

Structuring Reasonable Accommodations After Disabling Injury or Illness

An employee returned to work after a disabling injury and conferred with an HR person about accommodations he needed to perform the essential functions of his job. The HR person weighed those stated needs for reasonability. The WRQ offers a procedure for identifying job elements around which accommodations need to be structured. This is a case example.

A software engineer's job was consistent with that of [Programmer, Scientific and Engineering](#). He sustained injuries that included a collapsed lung, and required shoulder replacement with an open reduction and internal fixation of his non-dominant forearm. When he returned to work he reported to Human Resources with a medical release that called only for "light duty."

To get detailed job information that was needed to structure reasonable accommodations, the HR representative printed two copies of [PAQ ratings on his job](#). She kept a copy for her own reference and gave the other to him. They scanned the [item definitions](#) and PAQ ratings for non-zero ratings on job elements on which performance would likely be decreased because of the worker's limitations. Item ratings that are much greater than zero are important to the job. Items with ratings of zero or near zero bear little or no relevance to the job. The HR person and the worker identified needs for reasonable accommodation on the following non-zero items:

- # 47Finger movement (his typing speed was slower than normal and he had less endurance)
- #48 Hand-arm movement (he had to lift his left hand up to the keyboard with his right hand, but once it was in position he could type with limitations noted above. Also, he had to think through using his non-dominant arm to actuate the turn indicators on his car)
- #49 Hand-arm steadiness (he reported some weakness or limitation in his non-dominant hand and arm)
- #94 Drawing or drafting tools (he could not hold templates steady with his non-dominant hand and arm)

- # 121 Traveling (by air because of his collapsed lung. His surgeon would indicate when air travel would be appropriate. No highway driving was permissible, but local driving was okay; recently, he had become able to ride as a passenger up to 50 miles round trip without fatiguing)
- #126 Set work pace (he was able to work 4 hours/day with rest breaks as needed)
- #150 Physical effort (required in carrying books and technical manuals, laptop computer, etc.)
Reasonable accommodation for Item #150 could be the provision of a small shopping cart and assistance transferring materials across security turnstiles in his workplace.

In this case, full medical recovery was anticipated, so these accommodations were not mandated by ADA, although they made sense for both the worker and the organization. If ADA had been relevant, the process for structuring reasonable accommodations would have been the same.

In this example, the individual did not need a job change, so he returned to his usual job with temporary accommodations. If he had needed a new occupation, the WRQ could have [generated a list of jobs](#) of which some might have been appropriate within the organization, depending on its size and breadth of functions, or elsewhere in the labor market.