

**Findings from 2016 Focus Groups on ACCESS for ELLs 2.0
Accommodations and Universal Tools**

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Executive Summary

After completing the first year of administration of ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Online, an English language proficiency assessment for English learners (ELs) in U.S. schools, WIDA conducted focus group interviews with test administrators in eight states. The purpose was to gather feedback on the technical quality of the embedded accommodations and universal tools available with both ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Online and the supporting training materials. Test administrators participating in the focus group interviews indicated a series of connected events that impacted how they perceived and trained students to use the accommodations and universal tools. Interviewee feedback included the following:

- Recommendations for improving the usability of embedded accommodations and universal tools,
- Concerns around delivering speaking items via recorded audio rather than by a human test administrator
- Observations that students did not seem to transfer the use of universal tools as part of their metacognitive strategy to the genre of online testing
- Need for more streamlined training guidelines and materials in the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 training course and needed to review that material as part of a community of practice.

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Background

WIDA creates curriculum, instruction, and assessment materials for a consortium of 39 state education agencies (SEAs). These SEAs are required by federal law (Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015–2016) to administer an annual summative English language proficiency (ELP) assessment to students who have been identified as English language learners (ELLs). Assessment results are used to monitor students' progress in acquiring academic English (i.e., the specific type of language proficiency needed to access the content area instruction provided in their schools).

In 2015–2016, WIDA introduced a new online version of its Grades 1–12 annual summative ELP assessment, ACCESS for ELLs 2.0. ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 was designed by WIDA and a sub-group of the WIDA Consortium member SEAs as part of a four-year Enhanced Assessment Grant, *Assessment Services Supporting ELs through Technology Systems (ASSETS)* (ASSETS Consortium, 2012). Fueled by the transition to technology-enhanced assessments and new conceptualizations around the more flexible approaches to curriculum design and test development being developed by other Next Generation Assessment Consortia funded by the U.S. Department of Education grants issued in 2010 and 2011 (Michelman, 2013), WIDA took advantage of the transition to online testing to enhance its test design and delivery.

As part of the ASSETS grant, ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 was designed to increase student engagement through a more dynamic testing experience. It includes built-in accommodations and accessibility features appropriate for a range of student needs and provides logistical flexibility as a result of simultaneous administration of multiple grades and proficiency levels. It also increases ease for test administrators who no longer need to administer and score the Speaking test one-on-one and who do not need to order the test by tier (ASSETS, 2012). Additional work conducted during the course of the ASSETS grants focused on ensuring that ELLs could take (that is, can "access") test items without encountering barriers that are unrelated to the ELP assessment construct. In other words, the work ensures that ELLs who were participating in this test would be less likely to be impacted by nonconstruct related barriers, which prevent them from showing what they know and can do with Academic English. To accomplish this goal, ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 included a set of specifically defined accommodations and accessibility features to ensure ELL access to the ELP assessment construct. According to test specifications, accommodations may only be assigned to ELLs with a disability that has been documented in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan, while accessibility features can be used by all ELLs taking the test, including those ELLs with IEPs.

In the final design of ACCESS for ELLs 2.0, some of the accommodations and universal tools are embedded into the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 test items or within the online test platform; other accommodations and universal tools are delivered by onsite test administrators. This particular study focuses on the accommodations and universal tools that have been built in, i.e., embedded into ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Online. Three embedded accommodations are allowable for ELLs who have these accommodations designated in the student's IEP or 504 plan. They are manual control of test item audio, repeat item audio, and extended speaking test response time. Six embedded universal tools were examined in the study: highlighter, magnifier, line guide, color overlay, color contrast, and, for the writing test only, sticky notes. The universal tools were available to all ELLs taking the test; these tools do not affect the construct being measured.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this focus group study was to gather feedback to use in improving the technical quality of the embedded accommodations and universal tools that are within the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 test directions and items or that are built into the supporting online test platform. The study also examined how to improve the technical quality of supporting accessibility and accommodation training information and tutorials, available in the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Training Course and in the directions found in the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Test Demo. Findings will be used to design further research and to share with the larger field of both content area and ELP testing as design and delivery of accommodations and accessibility support moves from human-provided, paper-based formats to online, digital formats.

Research Questions

Using data gathered from 2015–2016 ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 test administrators, this study examined test administrator perspectives on the following research questions:

1. What are your perceptions of the technical quality of the embedded accommodations and universal tools available with the online version of ACCESS for ELLs 2.0? How might we improve them?
2. What are your perceptions of the quality of the accessibility and accommodations training materials available with the online version of ACCESS for ELLs 2.0? How might we improve them?

Methods for Conducting the Study

This qualitative study involved collection of focus group interview data from ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 test administrators who regularly work with ELLs (with or without disabilities) and who administered ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Online during spring 2016. The following sections provide more detail on the method used to identify and conduct activities related to participation criteria, study sites, data collection, and data analysis.

Participation Criteria

For the study, the research team targeted Certified ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Test Administrators. Certified Test Administrators had completed preassessment 2015–2016 test administrator certification requirements found in the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Training Course at <https://www.wida.us/ACCESSTraining/online/accommodations.aspx>. To locate potential study participants, the research team first obtained permission from the state education agency to identify and contact one district in their state. From there, the research team followed each district's protocol and procedures for contacting employees (test administrators) for recruitment. While test administrators had the option of participating in face-to-face interviews, all focus groups were conducted via a phone interview with a supporting WebEx. In all, focus groups ranging from one to three test administrators participated in the study. Of focus group participants, 65% served elementary school ELLs; 35% served middle and high school ELLs, and 15% worked in district offices. (Note: 15% participants served an overlapping range of K–12 students.)

