatically permitted by exam boards – a school or college will need to show that they were part of a ‘normal way of working’ for a student”.

NCDS, 2021

Applications for access arrangements should be made in good time before the examination date to ensure time for processing. Deadlines for submitting applications for access arrangements/reasonable adjustments and orders for modified papers using Access Arrangements Online can be found on **pages 12-13** of the [JCQ Guidelines](#). Centres should

“To inspire, support and challenge all our Children and Young People to be the best that they can be.”
Education Authority – Literacy

also refer to **Chapter 8** for more detailed information on processing applications for access arrangements and adjustments.

Access arrangements/reasonable adjustments should be processed at the start of the course. Centres, for example, should be able to process applications at the start of or during the first year of a two-year GCSE course having firmly established a picture of need and normal way of working during Key Stage 3 (NI Years 8 to 10).

In the event of a temporary injury or impairment, or a diagnosis of a disability or manifestation of an impairment relating to an existing disability arising after the start of the course, access arrangements/reasonable adjustments should be applied for as soon as is practicable. Centres must process applications as detailed in **Chapter 8, section 8.3** using Access arrangements online where required.

Any application processed after the published deadline may be subject to scrutiny. SENCos **must** ensure that the appropriate paperwork is on file and available for inspection.

Chapter 5 provides full details as to what constitutes the core evidence/evidence of need for each arrangement. Appropriate documentation as per **Chapter 5 must** be held on file to support the arrangement(s) processed and be available for inspection. Access arrangements online must also be used for those qualifications listed within the Deadlines section (P12-13) for pupils with a temporary injury or injury impairment such as a broken arm.

JCQ have created a short explanatory video on how to apply for [Temporary Access Arrangements \(August 2023\)](#).

Arrangements **must** always be approved **before** an examination or assessment.

Requirements for Pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs:

“A Statement of Special Educational Needs is **not** an automatic entitlement to access arrangements such as 25% extra time, a reader or a scribe. The SENCo would have to complete Form 9 and an online application would have to be processed”.

Nick Lait - Head of Examination Services JCQ

Normal Way of Working

The arrangement(s) put in place must reflect the support given to the pupil in the centre, for example:

- ❖ In the classroom (where appropriate)
- ❖ Working in small groups for reading and/or writing
- ❖ Support lessons
- ❖ Intervention strategies
- ❖ During internal school tests/examinations/mock examinations

This is commonly referred to as ‘**normal way of working**’. SENCos and assessors **must** refer to **Chapter 7, section 7.6.1 of the JCQ guidelines** for information on how to confirm ‘normal way of working’. A history of support and provision must be evident to confirm the arrangement is **not** suddenly being granted to the pupil at the time of their examinations. The only exception to this is where an arrangement is put in place due to a temporary injury or impairment (**see Chapter 8, section 8.3**).

The pupil **must have had appropriate opportunities to practise** using the access arrangement(s) before their first examination. This is particularly so where a computer reader, modified enlarged papers, a scribe, speech recognition technology or a word processor will be used in examinations.

Common Access Arrangements/Reasonable Adjustments

Below is a list of the most commonly provided Access Arrangements for post-primary pupils experiencing literacy difficulties. For further details please visit the relevant chapter/section of the JCQ guidelines as referenced.

- ❖ Coloured Overlays – (5.16)
- ❖ Coloured Papers – (6.5)
- ❖ Supervised Rest Breaks – (5.1)
- ❖ Extra Time – (5.2 - 5.4)

- ❖ Read Aloud – (5.6)
- ❖ Examination Reading Pen – (5.6)
- ❖ Reader – (5.5)
- ❖ Computer Reader – (5.5)
- ❖ Word Processor (with spelling and grammar check switch off) – (5.8)
- ❖ Word Processor (with spelling and grammar check switch on) – (5.7.5)
- ❖ Scribe – (5.7)
- ❖ Speech Recognition Technology – (5.7)

For JCQ guidance on Access Arrangements for Entry Level Certificate qualifications please refer to the following page numbers:

- ❖ Extra time – (page 49)
- ❖ Reader – (pages 56 and 58)
- ❖ Scribe – (pages 69-70)
- ❖ Speech Recognition Technology – (pages 69-70)

Access arrangements/reasonable adjustments are based on an individual pupil's needs. Consideration **must** be given as to whether the proposed adjustment is effective and suitable for the pupil's learning difficulty. For example, if a pupil can complete a paper in the normal length of time and never uses the 25% extra time which has been made available, then it is not an effective adjustment. It **would not** be appropriate to process an application for 25% extra time. Similarly, if a pupil requests the use of a word processor but cannot type comprehensible prose, it is not an effective adjustment for their examinations. However, a scribe may be required.

