Star Assessments Accommodations FAQ

The Star assessments (Star Reading, Star Early Literacy, and Star Math) are suitable for use with students with disabilities. Since Star is computer adaptive, 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. 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.

Is there a time limit for students to take Star assessments?

Star assessments do not have an overall time limit associated with them. However, there are time limits for individual items intended to keep the test moving and maintain test security. Nearly all students can answer items within the established time limits. However, you have the option to extend time limits for individual students who need more time to respond to each question.

When time is nearly up for an item, a clock appears, and the software reminds students to choose an answer. If time runs out before the student selects an answer, the item is treated as an incorrect response, and the next item is presented. If the correct answer was selected prior to the time running out, the item is treated as a correct response, and the next item is presented.

Can time be extended for students that require additional test-taking time?

Star Reading, Star Math and Star Early Literacy 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, on the Home page, select your name in the upper-right corner. In the drop-down list, select Edit Preferences > Extended Question Time Limits > select the box for students requiring this accommodation. [https://help2.renaissance.com/prefs/21023](https://help2.renaissance.com/prefs/21023)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Time Limits</th>
<th>Standard Time Limit Per Item</th>
<th>Extended Time Limit Per Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Star Early Literacy</td>
<td>90 seconds</td>
<td>270 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star Reading Grades K-2</td>
<td>Items 1-10 60 seconds</td>
<td>Items 1-10 180 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Items 11-34 120 seconds</td>
<td>Items 11-34 270 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star Reading Grades 3-12</td>
<td>Items 1-10 45 seconds</td>
<td>Items 1-10 135 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Items 11-34 90 seconds</td>
<td>Items 11-34 270 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star Math</td>
<td>3 minutes</td>
<td>6 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Warning clock appears in all assessments when 15 seconds remain for the item.

Although the existing Extended Question Time Limit preference can be used to give students more time to answer Star Math English and Star Reading English test questions, the "Allotted Time" Accommodation can override it, giving students unlimited time. If Unlimited Time is checked in the accommodations preference, students will have even more time to answer: for both practice and actual test questions, the student will have 900 seconds (15 minutes) to answer.

If there is no activity from the student within this amount of time, the student will be shown a dialog box. The student will have 60 seconds to respond in the dialog box and return to the test. If the student does not respond within 60 seconds, the student’s current progress on the test will be saved and the test will be ended (treated as a paused test; see instructions for resuming a test for Star Math or Star Reading.)
Does extending testing time impact Star scores?
The psychometric foundation of the Star assessments is Item Response Theory, which assumes that a student’s performance on a test question is solely a function of what the student knows and can do and the question’s calibrated difficulty—not how fast they can do it. Therefore, it’s assumed a student has ample time to answer every question. Renaissance Learning has set time limits within Star such that this is almost always true. The extended time limit option is intended to serve the small percentage of students who need more time than usual to demonstrate their proficiency, thereby eliminating speed of response as a factor in the test performance. Students who do not need extra time will generally not benefit from extended time; giving select students extra time is simply a means of leveling the playing field. Extended time does not invalidate the Star results.

The scaled scores are interpretable the same way whether the extended time limits were used or not. However, it is important to note that the current Star norms are created using data from standard test administrations that exclude accommodations such as extended time and others. As such, the norm-referenced scores should be interpreted to fully represent performance under standardized conditions. As previously stated, extended time allows students to perform to their very best, which would approximate a standard test administration for the students that do not need the extra time and we expect the norm-referenced scores that results from extended time limits to be appropriate.

Can Star Reading assessments be read aloud to students?
No. The Star Reading assessment measures a student’s independent reading ability. Reading the Star Reading assessment to a student defeats the purpose of the assessment. If an IEP requires tests be read to students, then reading the Star Reading assessment aloud is a local decision. Keep in mind that reading the Star Reading assessment aloud will invalidate all results.

Can Star Math assessments be read aloud to students?
The primary purpose of providing a read aloud accommodation on mathematics tests is to level the playing field for students with significant reading difficulties. The goal is to obtain a fair and accurate assessment of students’ math skills and skill levels independent of deficits and difficulties in reading. It is intended that adding the audio to the items will not change the difficulty of the items but is done to lessen the reading burden.