Study Sites

The focus group interviews took place with certified ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 test administrators from public elementary and secondary schools located in eight WIDA Consortium member districts: (1) Barrow County (Georgia), (2) Burlington (Vermont), (3) Carroll County (Maryland), (4) Closter (New Jersey), (5) Colonial (Delaware), (6) Grand Forks (North Dakota), (7) Jefferson County (Kentucky), and (8) Roseville (Minnesota). The original study plan included a district from Colorado; however, they did not participate due to scheduling issues.

Data Collection

Researchers conducted 1-hour to 1.5-hour interviews with project participants. Data collected included observations and recordings of focus group interviews with teachers around their perceptions of student use of the embedded supports and recommendations for improving the accommodations and universal tools and the associated training materials.

During the interviews, participants were asked a series of questions which had been developed using effective practices for assessment-related focus group interviews (e.g., Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008; Nolin & Chandler, 1996; Zucker, Sassman, & Case, 2004). The semistructured interview questions (shown below) defined the areas being explored and were provided to participants in advance. The full interview guide is located in the Appendix. Please note that this guide employs terminology used in the first year of ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 administration, not the version updated based on study findings. The updated version is publicly available.

Focus Group Interview Guide

1. How did you use the training materials located at ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Training Course located in the WIDA Web site at <https://www.wida.us/ACCESSTraining/online/accommodations.aspx>? How might we improve them?

2. How did you use the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Test Demo at <http://assets.drcedirect.com/States/WIDA/Tutorials/Student/201510-html5/201510-html5.html>? How might we improve them?
3. How did you use the practice Items found at <https://wbte.drcedirect.com/WIDA/portals/wida>? How might we improve them?
4. Were any of your student assigned one of three the online accommodations? What happened? How might we improve them?
5. Did any of your students use the accessibility [universal] tools? What happened? How might we improve them?

While all questions were covered during the interview, the researchers probed responses for more information and allowed the conversation to follow the lead of the participants as teachers reflected on what they observed during administration of the assessment. As noted in Gill et al. (2008), this approach “allows for the discovery or elaboration of information that is important to participants but may not have previously been thought of as pertinent by the research team” (p. 291).

Data Analysis

Using thematic coding techniques (Maxwell, 2004), the research team identified five basic themes that arose during focus group interviews and noted the category of either support or training materials that were referenced. (See Table 1 below.) The accuracy of these themes and categories were then triangulated with research team observation and reflection memos.

From there, the research team used axial coding methods to identify related causal conditions and recommendations (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). The members of the research team then reviewed the interviews to explore how the concepts and categories connected with related causal conditions and recommendations.

Table. 1
Concepts, Categories, and Related Conditions Identified in Data

Theme Identified in Data	Categories	Related Causal Conditions	Recommendations
1. Recommendations for improving the usability of embedded accommodations and universal tools	Training Tutorial, Demo Test Items, Universal Tools, Accommodations	Those study participants who were less aware of accommodations and universal tools felt that the tools worked well (especially if the overall test technology worked well). Other participants with greater awareness of accommodation and universal tools	Feedback was provided for two accommodations— manual control of item audio (MC) and repeat item audio (RA); and 6 universal tools—highlighter, magnifier, line guide, color contrast/color overlay, and sticky notes.

Theme Identified in Data	Categories	Related Causal Conditions	Recommendations
		recommended improvements.	
2. Doubts about delivering speaking items via recorded audio rather than by a human test administrator	Accommodations	Test administrators expressed concern that student’s disability might result in his/her true proficiency in English not being documented during testing. They felt students who are at a lower proficiency level (PL 1 and PL 2) need more support with oral discourse. Responding to a computer was not “natural” or familiar to these students.	Additional research is needed to understand how student proficiency, especially for students with disabilities, in speaking English is affected when responding to a computer rather than a human test administrator.
3. Observations that students did not seem to transfer the use of universal tools as part of their metacognitive strategy to the genre of online testing	Training Tutorial, Training materials	Test administrators do not have a lot of reading and planning time or may not have access to a school/district Professional Learning Community with whom they might digest and reflect upon the information	Students and test administrators need more explicit experience with the genre of online testing and opportunities to embed similar online tools into instruction.
4. Need for more streamlined training guidelines and materials in the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 training course and needed to review that material as part of a community of practice	Training Tutorial, Demo Test Items, Universal Tools	Test administrators were often pressed for time. Access to and understanding of test preparation activities is contingent upon test administrator understanding and school/district commitment	<p>Test administrators need a “Cliff Notes” version of documents as a reference.</p> <p>Training videos and materials need to explicitly guide test administrators in how they can support practice test and instructional use of accommodations and universal tools.</p> <p>On the practice test, provide teacher walk-throughs of specific features of how the</p>

Theme Identified in Data	Categories	Related Causal Conditions	Recommendations
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genre of online reading and writing differs from paper-based formats and of how to support use of embedded accommodations and embedded supports.

Study Limitations

By its very nature and purpose, qualitative research (in this case, focus group research) is not designed to produce generalizable findings. The sample size is too small and not random enough. Moreover, while efforts were made to ameliorate the impact of one participant’s opinion on the others, it is possible that some members of each focus group, by nature of their status at the school wielded more influence during the interview. Thus, this study provides an exploration of possible areas of interests, rather than providing definitive findings. Statistically, the findings from this study cannot be projected onto the larger population of ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 test administrators. Instead, the research team looked for patterns of consistency among the insights expressed during different interviews and by different groups.

Findings

This study explored the technical quality of the embedded accommodations and universal tools available with ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Online and the supporting training materials. Two findings around the technical quality of the accommodations and universal tools were identified; three findings were identified around the training materials. The findings were initially categorized as concepts in the data. An overview of the primary concepts, categories, related conditions, and recommendations identified in study findings are outlined in Table 1.

Accommodations and Universal Tools Findings

Theme #1: Recommendations for improving the usability of embedded accommodations and universal tools

Overall, focus group participants told us that they thought ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 was easier to administer and an improvement over the previous paper-based version of ACCESS for ELLs. The online test was less time consuming on the front end; it had fewer materials and more centralized scoring, which was perceived to be more standardized across multiple states. Participants also thought the new flow of the test was logical and lead to improved scheduling and administration.

