Is this an accommodation or a modification? Quiz your staff with these 8 examples

Your staff may have heard you say, "Accommodations change how information is presented to a student, whereas modifications change what the student is expected to learn." But does your team really understand the difference?

Knowing an accommodation from a modification is important for several reasons:

First, staff need to understand that modifying the curriculum in a way that reduces the academic standards expected of a student could impact whether the student is able to earn credit for a course and might affect the student's ability to graduate with a regular diploma. Also, modifying the curriculum may be a form of special education and could mean the student should be identified under the IDEA.

Second, staff need to understand accommodations so they know what changes they can make to address a student's disability-related needs without altering or lowering the academic standards expected of the student.

Use the examples below to test your staffers' knowledge of the two.

Accommodation or modification?	
Example 1: A student with dyslexia uses text-to-speech during an assessment.	**Answer:** *It depends.* Consider the purpose of the assessment. If the goal is to test the student's reading comprehension by having him answer questions about a text, then using text-to-speech to listen to passages will likely be an accommodation. However, if the purpose of the assessment is to test the student's foundational reading skills, using text-to-speech could be considered a modification.

Example 2: A student with ADHD receives interim deadlines for assignments. A project is broken into smaller chunks and assigned to the student before the final deadline.	**Answer:** *Accommodation*. The interim deadlines address the student's executive functioning deficits to help the student to stay on track with the project. If the goal of the assignment is to have students demonstrate their knowledge of the subject matter, breaking a project into smaller steps for the student does not change the objectives, nor does it change how the student's final project will be graded.
Example 3: A student with multiple disabilities uses a calculator to complete math problems during a unit on addition and subtraction.	**Answer:** *Modification*. The purpose of the unit is for students to learn basic computational skills. Providing a calculator that does the computations for the student alters what the student is expected to learn and be able to do.
Example 4: A student with dysgraphia receives a copy of notes ahead of class.	**Answer:** *Accommodation*. The student's disability makes it difficult for her to take legible notes during class. Because the purpose of the lecture is to provide the student with information, changing the way the student receives that information doesn't change what the student is expected to know.
Example 5: An eighth-grade student with autism learns sight words at a first-grade level while his classmates learn to read and comprehend text at a sixth- to eighth-grade complexity level.	**Answer:** *Modification*. Changing the complexity of the reading would substantially change what the student is expected to learn.

Example 6: A student with behavior and attention issues takes tests in a separate room with less noise and fewer distractions.	**Answer:** *Accommodation*. Changing the testing environment here does not alter what the student is expected to know and be able to demonstrate that he knows on the test.
Example 7: A student with an immune disorder may record her presentation from home rather than present it at school in front of her classmates.	**Answer:** *Accommodation.* If the purpose of the assignment is to share what the student learned about the subject matter with her classmates, then changing how the student presents that information would be an accommodation. The student's presentation will be graded using the same academic standards as her classmates' presentations.
Example 8: A student with an anxiety disorder only needs to complete the odd-numbered questions on a math homework worksheet.	**Answer:** *It depends.* If the even-numbered questions simply provide additional opportunities for students to practice the same concept, then reducing the number of questions the student must complete would likely be an accommodation. However, if the skipped questions are more challenging or if they represent a different concept than the other questions, then this could be considered a modification.