Accessibility and Disability Service

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A Guide to Services for Students with a

Learning Disability

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Do I Have A Learning Disability?

A person with a Learning Disability has difficulty taking in, remembering, or expressing information. The learning process is impaired resulting in problems acquiring and/or using listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities.

Most individuals who experience difficulties with learning during their earlier educational years would typically be identified through noted deficits in academic achievement. The following is a brief description of types of academic learning disabilities.

- **Dyslexia**, perhaps the most commonly known, is primarily used to describe difficulty with processing the code for language and the impact on reading, writing, and spelling.
- **Dysgraphia** involves difficulty with writing. Problems might be seen in the actual motor patterns used in writing. Also characteristic are difficulties with spelling and the formulation of written composition.
- **Dyscalculia** involves difficulty with math skills and impacts math computation. Memory of math facts, concepts of time, money, and musical concepts can also be impacted.
- **Disorder of Written Expression** a type of learning disability in which a person's writing ability falls substantially below normally expected range based on the individual's age, educational background, and measured intelligence.
- **Expressive Language Disorder** a communication disorder in which there are difficulties with verbal and written expression.

For adults, additional challenges to academic success might stem from problems with information processing. Our senses constantly provide us with information. Managing all of the information received, and using it effectively to complete a task at hand is called "information processing." Understanding the impact on academic performance may help identify the source of current difficulties.

Information Processing Skills & Associated Difficulties

Visual Discrimination
The ability to use the sense of sight to notice and compare the features of different items to distinguish one item from another.

Individuals with problems in this area may find it difficult to:

- Notice the small differences between some letters and numbers. They may confuse the printed letters b, p, g, and q (or the numbers 6 and 9) because these printed characters have many features in common.

Visual Closure

The ability to know what an object is when only parts of it are visible. Individuals with problems in this area may find it difficult to:

- Recognize a picture of a familiar object that is missing some parts.
- Identify a word when a letter is missing.

Visual Figure-Ground Discrimination

The ability to separate a shape or printed character from its background. Individuals with problems in this area may find it difficult to:

- Find the specific bit of information they need from a printed page (or computer screen) filled with words and numbers.

Visual Memory

There are two kinds of visual memory. Long-term visual memory is the ability to recall something seen a long time ago. Short-term visual memory is the ability to remember something seen very recently. Visual memory often depends upon the nature of the information being processed. For example, most people find it easier to remember what an object looked like four weeks ago if the object is associated with a special event. Individuals with problems in this area may find it difficult to:

- Remember the spelling of a familiar but irregularly spelled word.
- Use a calculator, typewriter or computer keyboard with speed and accuracy.

Visual Motor Processing

Visual motor processing is the kind of thinking needed to use feedback from the eyes to coordinate the movement of other parts of your body. For example, your eyes and hands need to work together to write with a pen or pencil. Individuals with problems in this area may find it difficult to:

- Write neatly or stay within the margins or on the lines of a page.
- Use scissors or sew.
- Move around without bumping into things.
- Place objects on surfaces so that they are not in danger of falling off.

Spatial Relationships

Spatial relationships describe how objects are positioned in the space around us. We use our ability to recognize and understand spatial relationships as we interact with our surroundings and also when we look at objects (characters or pictures) printed on paper.
The ability to recognize and understand spatial relationships helps us know whether objects are near to us or far away, on our left or right, or over or under other objects. Individuals with problems in this area may find it difficult to:

- Find their way from one place to another, even in familiar surroundings.
- Write intelligibly. They may place letters, words and numbers too close together or too far apart.

Auditory Memory
Like visual memory, there are two kinds of auditory memory. Long-term auditory memory is the ability to recall something heard long ago. Short-term auditory memory is the ability to remember something heard very recently. Individuals with problems in this area may find it difficult to:

- Remember people's names
- Memorize and recall telephone numbers
- Follow multi-step spoken directions

Auditory Figure-Ground Discrimination
Auditory figure-ground discrimination is the ability to pick out important sounds from a noisy background. Some disorders of attention are associated with auditory figure-ground discrimination difficulties. Individuals with problems in this area may find it difficult to:

- Separate meaningful sounds from background noise. For example, you may not be able to easily pick out the words spoken by a teacher standing at the front of the classroom from the sounds made in the next room or the traffic outside.
- Stay focused on the auditory information that is needed to successfully complete the task at hand.

Auditory Discrimination
The ability to notice, compare and distinguish the distinct and separate sounds in words. In order to read efficiently, we have to be able to isolate sounds (distinguish one sound from another), especially those sounds that match letters in the alphabet. Most of us make mistakes from time to time because we fail to isolate sounds correctly. For example, "turn left down the hall" may be mistakenly heard as "turn left at the wall". Individuals with problems in this area may find it difficult to:

- Understand spoken language, follow directions, and remember details.
- Learn to read.

So I Have a Learning Disability... Now What?

If you are interested in requesting accommodations for a Learning Disability through the Accessibility and Disability Service you must have documentation that fulfills the criteria set forth on the following page. You should schedule a registration appointment with the counselor who works with students with Learning Disabilities at ADS. Be prepared to spend at least 45 minutes to an hour in that session during which time a discussion about how your learning disability may affect your academic performance will take place. The reasonable and appropriate accommodations for which you are eligible will then be determined and information regarding implementation procedures will be explained.