One participant commented:

We felt like we were able to move through the test more quickly than in the past. It was nice to not have to organize and deal with lots of notebooks and the logistics. In the end, [the] speaking test was the most challenging [to offer] because they [students] were

speaking into a microphone. We were very anxious about doing this test, but we think if you prep two months ahead of time. We did not have hardly any challenges.

Another participant added:

When everything worked like [it] was supposed to, it [the online test] was very, very easy. I loved it. It was only when there was a glitch. Wow. This was so much easier. The actual test—I liked it and the kids did well with it.

Roughly one third of participants in the focus groups indicated that the accommodations and universal tools were sufficient in nature and had no feedback on improvements to make. Table 2 shows the feedback that was provided on how the design accommodations and universal tools’ functionality might be improved. Participants also identified instances during which the specific tools seemed cumbersome or did not seem to function properly.

Table 2.
Issues and Improvements Suggested by Focus Group Participants

Support Name	Participant Observations	Participant Recommendations
Manual Control of Item Audio (MC) and Repeat Item Audio (RA)	Both the read aloud and repeat item audio tools were considered useful.	Consider combining Manual Control of Item Audio (MC) with Repeat Item Audio (RA) to create a single control and make it more efficient to assign.
Highlighter	This tool is more likely to be used by students at the middle and high school level than the elementary level. Some participants reported that they saw their students use the highlighter during the test as they were reading. (Students would read through the text, look at the answers, and highlight what was relevant for their answer.)	Allow highlighter use to be activated while listening to the audio rather than after it; ensure that the highlights made do not disappear in items which allow participants to flip between screens (e.g., pages).
Magnifier	Grey scroll bar is small and test administrators suspect it would be hard for a student with low vision to locate and use. Students took a few moments to realize could use the keyboard arrow keys to navigate the page, scroll over and down to	It would be nice to have a magnifier tool that can be moved around the screen to enlarge a portion of the screen. Here’s a picture of a possible way to show the magnifier on the screen.

	the magnifier button and deactivate the tool.	
Line Guide	Most participants did not see students using this tool.	There is not much text on the screen at one time, so there is not much use for this tool.
Color Contrast/Color Overlay	Both tools seemed to be more of a distraction for these students. Participants observed students clicking through different color options on these tools randomly with no clear purpose. For those participants, who had students work through the demo and practice item, the distraction went away after the students played with it a bit and then figured out what they wanted to use during the test.	Adjust the text image design so that students can manipulate the color of any text embedded in images. Consider having this test administrator-controlled so it will only be assigned to students for whom it will not be a distraction.
Sticky Notes	Writing preplanning tools were not effective for ELLs' unique proficiency level needs and abilities. It was a foreign concept for most students to use to make them use a note pad online. (The practical reality is that, in most cases, the teacher needs to intervene to remind students to use their tools. One participant felt that this tool had just been borrowed from the content assessment repertoire of tools, but really was not appropriate for an assessment of ELL language proficiency.)	Just allow students to use a physical piece of paper to look back and forth OR embed the tool within the item and add a step in the item that requires student use. Create innovative items that involve different types of graphic organizer use as part of forced choice. Build graphic organizer and other accessibility tools into the formula for how WIDA creates staged adaptive test items in a folder....

Theme #2: Concerns around delivering speaking items via recorded audio rather than by a human test administrator

Accommodations on paper tests have a well-earned reputation for being unreliably selected, implemented, and monitored (Kimbrough & Mellen, 2012; Shafer Willner, Rivera, & Acosta,

2010; Shafer Willner, Rivera, & Acosta, 2007). While focus group participants could see the advantages of transferring most accommodations and universal tools to online embedded formats, many were still not convinced that student proficiency in speaking English could be accurately measured when the speaking item was delivered via recorded audio rather than by a human test administrator.

One participant admitted:

There is never a moment, as an ESOL teacher, when I have students speaking into a microphone—it's just not right to have students do this online when they are used to doing this with a human. I want an accurate gauge and right now, the way the speaking test is designed is awkward. How can this test gather an authentic speaking sample?

Some test administrators and students missed the human interaction during the Speaking test. They felt students who are at a lower proficiency level (PL 1 and PL 2) need more support with oral discourse. Responding to a computer was not “natural” or familiar to these students.

Another focus group participant explained:

On the paper version of the test, there was always engagement with the teacher, “What more can you say?” We need this same structure on the digital test. If a student responded and we knew they could say more. The computer didn't say “tell me more.” After they pushed stop, the computer could tell them more. As their teacher, I knew what they were capable of saying. Incorporate that into the Speaking test.

Human test administrators could gauge more readily when a student needed extra time. Test administrators noted that as the recording clock indicated time was ending, students started to speak faster and faster. Test administrators felt this timing of speaking responses caused undue stress on their students.

In general, focus group participants requested more research to show how student proficiency in speaking English (especially for students with disabilities) is affected when responding to a computer rather than a human test administrator. (Note: There is an option for the school team to allow ELLs with disabilities to have a human accommodator on ACCESS for ELLs 2.0.)

Theme #3: Observations that students did not seem to transfer the use of universal tools as part of their metacognitive strategy to the genre of online testing

Participants thought students were more likely to use embedded accommodations and universal tools during the test if they had been provided the opportunity to preview and practice using them before the test was given. Most participants utilized the Test Demo in a whole class setting. In general, students were scheduled for a practice/demo session in the computer lab one week prior to the start of testing. (The practice/demo session required availability of a computer with a microphone and headset.) Students followed along and the teachers paused after every few sections to ask questions and clarify directions.

Participant:

I put the Demo on the smart board in my room to familiarize ourselves with the test format. They were incredibly helpful to take the fear out of the experience—to see it and play with the different tools was really nice.

