# The STAR Assessments and Students with Disabilities

The STAR assessments (STAR Reading™, STAR Early Literacy™, and STAR Math™) are suitable for use with students with disabilities. Since STAR uses computer adaptive testing, the difficulty of the test is adjusted automatically to reflect the skill level of a student.  Therefore, the assessments are more likely to present items that correspond to the broad range of abilities of all students, including those with special needs. STAR minimizes frustration for students because the difficulty of questions is "adapted" based on a student's response pattern.  For example, if a student misses a question, the next question will be easier.  If a student answers a question correctly, the difficulty level will increase.

Because the STAR assessments are computer adaptive, they gather valid and reliable information in a relatively short period of time.  STAR Reading and STAR Math were developed using a nationally representative sample that contained students with special needs based on their proportional representation. These students completed the assessments using standard time limits. The students with disabilities were receiving instruction in inclusive settings as required by their Individualized Education Programs.

STAR Reading and STAR Math include the ability to provide extended time limits for students who may need more time to process the questions and enter a response.  To do this, go to **Student Settings > Edit Student Settings**, and check the **Extended Question Time Limit** box for students requiring this accommodation.

## Students with Visual Impairments

For students with limited vision, the introductory screens of the STAR assessments respond to the "High Contrast" accessibility feature within Windows and the "Switch to Black and White" accessibility feature in MAC OS 10. In addition, the assessment screens within STAR already provide visual contrast through a light background and black writing. Furthermore, STAR assessments are compatible with Mac OS 10's "Zoom In" accessibility feature, which allows users to magnify nearly all STAR screens.

If students are blind, however, the STAR assessments may not be appropriate. STAR Reading, for example, is based on a reading comprehension task.  The student must be able to read the on-screen prompt in order to assess his or her ability to read and comprehend. The same is true with STAR Math and STAR Early Literacy, in which the student will have to respond to on-screen prompts. We recommend that the teacher or specialist who works with the student evaluate the suitability of the STAR assessments for a given student with a visual disability and use the appropriate adaptive strategy. We also encourage you to contact Renaissance Learning™ to let us know how you are adapting our assessments so we can share your strategies with other users.

Since the STAR assessments use Flash technology, they do not work well with screen reader software such as JAWS Adaptive Speech Reading.

## Students with Hearing Impairments

STAR Reading and STAR Math may be used with students who are deaf or hard of hearing using standard administration procedures. The text of STAR Reading should not be signed to the students because it is an assessment of their ability to comprehend printed text. At the discretion of the teacher or specialist, STAR Math may be signed to the student if there is a question about the student's ability to understand the text. If this adaptation is used, the results of the assessment should be evaluated cautiously. It is reasonable to assume that the same adaptations or accommodations permitted for standardized or state assessment may be used with STAR Math.

STAR Early Literacy items feature an auditory component. This component is critical to the assessment of the skill on which the item is based. The assessment is not appropriate for deaf students and most hearing-impaired students. If you believe that a student has sufficient residual hearing to complete the items successfully, the results should be interpreted cautiously in order not to underestimate the early literacy skills of the student.

## Students with Limited Motor Skills

STAR offers accommodations for students with disabilities through the accessibility options built into a computer's operating system. For instance, students with limited motor skills can execute STAR's mouse-related functions through the keyboard when "mouse keys" is selected under Accessibility Options within the Windows operations system.  The Mouse Keys option is also available for the Mac under **System Preferences > Universal Access > Mouse > Mouse Keys**.

The STAR assessments work using the keyboard or mouse to input answers. Generally speaking, the STAR assessments are also compatible with the adaptive devices typically used by students with limited motor skills. The devices may be part of the operating system or may be add-on devices such as cursor or keyboard controllers. If you have had particular success with an adaptive strategy, we encourage you to contact Renaissance Learning so we can share your success with other users.

## External Review

Federal IDEA regulations allow the use of Response to Intervention (RTI) processes in special education determinations (although RTI is about more than just special education determinations). In addition, the federally funded National Center on Response to Intervention[1] (NCRTI) has given the STAR assessments some of its very highest ratings for screening and progress monitoring—meaning they are among the best assessment tools for RTI purposes including use with students in special education programs.

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[1] http://www.rti4success.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=20&Itemid=71