



WINTER 2024

## Student Strengths as Leverage

How do you handle it when you are faced with a task that's difficult for you? What do you do? Assuming you can't just avoid the task or ask someone else to do it for you, it's highly likely that you consider ways you can use your strengths – the things you're good at – to help you complete the task. Using our strengths as leverage is a natural way of responding to challenges. As we work to solve problems, overcome challenges, or complete a difficult task, we tend to lean into our strengths to help us succeed.

This means we should also consider our students' strengths as leverage to empower them as they work to overcome their needs. We begin every IEP meeting by considering a child's strengths; not only do we want to start the meeting by saying something nice, but we also want to bring to the front of our minds the strengths the child would naturally use to empower them.

[Read on to learn more!](#)

Accommodation is aligned to student needs



Accommodation matches student's degree of need



Accommodation fits an instructional environment



Keep reading to learn more



Accommodation leverages a student's strengths




## "Just-Right" Accommodations

# Overcoming Student Aversion to Accommodations

## Tell me the story...

### Antipathy leads to resistance



Danny feels his heart rate rising as he walks through the door to his Biology class. He enjoys Biology and has learned a lot about cells during the recent unit of study. But, today is test day, and he's really not looking forward to that moment...that moment after Mr. Smith finishes providing a quick review and explaining the parts of the test...that moment when his classmates get real quiet and start the test...that moment where he feels the eyes of the entire class burn a hole through his back as he walks out the door...that moment when he has to get up to leave the room to have his test read to him. That moment has caused antipathy toward the accommodation that makes it possible for him to perform well on tests. The anxiety of that moment caused him to refuse to leave before, which resulted in his parents being angry because he failed the test. Danny knows he needs help reading, so his reluctance to stand up becomes slowly defeated by the knowledge that he needs the support. Making himself as small as he can, Danny slowly stands and walks out the door.

## What's the context?

### IEP teams should consider student strengths

It is well documented in [Danny's Reevaluation Report](#) and other sources that he is a very social child. He has a peer group and regularly interacts with them both in and out of school. However, Danny struggles with the fact that he's a poor reader, so, as a typical adolescent trying to fit in socially, he does his best to hide this struggle from his peers. In this case, a negative match exists between Danny's personality and the accommodation his IEP team has chosen.

To work past this negative match, and to make his accommodations work better, Danny's teachers should work to connect his accommodations to his strengths! Strengths naturally empower all of us, so by connecting his strengths to the solutions his teachers use to overcome his learning disability, Danny's resistance will fade.

### Remember!

Accomods' Builder has a list of student strengths connected to accommodations!



## Get to the point...

### Resistance can be overcome with a focus on strengths

A learner's resistance to an accommodation can be overcome by ensuring the accommodations are connected to strengths. This same practice – connecting strengths to accommodations – dramatically enhances the effectiveness of all accommodations, even if the child isn't demonstrating resistance. Connecting accommodations and modifications to student strengths is a practice that will significantly enhance the effectiveness of efforts to support children around their needs through the use of "just-right" accommodations!

# 3 Ways student strengths connect to accommodations

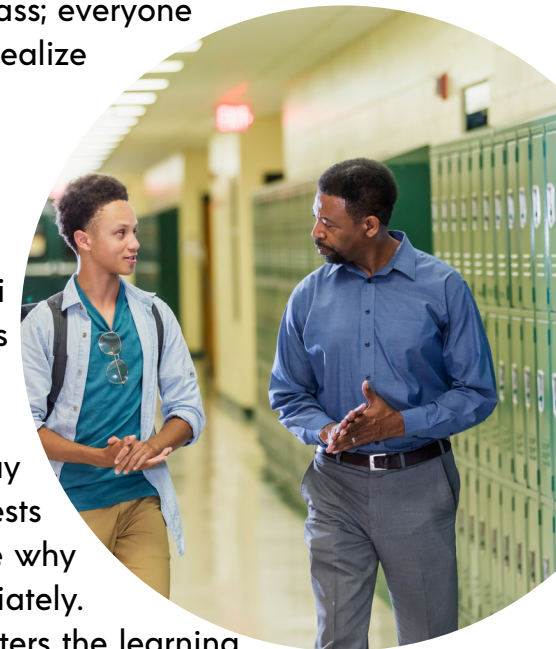
- a direct alignment between the accommodation and the student strength
- an alignment that is created through thoughtful implementation
- a negative alignment where the accommodation is mismatched with the child's skills

## The story continues...


### Strengths are leverage

As Danny exits the classroom, his learning support teacher, Mr. Johnson, is waiting in the hall. "What's with the stressed-out look, Danny?" "I hate walking out of class; everyone looks at me, and I feel stupid," Danny replies. "Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't realize you felt that way, Danny! Let's see what we can do about that!"