The practice items provided students with valuable exposure to a new test format. Many students had expressed feeling nervous and worried when they were first told the assessment would be online this year. After working through the practice items, students said they felt much more comfortable and confident with the idea of online testing. Participants noted:

The teachers liked that the directions were the same in pretest and within the test—it got them in the mode of taking the test and boosting their confidence.

Another participant reported that she planned to prepare students to use the tools next year:

Our students should own these tools and use them whenever they want to use them.” Next year, I want to make sure my kids can do all these things about using computers. I’m going to make sure they can use the microphones to record themselves reading into classroom instruction during fluency practice. (We hadn’t thought about doing this type of activity with our students since a lot of our computers don’t have microphones.

Focus group participants reported a difference between the instruction students were receiving in classrooms and the format of the test, particularly in the area of paper vs. online text. Because there was a difference in instruction and assessment format, participants in the focus groups reported underlying concerns that students were having difficulty in transferring use of tools from a paper format to online tests.

Participant:

This was the first ever online test that our students took. They were not used to these tools. During instruction, these students don’t do a lot of highlighting. If you don’t use these tools often, it’s hard to transfer them. To make transfer happen, you need to do it often to move the skill into student’s long-term memory.

In a moment of insight, one participant emphatically added, “Transference of using different tools [from paper to online formats] won’t happen unless the tool is built into the test question.” She suggested that universal tools and graphic organizers should be embedded at the item level, rather than provided in generic forms across domains. She commented, “When teaching writing in English, you’re teaching the discourse structure of English (the sociocultural portion of writing).” In other words, there needs to be enough context so that the tool can be used in a particular way (that is, according to a particular pattern) when answering the question.

Because use of universal tools is dependent on student familiarity in using them before the test (as part of test practice and/or during instruction), it might be preferable to embed the universal tools at the task level—that is, not just by providing general universal tools or retrofitting support using accommodations (well after item design). In this way, the use of the tool would appropriately scaffold and elicit more implicit language knowledge and skills of students with different levels of proficiency.

One participant:

If we see accommodations and [universal] tools as a resource, then the best way to structure a student response is by giving them not a blank piece of paper. In the ESL class, we are looking at models—deconstructing and creating an anchor chart. Students never get a blank piece of paper. . . .Tools are used to help solve problems. Students need a step physically there as options to tie in the tools, especially in ways that are appropriate for each proficiency level. Give [students] forced choices. . . . Teachers need to make more explicit connections to show students how to transfer classroom use of [universal] tools to testing situations. In the rush to assess everything digitally, we have lost the transference between paper teaching and digital testing.

Theme #4: Need for more streamlined training guidelines and materials in the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Training Course and needed to review that material as part of a community of practice

During focus group interviews, participants were asked how they used the training materials found in the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Training Course located in the WIDA Web site at <https://www.wida.us/ACCESSTraining/online/accommodations.aspx>? They were also asked how we might improve these training materials. Overall, the different types of focus group reactions around the amount of training materials highlights the importance of time to process the information, especially as part of district trainings and/or district Professional Learning Community (PLC).

When test administrators had training time to review the accessibility and accommodations training materials, they were more likely to indicate that they found the information useful and had referred to it during training. For these test administrators, the district or school assessment coordinator highlighted essential information and then the test administrators looked through the training materials multiple times.

I didn't have a problem with the materials. For training, our DAC [District Assessment Coordinator] highlighted essential information. Looked at them multiple times. The matrix in the Descriptions document was helpful. Liked the layout. All the information was there in the table.

Another participant reported:

I liked that all the training information was placed in one location. It made it easy to find. I read the materials and watched the short video. I liked the accommodations framework “triangle (shown in Figure 1 to the right.) It was intuitive and easy to understand.

Still another participant commented:

We had a day-long training—went over some as a group and some at our own pace. We looked at the Manual. We, the school test administrators, didn't need all of the information in the Guidelines and Descriptions. It wasn't a big problem to have all the

documents. We met with the SPED people to decide which ones the kids needed. We didn't use the Descriptions Tables in our meeting. We emailed them a one-pager.

In contrast, the focus group participants who had been provided little or no training time with the accessibility and accommodations materials were more likely to report that there was too much information in the training materials. They wanted the training materials to be “short and sweet” —less description and more streamlined. These participants reported that many teachers became overwhelmed when they saw all the documents that needed to be reviewed and processed.

Participant:

A lot of it was just too much information to help administrators. I think the training materials should focus on [what] the teachers need to do to prep for the test. Put the test administration information in a separate document (or just in the Test Administration Manual).

Participants reported:

We wanted a “cliff notes” version of the materials that would prioritize certain information, but also give us the possibility of additional information.

Another participant suggested:

In addition to streamlined materials for the test administrators, keep a shorter version of the Accommodations Descriptions Table. I would like to have simple information to send over to the school special education team.

While most of the focus group participants found the test demo videos to be helpful in introducing the basics of the test items, they wished the materials provided a little more guidance on how to use the embedded accommodations and universal tools more effectively. However, until they were prompted by the interviewer, participants did not make the connection to use the accessibility tools such as highlighter and line guide as part of good test-taking strategies. (Noted that even the ELLs who are methodical in their test taking, didn't realize they could use the tools in their online test taking.)

One study participant agreed:

Yes, now that you mention it, I really do think it would be useful if the test demo contained prompt and reminders for students around how to use the universal tools (line guide and highlighter in particular). This is part of good test-taking strategies: What do you already know about using tools to help you when reading? How might you do this online?

After our focus group interview, one group sent the following suggestions for the types of test administrator prompts that might be included in the practice items. The main idea was to put more in the demo around the quality and quantity of language test administrators should help students aim for. What is the spoken English goal we should be looking at?

