# Reference Sheet Accommodation for Students

Georgian College endorses and adheres to the Ontario Human Rights Code and its supporting legislation. Accordingly, all students with disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodation.

* The student will provide his/her course instructor with documentation from Student Success Services substantiating the need for use of a reference sheet.
* The course instructor will keep the personal information (i.e. disability status) of the student strictly confidential.
* The student and / or the course instructor collaborate on the creation of the reference sheet(s).
* The student and course instructor may work with the Accessibility Advisor in order to clarify the approval process and /or to ensure a complete understanding of reference sheets as an accommodation, and the process for developing and using the sheets. The College’s Human Rights Consultant may also be involved as necessary.

This information sheet assists instructors in understanding and implementing the use of Reference sheets for specific memory impairments. Of course, a student’s Accessibility Advisor is available for discussion about these strategies and accommodations.

## What is the Instructor's process for approving Reference sheets?

1. The student will meet with the course instructor to develop sample cues from course material. (The student’s use of a Reference Sheet for a given test/exam requires a course instructor’s express approval of its specific contents.)
2. The student works on the Reference Sheet with their course instructor in advance of their test.
3. The course instructor reviews the Reference Sheet and either approves the sheet or advises the student to make certain revisions and resubmit the sheet.
4. The course instructor emails the approved Reference Sheet to the Test Centre to ensure the integrity of the exam.
5. Students must submit their Reference Sheets along with their completed exam.

## Support for Memory Impairments

Memory refers to a complex set of cognitive and neurological processes involved in the acquisition, storage, and recall of information. Specific memory impairments are characteristic of a variety of disabilities.

By the time students are accepted into college, most have developed a personal repertoire of memory strategies effective at the high school level. However, college presents substantial new memory challenges. In general, there is far more information, at a higher level of complexity and detail, to be learned. There tends to be a greater emphasis on test/exam performance, versus take-home assignments. And finally, there is typically a substantially greater proportion of grades dependant on far fewer tests/exams, compared to high school.

At the Georgian College, our goal is to increase the likelihood that the performance of students with specific memory impairments on tests/exams reflects what they have actually learned, rather than the impact of their disability, without compromising the integrity of the evaluation. Reference sheets are NOT cheat sheets, with facts and formulae copied down for the student to use during tests or exams. Rather, they provide mnemonic cues that the student has developed from the course material to assist in the recall of previously-learned information.

## Reference Sheets as an Academic Accommodation

Some students registered with Student Success Services have medical or psycho-educational assessments that document the need for a Reference Sheet to compensate for significant memory problems, such as sequencing, working memory or long-term memory retrieval.

Individuals have difficulty retrieving the information they have studied due to memory processing deficits. A Reference Sheet is a type of memory aid used to trigger the recall of that information; the purpose is not to provide the student with the answer but rather to provide the mechanism to retrieve what is already stored in their long-term memory.

## What is a Reference sheet?

Memory is a complex function involving a series of processes. For example, in order for someone to commit a piece of information to memory, the brain must first receive input through one or more senses, and then process this information by sorting, categorizing and recognizing associations with existing memories (or knowledge), before storing it for later recall. To use this information later, the brain must then locate the stored information, organize it. Prepare a response and then release the information (i.e., through speaking, writing, or an action); Learning strategies that use a multisensory approach through the use of colours, visual pictures, songs, rhythms and rhymes capitalize on students’ strengths. Typically, our brains are selective and tend to remember only information that forms a memorable pattern. Therefore, strategies which encourage the organization of information into clear patterns help students, specifically those with learning disabilities, some types of head injuries, and attention deficit disorder, to store and retrieve information which otherwise would get jumbled due to processing difficulties. Some students with learning or medical disabilities have difficulty accessing stored information and may require Reference sheets during exams to help them compensate for their retrieval impairment in the testing environment. What are Reference sheets?

* Reference sheets contain retrieval cues or mnemonic strategies that provide a systematic approach for organizing and remembering information. They do not provide the answers to questions but rather, they assist in the retrieval of information already learned.
* Retrieval cues can take many forms. They may be mind maps, rhymes, acronyms, abbreviations, acrostics, visual chains, and so on.

Without a full understanding of the material, a Reference sheet will not be of much use! Examples include:

* ACRONYMS Each letter in a word represents one item in a list: E.g. HOMES Five Great Lakes: Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior
* ACROSTICS The first letter of each word is used to create a new word to be used in a sentence: E.g. Very Active Cat (Three blood vessels – veins, arteries & capillaries)
* RHYMES can be used to remember facts: E.g. Every perfect person owns Two hundred six bones
* FORMULA CARDS Students demonstrate their knowledge of an application without penalizing them for deficits in memory In these examples, the actual Reference sheet would contain the following: HOMES, Very Active Cat, Every perfect person, and pre-approved formulae or vocabulary

## Essential Course Requirements

The term ‘essential requirements’ refers to “knowledge and skills that must be acquired or demonstrated in order for a student to successfully meet the learning objectives of the course” (Oakley, Parsons & Wideman, 2012).

If information on the Reference Sheet is determined to be an essential learning outcome, it should not be allowed. For example, if the learning objective of the course is to know a mathematical formula or to recall a key term, it should not be allowed on the Reference Sheet. However, if the learning objective is to demonstrate the ability to apply a formula, or explain the meaning of a key term/word, then it could be allowed on a Reference Sheet.

It is recognized that due to the nature of courses’ stated learning outcomes, the creation of a Reference Sheet will require significant communication and collaboration between the student and course instructor.

## What can be included on a Reference Sheet?

A Reference Sheet may or may not include the following: Acronyms Short phrases Mind maps Schematic diagrams Pictures Names Tables Charts Key terms/words Formulae Example questions

**References**

Oakley, B., Parsons, J. & Wideman, M. (2012). Identifying Essential requirements: A Guide for University Disability Service Professionals. Inter-University Disability Issues Association (IDIA).

University of Toronto St. George Campus Accessibility Services (2006). Memory Aid Sheet Policy.