

The Dangers of Copy/Paste IEPs...and How to Avoid Them

Purpose & Overview

Copying and pasting from one IEP to another may feel like a shortcut, but it can result in serious compliance issues, inaccurate information, and poorly individualized plans. Families notice, advocates notice, and due process hearing officers notice.

A “copy/paste” IEP undermines trust, reduces accountability, and, most importantly, fails to meet the student’s unique needs.

This worksheet helps educators identify signs of copy/paste errors, understand the risks, and apply practical strategies to write authentic, individualized IEPs.

Why Copy/Paste IEPs Are a Problem

- **Compliance risks:** Incorrect names, pronouns, or data can invalidate an IEP.
 - **Equity concerns:** Students may receive cookie-cutter goals that don’t match their needs.
 - **Instructional confusion:** Staff can’t implement vague or inaccurate goals effectively.
 - **Loss of family trust:** Parents quickly recognize when an IEP is recycled.
 - **Legal vulnerability:** Copy/paste errors are frequently cited in complaints, mediations, and hearings.
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Red Flags That an IEP May Be Copy/Paste

Section	Red Flag	Example
PLAAFP	Generic or vague language	“Student is making progress in math.” (no data)
Goals	Same wording across multiple students	“Student will improve reading comprehension with 80% accuracy.”
Accommodations	Overly broad lists	Every IEP lists “preferential seating” regardless of need.
Progress Notes	Data doesn’t match narrative	Goal shows “80% mastery,” but no evidence in data.
Names/Pronouns	Wrong student info	“He” in an IEP for a female student.

Best Practices to Avoid Copy/Paste Errors

1. **Use Templates Wisely:** Templates should serve as scaffolds, not replacements for individualized language.
2. **Anchor Everything in Data:** Each PLAAFP and goal should reference specific baseline data.
3. **Personalize Strengths and Interests:** Include details unique to the student (e.g., favorite subjects, motivators).

4. **Quality Check Before Finalizing:** Review for names, pronouns, and consistency across sections.
 5. **Collaborate with the Team:** Invite input from general educators, related service providers, and families.
 6. **Use Goal Banks Correctly:** Adapt examples to student needs rather than pasting them word-for-word.
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Sample Individualized vs. Copy/Paste ('Template') Goals

Copy/Paste Goal:

"Student will improve written expression with 80% accuracy."

Individualized Goal with Baseline:

"From a baseline of writing incomplete sentences in 2 of 5 opportunities, Student will write a 5-sentence paragraph with a topic sentence, supporting details, and a conclusion in 4 of 5 opportunities, measured by writing samples across three consecutive weeks."

Benchmarks:

- Write simple sentences with correct capitalization and punctuation in 4 of 5 opportunities.
 - Combine two simple sentences into one compound sentence in 3 of 5 opportunities.
 - Use a graphic organizer to draft a 5-sentence paragraph in 4 of 5 opportunities.
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Quality Assurance Checklist

Before finalizing, ask:

- *Does each PLAAFP contain specific, current data tied to the student?*
- *Are goals aligned with that data and written in measurable terms?*

- *Do accommodations directly support access needs documented in Present Levels?*
 - *Are strengths, interests, and preferences individualized, not generic?*
 - *Have I checked for correct student name, pronouns, and details throughout?*
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Common Pitfalls & How to Avoid Them

Pitfall	Better Practice
Using goal banks as “copy/paste”	Adapt goals with baseline data and benchmarks.
Generic PLAAFPs	Always reference multiple data sources (benchmarks, observations, evaluations).
Laundry-list accommodations	Only include what’s tied to student need.
Last-minute editing	Schedule peer review or a second set of eyes.

Action Starter: Try Tomorrow

- Select one student’s IEP and highlight any phrases that could apply to *any* student.
- Revise at least one section (PLAAFP, goal, or accommodation) to add student-specific data or interests.
- Share with a colleague and ask if they can clearly tell this IEP belongs to *your* student.