- **Prompt students:** What do you know how to do already? What tools do you use during instruction to do this task? Then point out the similarities between the embedded tools and paper-based activities.
- **Prompt** with practice items to remind students how they might best take advantage of the accessibility tools.
- **Remind students:** With the writing test and speaking test, it was not about how much you say, but how well you say it.
- **Remind and encourage students when using speaking practice items:**
 - Stop and think before hitting the record button.
 - Use complete sentences.
 - Talk until they see the clock come up. Then they know they have said enough words.
 - Try to use words “and” and “because” to make their sentences longer.
 - Listen carefully to Nina, and talk more than Nina.
- **Remind** test coordinators to send out the links to the practice items so that the content teachers and other teachers can be familiar with what is expected of students on the test. Teachers could take a moment during instruction and show the students what to expect on the test, and remind them of tools they use during content instruction to complete similar tasks. This second group of teachers may not have had direct training with the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 materials, because they were not administering it.

However, recommendations for more explicit prompts on how to use the embedded accommodations and universal tools more effectively were offset by concerns about keeping the training streamlined.

One participant added this caveat:

Sometimes with ELLs, we do too much. We give too many strategies. Be careful about giving too many choices or strategies. The teacher needs to be the one to add or facilitate the support. Sometimes less is more. For example, with my high school students, whether or not we “go into” detail about the embedded tools really depends on how competent students are on the computer. While high school students are more focused than younger ones, if they have lower proficiency levels, they shouldn’t waste their time on something [embedded tools] they didn’t need. They just need to concentrate on essential things [when taking the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0.]

Discussion

This study takes place in the context of the transition from paper-based to online testing. The study provides short term findings to guide test developers as they move beyond the first year that WIDA administered an online test, providing technical specifications that might improve the

usability and technical quality of online tools and platforms and accompanying guidelines. (Note: In response to study findings, WIDA streamlined its 2016–2017 accommodations and accessibility guidelines into a single supplement to be used across all WIDA ELP assessments.)

In this study, test administrators shared that they were often pressed for time when reviewing assessment training materials. Also in this study, those focus group members who had reviewed and discussed assessment training materials as part of a community of practice expressed the greatest ease with the online assessment, including use of embedded accommodations and universal tools.

Beyond technical improvements to accommodations and universal tools, another finding emerged as a next step for framing accommodations for data collection. Historically, states have used different names and definitions for accommodations. For example, what might be considered a single accommodation in one state (Read aloud and clarify directions) might be considered two separate accommodations in another state. This practice impacted comparisons of data of paper-based test accommodations (Shafer Willner, Rivera, & Acosta, 2008). WIDA was committed to ensuring that school teams could easily identify and select accommodations for students across different assessments. The first stage of technical considerations in designing the WIDA Accommodations and Accessibility Framework took the necessary initial step of ensuring that the accommodations and universal tools that would use in WIDA assessments would employ similar naming and definitions as used with those available with content area and alternate assessments (as described in Shafer Willner & Monroe, 2016a). Consistent definitions would also support educators' abilities' to conduct cross-state, cross-consortia, and even, when appropriate, cross-assessment comparisons of student accommodation data.

Building on the approach described above, the findings from this study show an important next step that could be undertaken as part of the ongoing transition from paper-based to computer-based assessment formats. The study has identified a need to customize the design of accommodations and universal tools to the unique ELP construct, rather than framing them in relation to content area assessment construct or continuing to frame them as an afterthought to item design. In doing so, this study includes findings that point to the need for more research to explore impacts on student performance when read alouds are delivered using recorded audio rather than delivered by a human test administrator.

This study also points to the need for more exploration of how accessibility principles can be better integrated into item writing methods. For example, item writers might consider whether a universal tool is even needed, such as in the case of providing a line guide on items with extremely limited text. They might also consider how to customize accommodations and universal tools by item type rather than by domain (i.e., listening, reading, speaking, and

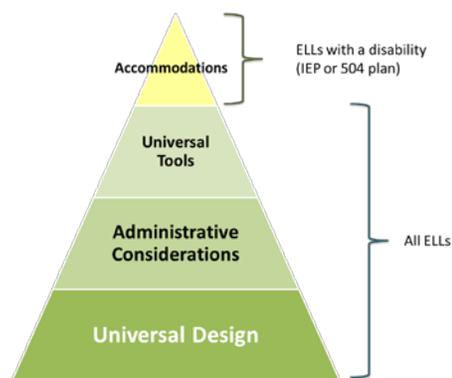


Figure 1. WIDA Accessibility and Accommodations Framework

writing). Other explorations to be considered include use of accommodations and universal tools as part of scaffolded scoring for responses (as proposed in Almond, Winter, Cameto, et al., 2010). Thus, to highlight the need to integrate UDL into the foundation of how an ELP assessment is developed and delivered for all ELLs, UDL was explicitly included in the diagram that accompanied the WIDA Accessibility and Accommodations Framework (Shafer Willner & Monroe, 2016).

Lastly, findings also point to the need for educators to provide students with more instructional opportunities to practice reading and writing online and to practice writing online. At a surface level, one can point out that, during their training and practice sessions, students could receive appropriate information to preview and practice the available accommodations tools during the test. Therefore, it is incumbent on schools to provide students with needed access to appropriate training materials, reminders in training videos, and a school/district commitment to provide time for collaborative learning and time for students to practice. Participants pointed out that it may be helpful for WIDA to provide a sample script (such as the model provided with the TestNav Tools and ePAT [Practice Test Environment] Guide) for teachers to use as they walk students through the practice items. This sample script would point out the embedded features and how they may be used during testing. This same script could prove additional opportunities for teachers to provide those prompts listed earlier in this paper.

But at a deeper level, participants in this study pointed to the need to think about accommodations in relation to the ongoing transition from paper-based testing to online testing. This transition period affords educators the opportunity to rethink accommodations which, until this point, have been limited only to specific subgroups and developed and implemented well after test item development (Russell, Hoffman, & Higgins, 2009, Shafer Willner & Rivera, 2011; Shafer Willner, 2012). Moving from an accommodations viewpoint to an accessibility viewpoint requires educators to think about how to embed use of testing accommodations and universal tools into instruction. (See Shafer Willner & Monroe, 2016b for a related discussion.)

