A fact sheet about

Adjustments in study

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Adjustments in study

What reasonable adjustments in study are, how much to share, and how to ask.



Key points

- A ‘reasonable adjustment' (definition below) is a change to how you study or are assessed, so that something stops getting in your way.
- In Australia, the law backs this up at most places that teach or train, including TAFE, university, adult learning and online study.
- You ask through the place's disability or accessibility service. What they need to know is how your study is affected, not your whole story.
- A good first step is one short written request, sent early.

What a ‘reasonable adjustment’ in study is

You have signed up for a course you really want to do. Then the first week brings a loud room and a group task with people you have never met, and there is also a page of deadlines, all due in the same fortnight. The work itself is fine, but the way it is set up may cost you more than it costs other people.

Asking for a change can feel like asking for a favour. But in Australia, it is something the law expects the place you study to do.

A ‘reasonable adjustment’ is a change to how, when or where you study or show what you know. Here are some examples:

- extra time in exams, or a quieter room to sit them in
- notes or slides before the class, or recordings after it
- breaks during long classes, or the choice to step out
- more time for some tasks, agreed ahead of time
- written answers instead of a spoken talk, where the course allows it

In Australia, the Disability Discrimination Act says that not making a reasonable adjustment can be unfair treatment under the law. The Disability Standards for Education 2005 set out how this works in education. They cover TAFE (Technical and Further Education) and other training places, uni, private colleges and adult and community education. They apply when you study online as well.

Under the Standards, the place you study must talk with you about what would help before it makes a change. It may keep the parts of the course that are essential to it, but it should change how you get there where it can. It can also offer a different change that helps you just as much, or say no if a change would cause it unjustifiable hardship. Either way, it has to talk it through with you.

The law uses the word disability, and its meaning is wide. It includes differences in how a person learns, thinks or feels, so it can cover many autistic, ADHD and more broadly neurodivergent adults. You do not have to use the word about yourself to ask. If you ever need to rely on the law, though, the place will need to know there is a disability.

Why you can ask without sharing every detail

The Standards talk about how a disability affects you in your study. So that is what the service needs to hear: what gets in the way, and what would help. It does not need your history, your whole assessment report or every hard day.

Some neurodivergent students do not ask at all. In one study, students worried about how the staff in charge of them would see them if they shared that they were neurodivergent. Some stayed quiet and pushed through, at a real cost to their health. In another, autistic adults who had left uni said they did not know who to ask, or what would help.

So how much you share, and who you tell, is your choice. You can ask the service who will see what you share, and what proof it needs. Most services ask for some evidence, often a short form from a health professional, not your full report.

These are two small studies: one with autistic adults in the UK, and one mostly with ADHD students in the US. More broadly, research on autism, ADHD and neurodivergence has often left out BBIA (Black, Brown, Indigenous and Asian) people, LGBTQIA+ people and other groups. Your lived experience is what is most valid.

The one thing to try: write one short request, early

Find the disability or access service on the course website. If it is a small course with no service, write to the person who runs it. Then send a short message like this:

"I am starting the [course] on [date]. I am [autistic, ADHD or neurodivergent, or you can leave this out]. Two things make study harder for me: [for example, loud rooms and talking in front of the class]. One change that would help is [for example, a written option]. Can we talk about adjustments?"

If you do not know what would help, that is fine. You can say so, and ask what the service can offer.

Ask early if you can. Under the Standards, how fast a change has to be made depends partly on when you tell them how your study is affected. A request in week one is easier to act on than one in exam week.

You can keep a note in the Understanding Zoe app of what you asked for, who said yes and when. You can also set a reminder to check in before each new term. If the answer is no, you can ask why in writing and get advice before you ask again.

This step comes from what neurodivergent students say helped them, and from the law. It is anchored in lived experience and in what the community shares about it. Writing the first message can feel like the hardest part. If you also want changes at work, you can read more about agreeing changes at work here.

Getting support

This page describes what many adults say about themselves. It is not an assessment, and it cannot tell you what is going on for you.

You can ask for support at any point, whether you are about to start a course or are halfway through one. A GP is a good place to start. If study is also affecting your mental health, a GP can talk with you about a Mental Health Treatment Plan, which can lower the cost of sessions. A GP, or the professional who assessed you, can also write a short letter for the disability service. Different health professionals can help you work out which adjustments would help you study, and your GP can help you work out who is right for you. You can also book a telehealth session through Understanding Zoe.

Sources

Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth), sections 4(1) (definitions of disability, educational institution and reasonable adjustment), 5(2) and 6(2) (failing to make reasonable adjustments) and 22 (education). Compilation No. 41, 8 October 2026, legislation.gov.au

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UnderstandingZoe

Understanding Zoe is the first neuroaffirming AI-powered app that turns every report, observation and moment into an actionable next step, supporting neurodivergent people and those who care about them to thrive.

for more information, you can contact

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