



FALL 2023

Accessible Vs. Easy

A common statement that often accompanies resistance to accommodations and modifications is that they make a task easier for the student. In this best-practices newsletter, we explore why this statement is simply not true.

"Easier" is an adjective used to compare two similar tasks. However, to be used appropriately, the term requires considering the proper variables. This is especially true when considering the impact of an accommodation on an instructional task. Recall that the purpose of "just-right" accommodations is to engage the child in class, instruction, and assessment in a meaningful way by empowering them around their need. The critical point is that the accommodation enables the child to become engaged! This means that we should consider the impact of an accommodation on a child's engagement, NOT its impact on the task itself. As you think about this idea, you will discover that a different adjective should be used to describe the effect of an accommodation on the task; that is, it makes it accessible! Furthermore, when you compare a child's engagement during an accessible task to their engagement in a non-accessible task, you will discover that accommodations make class, instruction, and assessment more rigorous, not easier!

KEEP
EXPLORING

Accessible adjective

ac·ces·si·ble ik-'se-sə-bəl ak-,ek-

1 a: capable of being reached *also:* being within reach

b: easy to speak to or deal with

2: capable of being used or seen: available

3: capable of being understood or appreciated

4: capable of being influenced: open

5: easily used or accessed by people with disabilities: adapted for use by people with disabilities



Accessibility Builds Engagement

Tell me the story...

An easy reading assignment

"Good morning, class. What did the cell say when another one stepped on its toes?" Mr. Smith scanned the room with a smirk, hoping to catch the eye of an interested child who would take the bait. "Mitosis!" he shouted with a laugh as he hopped around on one foot. The students laughed like when their dad told one of his favorite bad-dad jokes. "Okay, enough of the fun; let's get to work! As you can see from the topic I've written on the board, today, we will discuss Mitosis – a type of cell division. Pull out your textbooks and take a minute to read the section, Cell Division: Mitosis, that starts on page 115. This section will get you ready for our class conversation."



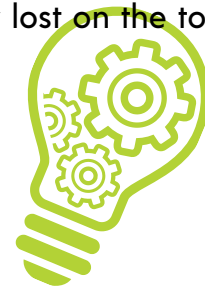
Most students opened their books and got busy reading, except Danny, who has mastered the art of looking like he's reading while daydreaming, occasionally turning a page as he observes someone close by turning theirs. Sometimes, if he's very interested in the subject, he might look at the pictures in the book and try to read the captions under them, but his Biology book is written at a reading level far beyond his ability, so it's just easier to pretend.

As he notices the class finishing the passage, Mr. Smith begins the conversation with a few questions about the topic. Several students become engaged in answering questions, but Danny has nothing to add to the conversation. Because most of the conversation is based on information the class read about, Danny isn't only not involved, but he's completely lost on the topic.

What's the context?

A solution to increase rigor

Mr. Smith doesn't fully understand accommodations. As was shared in "[High Expectations: Discover the Power of Around](#)," he thinks they make things easier for the student. But, what Mr. Smith is missing is that accommodations don't make instruction, assignments, tests, and other things "easier"; they make them accessible. When he pretended to read and sat quietly, disengaged in the conversation, what Danny did was easy. Had Mr. Smith used an accommodation, such as [C1: provide alternative text/books with similar content, skills, and strategies but at a more accessible reading level](#), Danny would have been able to independently read the content and become engaged in the classroom conversation. The accommodation would make the assignment accessible, not easier. It was easy for Danny to pretend to read. The content becomes rigorous when it is accessible, opening the door for him to become engaged in the assignment!



Get to the point...

Accommodations make tasks accessible not easier

When thinking about the impact of an accommodation, we should always consider what it does for the child's meaningful engagement in their education, not what it does to the assignment. Did Danny read an article that was written on an easier reading level? Yes. But did the article Danny read increase the rigor of the assignment for him? Yes!

By making assignments accessible, accommodations increase the rigor of a child's education; they do not make it easier. Consider the comparisons below to explore this idea further.



Easy

- "Forgetting" to complete a homework assignment
- Talking to a peer while the class independently reads an article
- Not wasting time studying for a test because the notes you took in class were terrible.
- Participating in a remedial, pull-out class
- "Waiting patiently" until someone helps you

Accessible

- Independently completing an alternative assignment
- Scanning the document with a phone app to have it read aloud
- Studying a photograph you took of a peer's notes
- Participating in an adapted general education class
- Being able to complete a modified assignment independently

