

Assistive Technology VS Adaptive Equipment

Aspect	Assistive Technology (AT)	Adaptive Equipment
Definition	<p>According to the Assistive Technology Act, an AT device is “any item, piece of equipment, or product system ... whether acquired commercially, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.”</p> <p>Also includes services such as evaluation, training, repair.</p>	<p>A more specific subset of AT. Often refers to devices specifically designed for people with disabilities (rather than adapted from mainstream tools).</p> <p>Some organizations define adaptive equipment as tools to assist with activities of daily living (ADLs): dressing, eating, bathing, toileting, mobility, etc.</p>
Relationship	<p>Umbrella term – includes adaptive technology, rehabilitative technology, and more.</p>	<p>Subset of AT. Not all AT is adaptive, but all adaptive equipment is generally considered AT.</p>
Typical Use / Purpose	<p>To improve or maintain functional capabilities – mobility, communication, cognition, environmental control, etc.</p> <p>In education, AT can ensure access (e.g., screen readers, alternative input)</p>	<p>More strongly focused on self-care and independence in daily living: feeding, grooming, dressing, mobility around the home, etc.</p> <p>Also can include customized or adapted versions of existing tools (like modified utensils).</p>
Technology Complexity	<p>Wide range: “no-tech” (e.g., pencil grips), “low-tech” (e.g., adapted utensils), “mid-tech”, up to “high-tech” (e.g., speech-generating devices, eye-gaze trackers)</p>	<p>Also spans low- to high-tech, but many adaptive equipment items are more “device-based” (e.g., specialized seating, adaptive forks, bathing aids)</p>
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wheelchairs (manual or powered) • Eye-gaze tracking for computer access • Screen readers, speech-to-text software • Environmental control systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dressing aids (e.g., button hooks) • Feeding utensils (e.g., built-up handles) • Bathing equipment (e.g., grab bars, transfer benches) • Mobility ADL supports (e.g., walkers)
Design Origin	<p>Can include mainstream technologies adapted for disability use (commercial, off-the-shelf, modified)</p>	<p>Often custom-made or specifically tailored for people with disabilities (though not always)</p>
Regulatory / Policy Context	<p>Recognized in U.S. law (Assistive Technology Act) – includes both devices and services.</p>	<p>Frequently covered by medical equipment policies and durable medical equipment (DME) programs, especially when used for ADLs. (Note: policies vary widely by region)</p>