Coloured Overlays

The provision of a coloured overlay including reading rulers, virtual overlays and virtual reading rulers could prove a useful access arrangement for certain pupils experiencing literacy difficulties. These can aid with tracking and focus. Coloured overlays may also help to reduce eyestrain.

Pupils may have a colour preference. SENCOs should ensure that different colour options have been trialled and the use of coloured overlays **must** reflect the pupil's **normal way of working**.

Coloured Papers

Pupils with literacy difficulties may find text printed on white paper difficult to read. Some pupils may report that there is glare from the page, or the text appears blurry. Text on a cream/soft pastel colour may be easier to read and reduce eye strain.

Pupils may have a colour preference. SENCOs should ensure that different colour options have been trialled and the use of coloured paper **must** reflect the pupil's **normal way of working**.

Depending on the Examination Awarding Body JCQ guidelines differ. **Chapter 6, section 6.5.1 of the JCQ guidelines** outlines specific information for AQA, Pearson and WJEC centres, CCEA and OCR centres, and City & Guilds centres.

Supervised Rest Breaks

Supervised rest breaks provide a pupil with a chance to remove themselves from the exam. This may be suitable for those pupils who will struggle to sit and concentrate for long periods of time.

During a supervised rest break the pupil **must not** have access to the question paper/answer booklet. Rest breaks **must not** be used as 'thinking time'.

A single supervised rest break should be no more than 30 minutes in duration. A supervised rest break will often be shorter than this. Pupils **cannot** be given as many supervised rest breaks as they like for as long as they like. A supervised rest break will not normally be required within the first 10 minutes of an examination but may be thereafter.

The duration of the supervised rest break **must** be determined by the SENCo based on their knowledge of the pupil's needs and their **normal way of working** when placed under timed conditions.

Extra Time

Pupils with literacy difficulties may present with poor working memory or processing speed. This may result in them taking longer to gather their thoughts and ideas and recording them on paper – especially under timed conditions. The SENCo should trial and monitor the impact of providing extra time (e.g. 25%) and based on the outcome, (e.g. exam scores) a picture of need and evidence of normal way of working could be established.

For example, while conducting in-school examinations a SENCo may trial the effectiveness of providing a pupil with e.g. 25% extra time. After the standard allocated exam time (e.g. 1 hour), the pupil is asked to continue working for the additional time (e.g. 15 mins) in a different colour of ink (e.g. change from black to blue pen). This will allow the SENCo to ascertain how the extra time was used and if it had a positive impact on the pupil's grading.

Please refer to the following sections of **Chapter 5 of the JCQ guidelines** when considering making an application for Extra time:

5.2 25% Extra Time

5.3 Extra Time of up to 50% (between 26% and 50% Extra Time)

5.4 Extra Time of over 50%

In each section you will find information on how to process an application, core evidence required and factors the centre must consider. Examples of extra time applications are included at the end of **section 5.4**.

Read Aloud

Where a pupil is reading difficult text, they may work more effectively and have greater comprehension if they can hear themselves read.

The arrangement **must** reflect the pupil's **normal way of working** in internal school tests and mock examinations.

A pupil who reads aloud to themselves **must** be accommodated in another room, away from the main examination room.

Examination Reading Pen

A permitted examination reading pen **must not** have an in-built dictionary or thesaurus, or a data storage facility.

The use of an examination reading pen, **provided by the centre**, might benefit those pupils who wish to work independently. It may increase the independence of pupils who need a reader for accuracy rather than comprehension.

The use of an examination reading pen should always be considered for those pupils who only require occasional words or phrases to be read to them.