Final Thoughts

Our primary goal for this study was to obtain feedback on how we might improve the technical quality of the embedded accommodations and universal tools provided with ACCESS for ELLs 2.0. During the study, focus group participants also shared ways to think more deeply about accommodations using an accessibility lens and consider how accommodations and universal tool use fits within the construct of ELP test items.

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Appendix: Teacher Focus Group Interview Guide

WIDA Accommodations and Accessibility Tools Teacher Focus Group Interviews¹

Thank you so much for participating in our upcoming focus group interviews! In preparation for our interview (and to keep within our time frame), I've excerpted some background information, a preview of key questions, and Web links might visit before the interview.

Background Information

During our interview session, we will record the discussion in case we miss something in our notes, but no one outside of the research team will have access to the tape. This session will give you a chance to express your opinions about some tools that have been built into an online test. We want you to feel comfortable in saying what you really think and what you really feel. We hope all of you will give us your ideas since each of your opinions is important to us. There are no right or wrong answers. You might disagree with each other and that's okay since different people often have different experiences and different opinions. It's really okay to disagree with someone but please do it respectfully. Also, it will also help me if you speak clearly and if you will speak one at a time.

Prior to participating in the interviews, please sign, scan, and email back your consent form to lynn.willner@wisc.edu.

Interview Objectives

- Obtain feedback and insight on the quality and usability of the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 training materials and tutorials on accessibility tools and accommodations and on the actual on accessibility tools and accommodations available with ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 .

Preview of Key Questions and WebLinks to Visit

1. How did you use the training materials located at ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Training Course located in the WIDA Web site at <https://www.wida.us/ACCESSTraining/online/accommodations.aspx>? How might we improve them?
2. How did you use the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Test Demo at <http://assets.drccedirect.com/States/WIDA/Tutorials/Student/201510-html5/201510-html5.html>? How might we improve them?

¹ In the first year of the online assessment, the term "accessibility tools" was used. However, after the first year, this term was changed to "universal tools."

3. How did you use the practice Items found at <https://wbte.drctdirect.com/WIDA/portals/wida>? How might we improve them?
4. Were any of your student assigned one of three the online accommodations? What happened? How might we improve them?
5. Did any of your students use the accessibility tools? What happened? How might we improve them?

The rest of this document contains the screen shots and questions from the actual interview script.

I. INTRODUCTORY DESCRIPTION OF THE EMBEDDED ACCOMMODATIONS AND ACCESSIBILITY TOOLS (AND LEARN ABOUT PARTICIPANT BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE)

We are going to begin by asking you some questions about the process you use in assigning accommodations and accessibility tools that were available with the online ACCESS for ELLs 2.0. These two types of supports augment the accessibility-enhanced, standard (i.e., default) presentation of WIDA's online *ACCESS for ELLs 2.0* assessment. Table 1 shows the accommodations to be examined in the study; Tables 2 and 3 below show the accessibility tools be examined.

Table 1. *Embedded Accommodations Allowed with the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Assessment*

Accommodations available to ELLs with IEPs	Test Domains			
	<i>Listening</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Speaking</i>
Manual control of test item audio	Yes	N/A	Yes - only for online test; N/A for paper-based test	Yes
Manual repeat of test item audio	Yes – but repeats items only one time	N/A	Yes – but only for online test; N/A for paper-based test	Yes
Extended Speaking Response Time	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes

Table 2. *Accessibility Tools Allowed with the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Assessment*

Accessibility tools available to <i>all</i> ELLs	Assessment Domains			
	<i>Listening</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Speaking</i>
Colored Overlays (Allows students to change the background color that appears)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Accessibility tools available to <i>all</i> ELLs	Assessment Domains			
	<i>Listening</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Speaking</i>
behind text, graphics, and response areas. Five colors are available: pink, yellow, blue, green, and orange)				
Color contrast (Allows student to choose from a variety of background/text color combinations)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Highlighter	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Line Guide	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Magnifier	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Note pad	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A

- Do you remember how you or the student decided whether a student might use one of the accessibility tools? Can you tell us what happened?

II. EXPLORE THE RESOURCES IN THE ACCESS FOR ELLS 2.0 TRAINING COURSE

FACILITATOR to Teachers: Now we'd like to show you excerpts from the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Training Course located in the WIDA Web site at <https://www.wida.us/ACCESSTraining/online/accommodations.aspx>. In the online training course for test administrators, there is a section devoted to accessibility and accommodations information.

The screenshot shows the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs Training Grades 1-12 Online website. The header includes the WIDA logo, a search bar, and navigation links for 'MY ACCOUNT & SECURE PORTAL' and 'LOG OUT'. A green navigation bar contains links for 'ONLINE HOME', 'LOGISTICS', 'LISTENING', 'SPEAKING', 'WRITING', 'READING', 'ACCOMMODATIONS', and 'GLOSSARY'. The main content area is titled 'Online Accommodations' and is divided into three columns:

- Philosophy:** A paragraph explaining the WIDA Accessibility and Accommodations Framework, followed by a note about state policies and a 'References' section with links to guidelines, descriptions, FAQs, and a checklist.
- Quick Facts: Accommodations:** A list of four bullet points detailing the framework's application to grades, the introduction of an enhanced framework for Kindergarten and Alternate ACCESS, the availability of new test administration features, and the role of IEP teams.
- Tutorial:** A section titled 'Tutorial' with a paragraph stating that it provides an overview of the framework and guidance for educators.

