



# Skill Building with Alternative Programming on an Individual Education Plan (IEP)

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IEP Alternative Programming is a great place to plan, track, and follow through on skill building for students with special education needs. Working together with students and families, you can create S.M.A.R.T. goals for students to develop the skills they will need for success after high school.

## Program Options: Accommodations, Modified Expectations, and Alternative Expectations

As laid out in the Ontario Ministry of Education's [special education policy](#):

"When planning the student's program, the team should identify which of the following options best suits the student's needs in each subject, course, or skill area in which the student will receive instruction:

- No accommodations or modifications
- Accommodations only
- Modified expectations (with or without accommodations)
- Alternative expectations/programs (with or without accommodations)

Alternative expectations are developed to help students acquire knowledge and skills that are not represented in the Ontario curriculum. They either are not derived from a provincial curriculum policy document or are modified so extensively that the Ontario curriculum expectations no longer form the basis of the student's educational program."

## Accommodation versus Skill Development

As laid out in the special education policy and confirmed in best practice, accommodations are not the only way, nor always the best way, to support a student's skill deficit. While accommodations can provide helpful short-term support, developing skills creates long-term independence. Skill building helps students take greater control of their learning, strengthens confidence, and prepares them for future education, training, and employment settings where accommodations may be different or more limited. By learning and practicing strategies, students not only improve their academic performance but also build lifelong habits that support success beyond high school.



**In many cases, skill development is the most beneficial tool, such as:**

- Managing one's own time
- Managing academic stressors
- Working independently

**Accommodations are appropriate when:**

- Students are working on skill development
- The required skill/area is a profound area of weakness (i.e., inability to read)
- The weakness or challenge will not respond to skill development/intervention (i.e., chronic upper limb weakness)

In many cases, when an accommodation is provided to support a student's skill gap, it should be paired with a plan to help the student build that skill. Accommodations can offer helpful support in the short term, but they should not replace opportunities for growth. As the student develops stronger skills, the level of accommodation can gradually be reduced, encouraging greater independence and confidence over time.

## **Alternate Programming and Skill Development**

Traditionally, alternative expectations have often focused on areas such as behaviour regulation, speech development, and gross and fine motor skills. While these are important, many students also need support in other key skill areas that should be included in this section of the IEP.

Some important skills for success, especially for students with special education needs, include:

- **Time management:** planning assignments and projects, and using class and study time effectively
- **Organization:** keeping notes and schoolwork organized, and arriving to class prepared and on time
- **Assistive technology and computer skills:** using tools such as text-to-speech programs, mind-mapping software, digital notebooks, file management systems, and online calendars
- **Workplace skills:** developing professional behaviour, teamwork, and completing tasks responsibly
- **Independent living skills:** managing transportation, personal care, and budgeting

***Focusing on these areas can better prepare students for success in school and beyond.***



## Sample Alternative Program Goals

### Organization

<p><b>Learning Expectation 1</b> By the end of the term, the student will independently use a labelled subject folder or tabbed binder and a daily checklist to organize class notes and handouts in at least 4 out of 5 classes, requiring no more than one verbal prompt.</p>	
<p><b>Teaching Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explicitly teach how to set up and label binders and folders.</li> <li>• Model how to file handouts and organize notes at the end of each class.</li> <li>• Provide a printed daily organization checklist (e.g., “File handouts,” “Record homework,” “Pack required materials”).</li> <li>• Practice organization routine at the end of each class for two weeks.</li> <li>• Gradually reduce verbal reminders from daily to weekly as independence improves.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Assessment Methods</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly teacher checklist tracking number of prompts required.</li> <li>• Random binder checks using a structured rubric (e.g., papers filed correctly, no loose sheets).</li> <li>• Student self-assessment checklist completed weekly.</li> <li>• Comparison of teacher checklist and student self-assessment during monthly conference.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Learning Expectation 2</b> Within 8 weeks, the student will bring his charged laptop to all required classes and use it for note-taking or assigned tasks in 90% of observed classes.</p>	
<p><b>Teaching Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a visual “End-of-Day Packing Checklist” including laptop and charger.</li> <li>• Set a phone or calendar reminder at dismissal time.</li> <li>• Practice packing routine with supervision for two weeks.</li> <li>• Provide specific praise for preparedness.</li> <li>• Fade reminders as consistency improves.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Assessment Methods</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher tracking sheet documenting laptop presence daily.</li> <li>• Student self-monitoring checklist recording preparedness.</li> <li>• Weekly percentage calculation shared with student to monitor progress.</li> </ul>