The team talks about the problem as they walk down the hall. Mr. Johnson asks Danny what he does at home when he wants to read something like an Instagram post or a text message from a friend. Danny informs him that he either works through it or uses Siri to read to him and that he often replies using voice-to-text. He finds both of these services to be helpful. Mr. Johnson recalls that Danny reported at his last IEP that he enjoys using technology. This recollection gets him thinking. "Hey Danny, what if I could find a way to make it possible for you to use something like Siri to read your tests to you?" "Could I use it on my own in class?" Danny asks. "I don't see why not," Mr. Johnson replies. Danny's demeanor changes almost immediately. "Thank you, Mr. Johnson," Danny replies with a smile as the team enters the learning support room to complete the test.



**Use Student Strengths as Leverage**  
By considering the alignment of an accommodation to a learner's strength, we reduce student resistance and maximize the effectiveness.



- 1 Identify Student Strengths**  
Gather student strengths.  
Consider stakeholder input, the strengths list in **Accomods**, or the **Student Strengths Survey**.
- 2 Identify Potential Accommodations**  
What accommodations are being considered?  
Consider current accommodations or explore options in **Accomods**.
- 3 Consider Direct Alignment**  
Ask, "Does (student strength) directly align with this accommodation?" If so, how?  
Direct alignment means there is a very clear connection between the learner's strength and the accommodation.  
Strength: Student understands when things are read/spoken.  
There is a direct alignment between accommodation and student strength.  
Accommodation: A36-Read assignment and test directions aloud.
- 4 Consider Implementation Alignment**  
Ask, "How can (student strength) be incorporated into the implementation of this accommodation?"  
Implementation alignment means there are methods or resources that can be used during implementation to create an alignment.  
Student enjoys technology - Provide the student with an app for their phone that reads text.  
Student enjoys working with peers - Permit the student to read class assignments with a peer reader.  
Student enjoys working with adults - Permit the student to read with a paraprofessional or other adult.
- 5 Determine Absence of Alignment**  
In cases where the accommodation or modification does not align with the student's strength, consider alternative accommodations.  
Accommodation: L27-Provide text in audio format.  
Student struggles with listening comprehension.  
Student is assigned a peer reader but doesn't want to be seen by their peers as different.

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## Be action-driven...

1. Think about your students. Can you identify a situation where a student's accommodation may negatively align with their strengths or personality?
2. Brainstorm with a colleague ways you might implement an accommodation to align it with a student's strength.
3. Jump into **Accomods'** Builder and think carefully about the strengths you check. Consider how those strengths might align with the accommodations you see, especially the ones at the top of the list.

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# EXAMPLES

Let's explore some examples of accommodations aligned to student strengths for a child who struggles to solve math problems.

## Accommodations with direct alignment to student strengths

### Accommodation

### Student Strength

A46-Provide frequent work in progress checks	→	Student doesn't mind being interrupted
A9-Permit student to rework missed problems/questions for a better grade	→	Student is persistent
L65-Provide a written, step-by-step process of how to solve math problems	→	Student understands and uses written information

## Accommodations with implementation alignment to student strengths

### Accommodation

### Student strengths used in implementation

A46-Provide frequent work in progress checks	→	Permit a peer to check in on progress because student enjoys working with peers. Provide student with a self-check system because they are trustworthy and work well independently.
L77-Pre-teach major points (main ideas) prior to instruction	→	Provide student with a preview video to be completed at home because they work well independently and are willing to work outside of class.
A44- Permit student to explain wrong answers on assessments	→	For a student who enjoys writing, provide an opportunity to explain errors by writing an explanation on Post-it notes that are then appropriately affixed to the exam.

## Featured Accommodation:

**B3 - Alert student of transitions prior to occurrence** is an excellent accommodation to practice aligning with student strengths. There are many wonderful ways to align it to a child's strengths during implementation. Think about it!



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