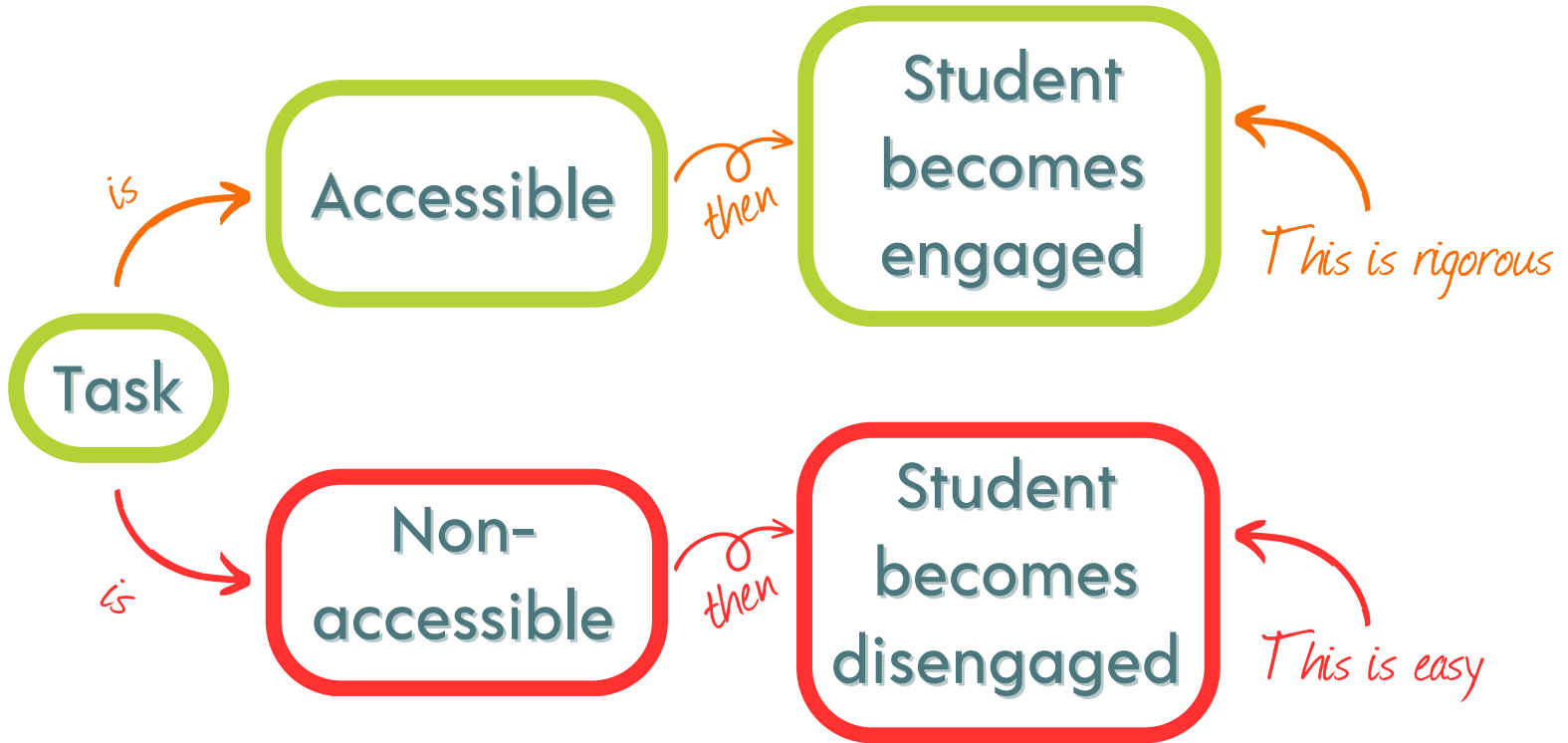
The story revisited...

An accessible reading assignment

Most of the students opened their books and got busy reading, except Danny, who knew there was an accessible way that he could explore Mitosis. He opened his computer to [Diffit](#) (an artificial intelligence site where you enter a topic and create a reading passage written on a selected reading level), typed the topic of the day, "Mitosis – a type of cell division," and began reading the passage independently.

As he notices the class finishing the passage, Mr. Smith begins the conversation with a few questions about the topic. Several of the students become engaged in answering questions, including Danny. As a child who has always loved fly fishing, nature, and other biology-related topics, he's excited to develop a deeper understanding of living things. The fact that he has read something different from his class allows him to share his understanding using different words, which, in turn, deepens the conversation for the class.

Accommodations make tasks accessible not easy



Be action-driven...

- ✓ Eliminate the word "easy" and replace it with "accessible" in accommodations-related conversations.
- ✓ Remember that engagement comes through the use of just-right accommodations. Explore more about this in our [Summer '23 Newsletter - The Importance of Just-Right](#).
- ✓ Dive into [Accomods®](#) to explore ways you might adapt future assignments to make them accessible to a child. Don't have an account? Learn more [here](#).

Featured accommodation:

C1- Provide alternative text/books with similar content, skills, and strategies but at an accessible reading level is a great adaptation because it provides an accessible assignment that the student can complete independently while learning the same content and/or rehearsing the same reading skills as the rest of the class. Independence is critical to building skills, confidence, and engagement!

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