## Assistive Technology (AT)

### Learning Expectation 1

For each English unit, the student will identify at least one reading task and one writing task that will be completed using assistive technology (e.g., text-to-speech, speech-to-text, graphic organizer software) and complete those tasks using the selected tool.

#### Teaching Strategies

- Provide direct instruction on specific AT tools (login, file saving, exporting, editing).
- Model when and why to choose specific AT tools.
- Provide a step-by-step written guide for each tool.
- Schedule guided practice sessions during class.
- Coordinate planning meetings with English and GLE teachers.

#### Assessment Methods

- Review of completed assignments using AT.
- Writing rubric including criteria for effective AT use (e.g., editing after speech-to-text).
- Student written reflection describing which AT tool was used and how it helped.
- Teacher anecdotal notes from observation during task completion.

### Learning Expectation 2

Within one term, the student will set one specific, measurable goal related to assistive technology use (e.g., "Use text-to-speech for all novel reading") and demonstrate progress toward the goal in 4 out of 5 opportunities.

#### Teaching Strategies

- Provide a SMART goal template.
- Model examples of strong AT goals.
- Conference with student to refine goal wording.
- Schedule biweekly check-ins to monitor progress.

#### Assessment Methods

- Teacher checklist tracking consistency of AT use.
- Student progress log.
- Student-teacher conference notes.
- Entry in "All About Me" portfolio documenting goal and reflection.



## Learning Strategies

<p><b>Learning Expectation 1</b> By the end of the term, the student will independently use at least two reading comprehension strategies (e.g., highlighting key ideas, summarizing paragraphs, using graphic organizers) in 4 out of 5 reading assignments.</p>	
<p><b>Teaching Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explicitly teach each strategy using gradual release model (model → guided practice → independent practice).</li> <li>• Provide a step-by-step strategy reference sheet.</li> <li>• Model “think aloud” while reading a text.</li> <li>• Provide guided practice using short texts before applying to longer readings.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Assessment Methods</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly student reading log identifying strategy used and example.</li> <li>• Teacher review of annotated texts or graphic organizers.</li> <li>• Monthly conference to discuss strategy effectiveness.</li> <li>• Reading comprehension quiz results compared over time.</li> </ul>

## Independence

<p><b>Learning Expectation 1</b> Within 3 months, the student will independently follow the morning and afternoon transition routine (transportation to classroom and classroom to transportation) using a visual schedule of no more than 5 photographs, requiring no more than one prompt in 80% of school days.</p>	
<p><b>Teaching Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a personalized visual schedule with clear photographs.</li> <li>• Teach routine using modeling and guided walkthrough.</li> <li>• Use verbal and gestural prompts as needed.</li> <li>• Provide immediate positive reinforcement for successful transitions.</li> <li>• Gradually reduce number of photographs and prompts over time.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Assessment Methods</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daily frequency data tracking number of prompts required.</li> <li>• Weekly summary of independence level.</li> <li>• Bi-monthly video recording (with consent) to document progress.</li> <li>• Data review meeting every 6 weeks to adjust supports if needed.</li> </ul>



## Resources

- [Ontario Special Education Policy & Resource Guide – IEP Components](#)
- [EduGains – Special Education Transitions](#)
- [Heart and Art – Examples of Alternative IEP Goals](#)
- [TeachSpecEd – Alternative IEP Programming](#)