Example scenario: A pupil was found to be mildly dyslexic in Year 8 (NI). The pupil has always used a reader in internal school tests. However, the SENCo trials the use of an examination reading pen which subsequently becomes the pupil's **normal way of working** within the centre. It is an effective arrangement, appropriate to their needs.

Reader

Computer Reader

Computer software which accurately reads out text, (including synthetic speech software stored on a memory stick) but **does not** decode or interpret the paper, may be used as a computer reader.

It is the centre's responsibility to ensure that the computer used **does not** contain any software that the pupil can access and which might assist them with the examination.

Failure to do so may constitute malpractice.

Papers (or sections of papers) testing reading

A computer reader **will** be allowed in papers (or sections of papers) testing reading, for example GCSE English Language papers. A computer reader is an acceptable arrangement since it allows the pupil to independently meet the requirements of the reading standards.

Please refer to **pages 59-61** of the [JCQ Guidelines](#) to peruse the permissions table.

Where an application for a computer reader is approved, it is strongly recommended that the centre orders a non-interactive electronic question paper. By ordering a non-interactive electronic (PDF) question paper there is no need for the centre to scan in a question paper for computer reading purposes (see **Chapter 6, section 6.7**).

Human Reader

A human reader is a responsible adult who reads the **examination instructions** and the **questions** * to the pupil. This may involve reading the whole paper to the pupil or the pupil may request only some words to be read.

See Appendix 1 for JCQ Memory Aid for a Reader

* Papers (or sections of papers) testing reading

A human reader **will not** be allowed to read questions or text in papers (or sections of papers) testing reading.

In a paper (or a section of a paper) testing reading a reader may read back, upon request, what the pupil has written without any emphasis on errors.

Please refer to **pages 59-61** of the [JCQ Guidelines](#) to peruse the permissions table

For a pupil with literacy difficulties, a computer reader may allow them to demonstrate their attainment more effectively and independently than would be possible with a reader. However, a computer reader **must** be appropriate to the pupil's needs. There **must** be sufficient time and training to ensure the pupil is able to use a computer reader effectively.

Word Processor

Spelling and grammar check switched off

Centres are allowed to provide a word processor with the spelling and grammar check facility/predictive text switched off where it is the pupil's normal way of working within the centre. For example, the pupil's quality of language significantly improves when using a word processor due to problems with planning and organisation when writing by hand.

Spelling and grammar check switched on

Where the centre has approval for the use of a scribe and where it reflects the pupil's normal way of working within the centre, as appropriate to the pupil's needs, the pupil may alternatively use:

- ❖ A word processor with the spelling and grammar check switched on; **or**
- ❖ A word processor with predictive text/spelling and grammar check switched on

The pupil **will not** have access to marks awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar. **In all cases a scribe cover sheet must be completed**

Scribe

A scribe is a responsible adult who, in non-examination assessments and/or in an examination but not in a Speaking Test, writes or types a pupil's dictated answers.

If a pupil dictates answers on to a tape, the scribe **must** type or write the pupil's dictated answers to the questions. The pupil **must** be present when the scribe types or writes their dictated answers. (A scribe cover sheet **must** be completed.)

Please refer to **Chapter 5, section 5.7.8 of the JCQ guidelines** for further guidance on the use of a scribe in subjects assessing quality of written communication or spelling, punctuation and grammar.

The scribe can read back the **dictated answers** to the pupil (only when requested). It is important to note, the same person can act as a reader and/or a scribe if permission has been given for these arrangements. **The regulations for the use of each arrangement must be strictly adhered to.**

See Appendix 2 for JCQ Memory Aid for a Scribe

Some pupils will be able to use a word processor in most of their subjects but may require a scribe in subjects such as Maths and Science.

Where the pupil and scribe are accommodated in another room, on a **one-to-one basis**, the scribe **cannot** additionally act as the invigilator where they are the pupil's subject teacher, Learning Support Assistant or teaching assistant.

Speech Recognition Technology

Where the centre has approval for the use of a scribe and where it reflects the pupil's normal way of working within the centre, as appropriate to their needs, the pupil may alternatively use speech recognition technology.

The pupil **must** have had appropriate opportunities to practise using speech recognition technology before their first examination.