There is considerable research to support the validity of allowing students with reading difficulty to have the math test read to them. The goal in providing an accommodation is one of “differential boost”: raising the performance of the students with reading difficulties while not impacting the performance of students who do not have reading difficulties. Several groups of investigators (Burch, 2002; Huynh, Meyer, & Gallant, 2004; Schulte, Elliott, & Kratochwill, 2000) have found that students with reading difficulties received differential item boost when they were permitted to take math tests using read aloud accommodations. The provision of the accommodation gave a better index of their math skills.

There are some nuances to the differential boost effect. Bolt and Ysseldyke (2006), Calhoun, Fuchs, and Hamlett (2000), and Lee and Tindal (2000) found that the read aloud accommodation allowed for better measurement on math tests. Other investigators (Bolt & Thurlow, 2007, Ketterlin-Geller, Yovanoff, & Tindal, 2007) found that the accommodation had a more positive impact on items that were difficult to read than on easy-to-read items. Based on research and meta-analyses of research conducted by Elbaum (2007) and Helwig, Rozek-Tedesco, & Tindal (2002) it is evident that the read aloud accommodation has a more positive impact on the performance of elementary age students than it does on middle school and secondary age students.

Is audio available for all items in Star Math?
All items in the Star Math item bank have audio support available. The following are examples of the types of audio support provided when the Star Math Audio preference is set:

- Audio support is available for items in which the question (or stem) involves reading or for items with difficult words. If a stem is a simple question, for example, 2+1 =, the audio will state, “Choose the best answer.”
- Labels and information in tables and graphics will not be read aloud. Text above or below a graphic or math expression that is part of the stem will have audio.
- Answer choices will be read if they contain text that would pose significant difficulty for struggling readers.
- For items that require labeling an object, the stem may not be read aloud. That’s because in some cases, use of the correct name gives students hearing the audio an advantage. For example, if a stem asks, “A (image of a dime) is the same as _______?”, the audio support would simply be, “Choose the best answer.”
Accommodations – Audio (Star Math English)

- **Audio & Auto-play:** The question and answers will be read out loud to the student; this will happen automatically when the question is first presented, and the student can choose to replay the audio if they wish.

Note: For Star Math English, the "Accommodations - Audio" preference setting overrides the Star Math Audio preference. If a student has the Star Math Audio preference enabled and then has any Accommodations preference(s) set, the "Accommodations - Audio" preference is automatically turned on and set to ‘Audio & Auto-play’ for that student (and can be changed to a different setting).

- **Audio with Auto-play turned off:** The question and answers can be read out loud to the student if and when they choose.
- **Audio Off:** There will be no audio provided for the question or the answers.

**Does using the Audio Support feature of Star Math affect the data?**

The general recommendation for Star Math is to allow the audio support feature for students who need it, based on professional judgment. The intent in providing an accommodation is one of “differential boost,” raising the performance of students with reading difficulties while not impacting the performance of students who do not have reading difficulties.

The primary purpose of providing a read-aloud accommodation on a math test is to level the playing field for students with reading difficulties. Research has found that students with reading difficulties received differential item boost when they were permitted to take math tests using read-aloud accommodations, and that the provision of the accommodation gave a better index of their math skills.

The scaled scores are interpretable the same way whether audio was used or not. However, it is important to note that the current Star norms are created using data from standard test administrations that exclude accommodations such as audio and others. As such, the norm-referenced scores should be interpreted to fully represent performance under standardized conditions. As previously stated, audio allows students to perform to their very best, which would approximate a standard test administration for the students that do not need the audio and we expect the norm-referenced scores that results from audio usage to be appropriate.

**Can students use calculators, manipulatives, or reference sheets on the Star assessment?**

No. For normative scores to be meaningful, students must take a test in the same way it was normed. During the Star Math norming study, students could use blank work paper and a pencil but not calculators, manipulatives, or reference materials when answering most of the items. Some advanced algebra and geometry items do include an on-screen calculator and/or a formula reference sheets. The difficulty of those items was calibrated with the use of these reference tools, which is why they are provided as part of the assessment.

