



UniSA

# Extra time in exams for students; Pain or Gain?

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# Today's session

As practitioners working within higher education institutions striving to assist students with disabilities maximise their potential, extra time in exams is often granted in the belief that it is a valid compensatory adjustment.

- Use of UniSA exam adjustments during mid year 2010 exams.
- Review research into extra exam time for students with learning disabilities.
- Affects of mental health conditions on exam performance.
- Review research into extra exam time for students with mental health conditions.
- Proposed research/questionnaire.
- Discussion

# Use of exam adjustments at UniSA November 2010



UniSA mid year 2010 exams, invigilators were asked to record the use of exam adjustments.

**Findings:**

*Findings to be added later.*

There exists a body of literature that extols the positive outcomes extra time has for students who have learning disabilities such as dyslexia.

Although all students show some benefit from extra test time, students with learning disabilities exhibit greater gains than students without disabilities.

(Fuchs, Fuchs, Eaton, Hamlett & Karns, 2000; Lesaux, Pearson & Siegel, 2006; Lindstrom, 2007; Sireci, Li & Scarpatti, 2003)

There is scant literature in regard the extra time adjustment and the affects it has on exam outcomes for students who have a mental health condition.

Scarffe, P. 2009, states, “...many students with mental health difficulties actually find it more difficult to concentrate over long periods, than many of their peers”.

- **Runyan, M. Kay (1991)**
  - Compared Uni students with & without LD's
  - Reading comprehension tests.
  - Timed vs Extra Time conditions.
  - Timed test:
    - Non LD students got higher scores
    - LD students failed to finish all questions
  - **Extra time**
    - No significant difference in scores
    - Extra time needed by students with LD varied from 4 to 29 minutes.

- **Zuriff, G.E. (2000)**
- “...the validity of test scores obtained under this condition [*extra test time*] is open to question because nonlearning disabled students might also benefit from extra examination time”
- Questioned the **Maximum Potential Thesis (MPT)**
- Sireci, S.G. Et al (2005) also refer to MPT as the **Interaction Hypothesis**
- Zuriff analysed 5 studies that tested the MPT.
- Hill (1984), Halla (1988), Runyan (1991a), Runyan (1991b) & Weaver (1993)
- Found over half did not support MPT. (all students gained with extra time).
- **Anxiety not an issue** as all participants knew they were participating in research.

- **Sireci, S.G. et al (2005)**
- Review of more than 40 studies in the area of extra time and what they refer to as Interaction Hypothesis.
- Sited 59 studies, only 28 had empirical analysis.
- Terms considered by Sireci et al:
- **Standardisation** (ensuring uniform content, test administration & scoring).
- **Accommodation** (alteration to the testing process to make test more accessible to SWD). Different to Modification ( changes made to content, format &/or administration process).
- **Validity** (“the degree to which evidence & theory support the interpretations of test scores...”) AREA et al 1999.

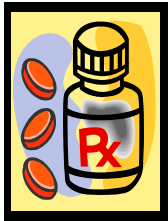
- **Sireci, S.G. et al (2005), cont...**
- Extra time often accompanied by other accommodations. (Difficult to isolate simply extra time)
- ***General findings***
- Experimental studies..extra time assists all. SWD benefit more.
- Students with LD all differ in extra time needed.
- How is this determined?





- **Sireci, S.G. et al (2005), cont...**
- Limitations of studies examined.
- Research focussed on SWD: small numbers and ethnically homogeneous.
- Minority groups under represented.
- Focus on “*elementary school grades*”
  
- **Recommendations for future research**
- Universal test design (UTD)/Inclusive Design Curriculum.
- The validity of test scores for both accommodated and standardised tests.

- **Factors contributing to study difficulties.**



Medications

Self medication

Social isolation/interaction

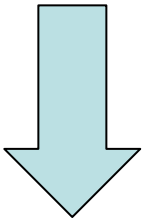
Responses to change

Handling pressure

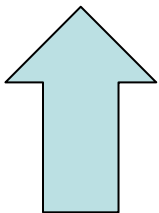
Fear of authority

*(Academic Accommodations for Students with Psychiatric Disability. The Regional Disability Liaison Officer & Amity Community Services Inc. )*

## Possible impact on exam performance.



Motivation  
Concentration  
Energy levels



Distractibility  
Anxiety  
Physical symptoms

# Students with Mental Health conditions

“The passage of time is probably the most anxiety provoking aspect of the testing situation for test anxious examinees. As their symptoms make them unable to work, the approach of the time deadline increases their anxiety, and their symptoms tend to escalate.” Zuriff, GE 1999,

“a student with panic disorder that manifests during exams is not “helped” by extra time and a separate room for exams. Effective accommodation might include allowing the student “to stop the exam, leave the room for up to one hour, and perhaps even to take medication to treat the attack.” Wilhelm, S 2003,

# Our proposed research

Having done preliminary research in the area of extra time in exams we will complete our questionnaire early 2011.

Our research will explore;

- How students report they use extra time in exams, if at all?
- What they use the time for?
- If the extra time assists in reducing exam stress.
- If the extra time balances the affects of student's disabilities?
- If there is a relationship between use of extra time and disability type?

# Our proposed research

- An on-line TellUs2 survey to UniSA students with a current Disability Access Plan
- Evaluation of data collected by invigilators during the November 2010 & exams
- Collaboration with other Universities where possible



#### **4. What are your main concerns when sitting exams?**

- Do not know the subject matter adequately.
- Will not remember the material you have studied.
- Have not prepared/studied enough.
- Will not have enough time to complete all questions.
- Too many other people in the room.

Other (please state) \_\_\_\_\_



**5. What other factors do you feel may contribute to any exam anxieties you have?**

- Family
- Relationship
- Economic
- Work
- Lifestyle
- Medication
- Lack of motivation
- Academic staff don't understand my condition
- Drugs/Alcohol
- Other

**6. As your Disability Access Plan (DAP) grants you extra time in exams, do you...**

1-----2-----3-----4-----5  
Never use extra time                      sometimes use extra time                      Always use the extra time

**7. In exam situations what do you use the extra time for?**

- Relaxation techniques
- Going to the toilet/breaks from the exam room
- Re-reading your completed exam paper
- Other, please state \_\_\_\_\_





**13. As a student with an anxiety/depressive disorder, can you suggest any other “reasonable adjustments” around assessment/exams that would minimise the impact of your condition on your grades?**

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# Conclusion

Research shows that the granting of extra time for some students with mental health conditions may be counter productive.

There needs to be further research specifically in the use of extra time in exams for students with mental health conditions.

We are happy to provide the findings of our research to any other institutions to help further inform our practice in this area.

## Presenters;

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