The pupil **will not** have access to marks awarded for spelling, punctuation and/or grammar unless they have independently dictated spelling, punctuation and/or grammar, and this has been recorded on the scribe cover sheet.

“If the candidate is using speech recognition technology which automatically spells words correctly, including grammar, then the candidate would not have access to marks assessing Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar”.

Nick Lait – Head of Examination Services JCQ

Additional Information on Electronic Reader Pens

An electronic reader pen is a handheld digital device that can read aloud text on a page, e.g. from an examination paper or a textbook. There are many different types of pens available, produced by a range of different companies. Some pens have built-in dictionaries and other useful features. Some pens are designed primarily for use in tests/examinations. Using OCR (Optical Character Reader) technology, these pens can scan and read printed text aloud and display it on a screen.

Advantages of an electronic reader pen

- ❖ Promotes independence
- ❖ Helps those with neuro-diverse needs – where human support is more of a barrier than a help
- ❖ Supports EAL (English as an Additional Language) learners
- ❖ Settings can be personalised e.g. reading speed
- ❖ Provides dictionary definitions to aid understanding
- ❖ Scans key words or phrases and transfers to a document for notes and revision
- ❖ Record/Dictaphone feature can be used for voice memos and reminders
- ❖ Works with headphones to facilitate inclusion in the classroom and exam hall
- ❖ Some electronic reader pens are permitted by the JCQ to be used in examinations
- ❖ Increases a pupil's confidence and self-esteem.
- ❖ Bypasses a pupil's reading difficulties by reading aloud page content

Some reading pens have an Exam Lock feature (pin code activated) which aim to protect the integrity of examinations by prohibiting access to some features (e.g. the dictionary, thesaurus, spell-checker and data storage). It should be noted however that these pens are **not JCQ approved and should only be used in informal school examinations/tests.**

Examination Reading Pens that are **approved** by the JCQ for use in GCSE, GCE, AS and A Level examinations are **clearly labelled**.

Appendix 1: Memory Aid for a Reader

Memory aid for a reader

I am here to read for you in your exam.

You **must** make clear what you want to be read.

I can **only** read the instructions and the questions.

I can repeat instructions, but **only** if you make it clear which instructions you want me to read.

I **can't** tell you which questions to choose.

I **can't** tell you when to move on to the next question.

I **can't** tell you which questions to do first.

I can spell words if you ask me, but **only** words on the question paper

I can read back your answer, but **only** if you ask me.

GCSE English Language Examinations:

I can read the questions in the writing section of the paper, but I **can't** read any of the questions in the reading section.

Centres **must** ensure that both invigilators and those acting as a reader are thoroughly trained and familiar with the rules detailed within **section 5.5**.

The pupil **must** be made aware of what a reader can and cannot do in advance of their first examination, e.g. internal school tests or mock exams.

Created using Appendix 1 [JCQ Access Arrangements & Reasonable Adjustments \(1 September 2024 to 31 August 2025\)](#) as guidance (page 121)

Appendix 2: Memory Aid for a Scribe

Memory aid for a scribe

I am here to type/write for you in your exam.

I must type/write **exactly** what you say.

I can draw maps, graphs and diagrams,
but I can only draw **exactly** what you tell me.
I **can't** draw for you in a Design examination.

I can change what I have typed/written, but **only** if you ask me.

If we have a problem communicating, I **must** tell the invigilator.

I **can't** give you any help with answers.
I **can't** suggest when an answer is finished.

I **can't** tell you which questions to choose.
I **can't** tell you when to move on to the next question.
I **can't** tell you which questions to do first.

If you are allowed rest breaks, I **can't** type/write in those breaks.

I can read back what I have typed/written but **only** if you ask me.

Centres **must** ensure that both invigilators and those acting as a scribe are thoroughly trained and familiar with the rules detailed within **section 5.7**.

The pupil **must** be made aware of what a scribe can and cannot do in advance of their first examination, e.g. internal school tests or mock exams.

Created using Appendix 2 [JCQ Access Arrangements & Reasonable Adjustments \(1 September 2024 to 31 August 2025\)](#) as guidance (page 122)