**Can students with limited vision use Star?**

Students who are blind/visually impaired or have other special needs may find it difficult to take the standard Star assessments. By setting the accommodations preference, you can give those students access to assistive tools and technologies which can help them take the English versions of the Star Math Enterprise and Star Reading Enterprise assessments.

**What assistive tools and technologies are available in the English versions of Star Reading Enterprise and Star Math Enterprise?**

When any of these options are chosen, they will appear in a toolbar on the screen while the student is taking the test. The student can use the toolbar to select and use whichever tools you are making available:

- **Response Masking:** The student can eliminate answers shown on the screen.
- **Calculator:** The student can use an on-screen calculator.
- **Color Contrast:** The student can change the contrast levels of the text and images on the screen to improve visibility.
- **Font Size/Zoom:** The student can “zoom in” or magnify the text and images on the screen to improve visibility. To get to 400% zoom, the user must use their browser’s zoom capability.
• **Highlighter:** The student can choose from four virtual highlighter colors to highlight parts of the text in an item. The student must drag their mouse or use the trackpad over the text of the item or answer choice and then the Highlight option will appear.

• **Line Reader:** The student can drag a line reader on the screen which will visually isolate one or more lines of text.

**Assistive Technology**

• **Screen Reader:** The text on the screen can be read by screen-reading programs. Renaissance Learning uses and recommends the Jaws screen reader on Windows in Chrome.

• **Other:** These settings should be selected for students who use screen readers, speech-to-text (speech recognition), switch devices, other assistive technology, and those who use a keyboard without a mouse.

Can students with limited motor skills use Star?
The Star assessments work using the keyboard or mouse to input answers. 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 > Accessibility > Mouse & Trackpad > Enable Mouse Keys.

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 success with an adaptive strategy, we encourage you to contact Renaissance Learning™ so we can share your success with other users.

Are there accommodations for native Spanish-speaking English Learners?
Teachers can assess students, whose native language is Spanish, in both English and Spanish to help determine if there are gaps between what these students know in Spanish and what they can demonstrate in English. Star Reading and Star Math are available in Spanish for students in grades 1-8. Star Early Literacy Spanish is available for students in grades K-3. Using Star Assessments in English and Spanish provides educators with greater insight to help determine the best instruction to meet the needs of Spanish-speaking English Learners.

For students to take Star Assessments, products need to be assigned to the class. To do this, go to Courses & Classes> Course Name> Assign Products.

Can Star assessments be used as a dyslexia screening tool?
Many states use Renaissance Star Assessments as a universal screener for characteristics of dyslexia. Use Renaissance Star assessments including Star Early Literacy, Star Reading, and Star CBM to measure essential skills for identification of reading difficulties, including dyslexia. Learning data is the key to unlocking each student’s full potential.

You can view one of our webinars to see how an effective universal screening process can boost the power of your RTI/MTSS program. [https://www.renaissance.com/2017/11/02/blog-rising-to-literacy-challenges-with-effective-universal-screening/](https://www.renaissance.com/2017/11/02/blog-rising-to-literacy-challenges-with-effective-universal-screening/)

Are there accommodations for Star CBM and Star CBM Lectura?
Star CBM accommodations should be consistent with requirements for individual students you are assessing. In general, and when appropriate, to use Star CBM and Star CBM Lectura as designed, we recommend not varying either the content of individual forms/measures or the time limit for completing each measure (1 minute). However, changes in font size, highlighting, contrast, or other changes that do not vary the content and timing are possible and, based on student need, appropriate. [https://help2.renaissance.com/starcbm/AccessibilityAccommodations](https://help2.renaissance.com/starcbm/AccessibilityAccommodations)

Which reports will provide indicators of an accommodation was used?
The Star Diagnostic, Star Test Record, and Star Test Activity reports have an accessibility section to see which accommodations were given to the student for the given assessment.