

Ten Tips for Writing Instructionally Appropriate IEPs (IAIEPs)

The logo for the Tennessee Department of Education, featuring the letters "TN" in white on a red square background.

#1: Begin with general education.

- IEP teams should consider the least restrictive environment in general education first, for all students, regardless of disability, before considering more restrictive settings.
- Consider general education supports (e.g., supplementary aids and services) to ensure access to general education instruction and access to non-disabled peers.

#2: Plan to reach the postsecondary vision.

- The student's postsecondary goals and aspirations provide a focal point for discussions and team decisions.
- Plan with student outcomes in mind, regardless of the student's age.

#3: Provide equal opportunities in decision-making.

- All decisions regarding eligibility and placement must be made by the IEP team, not any one individual outside of the team.
- Ensure the student and parents are afforded the opportunity for meaningful participation in each IEP team decision.
- Avoid (or explain) education-specific jargon throughout the process.

#4: Don't get ahead of the process.

- Follow the IEP process from "where are we" to "where are we going" to "how we are going to get there".
- No one team member should predetermine decisions; all decisions should be made with and by the full IEP team.

#5: Consider all proposals

- Ensure the team considers all proposals brought by any team member.
- The team may decide to gather more information in order to make a decision about a proposal.
- Document proposals and decisions on the prior written notice.

#6: Build a strong foundation.

- A strong foundation built on knowledge of the student allows the team to make individualized, student-focused decisions.
- Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEPs) and narratives provide the foundation for generating goals, supports, accommodations, and services that are designed to meet the student's individual needs.

#7: Keep the "I" in "IEP."

- All decisions regarding the student's needs must be individualized (i.e., not based on eligibility, age, scheduling, staffing, or assessment decision).
- Avoid blanket statements like, "We don't do ____" or "All students with IEPs..."

#8: Focus on leveling the playing field.

- Select accommodations that support the student's current needs for access and participation so the student can accurately reflect their current level of knowledge and mastery.
- Modifications are restrictive by nature and should be a last resort.
- Ensure the least restrictive environment for the student to receive the most intensive, specialized instruction.

#9: Respond to the data.

- If it's not working, change it.
- Don't collect data for the sake of collecting data.
- Use data to make decisions regarding goals, services, and supports.

#10: Collaborate to implement the plan.

- Correa et al. (2016) define collaboration as "a mutual effort to plan, implement, and evaluate the educational program for a given student."
- School teams must implement the written plan for each student throughout the school day and reconvene the IEP team to propose changes.