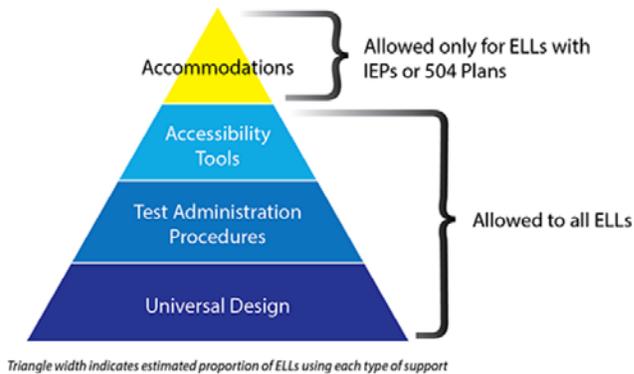
Figure 1. Upper View of the Accommodations Training Web page

There is a training tutorial video on this Web page that provides an overview of the WIDA Accessibility and Accommodations Framework.

Learning Support and Practice

To build test items, WIDA developers first applied Universal Design principles. They added supporting prompts with appropriate animations and graphics, embedded scaffolding, tasks broken into "smaller segments," and task models and guides. Second, there are two types of supports that are now available to all ELLs taking the test: Test administration procedures and Accessibility Tools. Test administration procedures are things like using familiar school personnel to administer the assessment, administering the assessment individually or in a small group, or in a separate room; providing frequent supervised breaks; or allowing students to take the assessment in short segments. Examples of accessibility tools include a highlighter, line guide, magnifier, or color overlay.

A set of recommended accommodations, which you see at top to the pyramid, can be assigned based on a student's formally documented learning needs or identified disabilities.



[Return to Checklist](#)

[Previous Page](#)

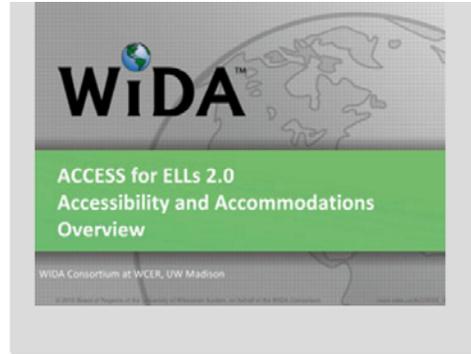


Figure 2. Lower View of the Accommodations Training Web Page

Questions:

- Do you have any questions about the information and resources I just showed you?
- When you were preparing your students to take ACCESS for ELLs 2.0, did you look at any of the training information found in the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Training Course?
- What parts of the information in the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Training Course were helpful?
- What anything confusing?
- What other information would you suggest we place here (or remove)?

III. EXPLORE THE TEST DEMO TRAINING TUTORIAL ON THE WIDA ASSESSMENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM WEB SITE

There is also an accommodations and accessibility tools tutorial found in the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Test Demo at

<http://assets.drcedirect.com/States/WIDA/Tutorials/Student/201510-html5/201510-html5.html>.

This tutorial is a video that shows how to use embedded accommodations and accessibility tools with the test items presented in each particular domain (i.e., Listening, Reading, Writing, or Speaking).

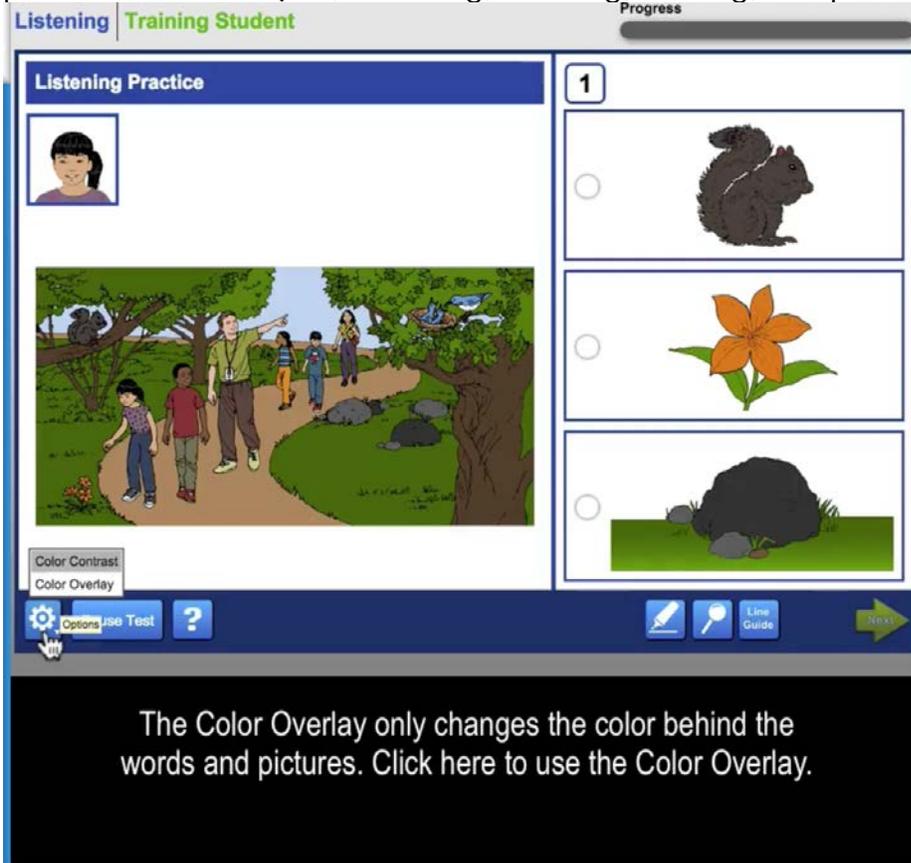


Figure 3. Screen Shot of the Test Demo Video Showing How to Use the Embedded Accessibility Tools

Questions:

- Do you have any questions about the training tutorial I just showed you?
- When you were preparing your students to take ACCESS for ELLs 2.0, did you look at any of the training information found in the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Training Course?
- Did you show this training tutorial to your students? (Tell us how you did this...)
 - What might your students have found useful? What might have been confusing?
- What other information would you suggest we place here (or remove)?

IV. EXPLORE HOW THE EMBEDDED ACCOMMODATIONS AND ACCESSIBILITY TOOLS WERE USED WITH THE PRACTICE ITEMS

FACILITATOR to Teachers: Now let’s look at how you used the Practice Items (found at <https://wbte.drcedirect.com/WIDA/portals/wida>) with your students.

As the individual/group looks through the Directions portion of each set of Practice Items, note that test directions are no longer read by the test administrator, but by an embedded recording of human voice.

Table 3. *Accessibility Embedded into Test Items*

Accessibility Tools Built into Test Items (as part of Test Directions and Practice) which are available to all students	Assessment Domains			
	<i>Listening</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Speaking</i>
Read test directions aloud, using a pre-recorded human voice.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Repeat test directions , using a pre-recorded human voice.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

- Did your students take the Practice items before taking the actual ACCESS for ELLs 2.0? [Some may not have used these Items with their students.]
 - If so, is there anything you would do differently next year when you administer this test?
- As a test administrator, what is your reaction to having embedded human voice test directions rather than the test administrator reading the test directions?
- What happened as your students began to work through the Directions and Practice items?
- Were there any instances when you needed to intervene and provide additional support with the Directions?
 - What kinds of skills or awarenesses about test-taking did you need to teach to your students?
- Did your students use any of the accessibility tools when going through the Directions screens and the practice items?
 - What skills did you need to teach your students about these tools?
- What kinds of questions did your students ask you as they tried out the accessibility tools?
- How might we improve student’s opportunities to try out the embedded accommodations and accessibility tools while using the Practice Items?

V. EXPLORE THE APPLICATION OF EMBEDDED ACCOMMODATIONS AND ACCESSIBILITY TOOLS WITHIN THE FOUR DOMAINS (LISTENING, READING, SPEAKING, AND WRITING)

- As we look at item for each domain, can you describe to me how the embedded accommodations and accessibility tools might be used to support ELL access to the test items?

- To what extent are the embedded accommodations and accessibility tools useful or challenging? Why?

[Open the Listening test item.]

Here are the tools available for the Listening [and Reading] sections of the test:



FACILITATOR to Teachers:

Let's review how these tools might be used in this particular test domain:

Table 4. Embedded Accessibility Tools

<p>Color contrast – This tool allows you to change the background color and color of the text on the screen. The picture to the right shows the color combinations you can choose. Let's try it. Click on the tool.</p>	A dialog box titled 'Color Choices' with a close button (X) in the top right corner. It contains six rows, each with a colored rectangular box and the word 'Text' next to it. The colors from top to bottom are: white, green, cyan, brown, pink, and yellow.
<p>Color Overlay – This tool allows you to change the color that appears behind text, graphics, and response areas. Five colors are available: pink, yellow, blue, green, and orange. Let's try it. Click on the tool.</p>	A dialog box titled 'Contrasting Color' with a close button (X) in the top right corner. It contains five rows, each with a colored rectangular box and the word 'Text' next to it. The colors from top to bottom are: orange, pink, yellow, light green, and teal.
<p>Magnifier – This is a tool to make things bigger. Let's try it. Click on the tool. Go ahead and move your mouse around. See, the pictures and words look bigger. When you're done using this tool, you just click on the tool again to tool it off.</p>	A blue square icon with a white magnifying glass symbol inside.
<p>Line Guide - The next tool is called a Line Guide. Here is a tool that you can use when reading a story. Click on it and use it to read the lines of text on the screen. See how the tool underlines each line in the story you are pointing to with your mouse. When you are done, just click on the same tool again to turn it off. Let's try it. Click on the tool.</p>	A blue square icon with the words 'Line Guide' written in white text inside.

See this button here on the screen? (Show Play button and then show Repeat button.) There are also some buttons you can push to stop and start the voice you hear [recorded audio].

Table 5. Embedded Accommodations

<p>Manual Play Audio in the test play automatically. This button allows you to start the voice when you're ready to hear it.</p>	
<p>Manual Repeat This button allows you to repeat (one time) the test voice you're hearing.</p>	

The facilitator will have the Teachers work through the Speaking and Writing domains after completing the Listening and Reading domains.

Online Tools for Speaking Speaking



- As we look at item for each domain, can you describe to me how the embedded accommodations and accessibility tools might be used to support ELL access to the test items?
 - To what extent are the embedded accommodations and accessibility tools useful or challenging? Why?

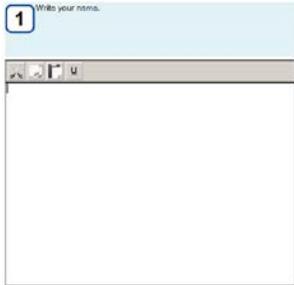
Online Tools for Writing

(Sticky Note is to the left of Magnifier):

FACILITATOR to Teachers: One of the tools that is available during Writing (in addition to the tools available for Reading and Listening) is the Sticky Notes. As you're thinking about what to write, you can jot down notes on these sticky notes. Let's click on the tool and take a look.



FACILITATOR to Teachers: As the student types his/her answer, there are some other tools you can use: cut, copy, paste, and underline. Let's take a look at them. Writing Response Area (cut, copy, paste, and underline)



- As we look at item for each domain, can you describe to me how the embedded accommodations and accessibility tools might be used to support ELL access to the test items?
 - To what extent are the embedded accommodations and accessibility tools useful or challenging? Why?

VI. FINAL QUESTIONS

1. How are the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 embedded accommodations and accessibility tools test similar or different to those used with other online assessments your students take?
2. Overall, do you think your students found the embedded accommodations and accessibility tools useful or challenging? Why?
3. Do you have additional pieces of advice for us on how we can improve these tools?
4. Is there anything more you would like us to know to help us understand your answers today?

Thank you for helping us out today.