The most frequently requested accommodation is extended time on exams. ADS provides testing services as well as other accommodations such as note taking support, or other supports that are recommended in your documentation. Information about all of these supports will be provided at your initial meeting. Once your accommodations letter has been completed you will receive validated copies of the letter to share with your professors. The original of the letter will be placed on file at ADS for future use in subsequent semesters. You must obtain newly validated letters from the ADS office each semester in which you plan to request accommodations. Students with Learning Disabilities may also be eligible for priority registration allowing them to schedule sufficient time between classes and/or to schedule classes during times most optimal for learning.

During your registration meeting, referrals for other academic support services available through the University may be discussed with you. Assistance may be sought through campus departmental resources and programs such as the Learning Assistance Service (LAS) or OMSE, the Office for Multi-Ethnic Student Education. In addition, the University Career Center offers advice and guidelines for success in your chosen career. Your counselor will provide you with contact information for resources that are most appropriate for you.

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Disability Verification for Students with Learning Disabilities

Students wishing to explore the possibility of a diagnosis of ADHD which is impacting their academic performance, and who have never been evaluated for the disorder should pursue comprehensive testing to provide adequate documentation to be reviewed by the ADS. The following is a detailed description of the recommended assessments and final report.

I. Documentation: Each student has the responsibility to secure appropriate documentation and present a copy to the Accessibility and Disability Service. ADS adheres to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.

* LD evaluation must be relevant and appropriate given the understanding that the impact of some learning abilities, based on compensatory measures developed, etc., may change over time. It is in the individual's best interest to submit evaluations that were completed within the last **5** years of registration with ADS.

* The report of the comprehensive evaluation (**Psychoeducational** or **Neuropsychological evaluation**) should reflect the incorporation of a diagnostic interview, assessment of aptitude, academic achievement and information processing, clinical interpretation and diagnoses.

If the documentation acquired does not adequately address the student's current functional impairment(s) or explain how the condition limits a major life activity(s), additional information will be required.

Individual Education Program (IEP) and Prior Academic Adjustments in Secondary Settings

The transition from secondary schools to post-secondary institutions is quite demanding, in that, the student's responsibilities change as well as laws related to providing services to students with disabilities are different. An older psychoeducational or neuropsychological evaluation, or current Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 Plan may be submitted to be reviewed by the ADS to support a justification to provide academic accommodations, auxiliary aids, and/or services in the post-secondary setting. Such documentation should: 1) be relevant, 2) specifically state the student's disability, 3) reflect the student's test scores, 4) state the impact of the disability on academics, 5) include the rationale for all proposed accommodations, and 6) be completed by a licensed authorized practitioner.

II. Diagnostic Interview
A psychoeducational or neuropsychological evaluation report should include the summary of a comprehensive diagnostic interview. Learning disabilities are commonly manifested during childhood, but are not always formally diagnosed. Relevant information regarding the student's academic history and learning processes in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education should be investigated. The diagnostic interview may include: a description of the problem(s) being

presented; developmental, medical, psychological, and employment histories; family history (including primary language of the home and the student's current level of English fluency); and a discussion of dual diagnoses where indicated.

III. Diagnostician

The diagnosis of a learning disability should be made by a professional such as an educational psychologist, neurologist, or a combination of such professionals who have expertise in diagnosing learning disabilities in adults. In addition, it is important that the diagnostician be able to screen for learning disabilities or other co-existing condition.

IV. Assessment

The evaluation for the diagnosis of a specific learning disability must provide clear and specific evidence that a learning disability does or does not exist. The assessment, and any resulting diagnoses, should be based on a comprehensive evaluation that does not rely on any one test or subtest. Evidence of a substantial limitation to learning must be provided. The domains to be addressed must include the following:

    a. **Aptitude**: A complete intellectual assessment with all subtests and standard scores reported.

    b. **Academic achievement**: A comprehensive academic achievement battery is essential with all subtests and standard scores reported for those subtests administered. The battery should include current levels of academic functioning in relevant areas such as reading (decoding and comprehension), mathematics, and oral and written language.

    c. **Information processing**: Specific areas of information processing (e.g., short and long-term memory, sequential memory, auditory and visual perception/processing, processing speed, executive functioning and motor ability) should be assessed.

V. Test Scores

Standard scores and percentiles should be provided for all normed measures. The data should logically reflect a substantial limitation to learning for which the student is requesting accommodation. The test findings should document both the nature and severity of the learning disability. The particular profile of the student's strengths and weaknesses must be shown to relate to functional limitations that may necessitate accommodations. The tests should be reliable, valid, and standardized for the use with an adolescent/adult population.

VI. Specific Diagnosis

It is important to rule out alternative explanations for problems in learning such as emotional, attention-oriented, or motivational problems that may be interfering with learning, but do not constitute a learning disability. The diagnostician is encouraged to use direct language in the diagnosis and documentation of a learning disability, for example DSM terminology. If the data indicates that a learning disability is not present, then the evaluator should state that conclusion in the report.

VII. Clinical Summary

A well-written diagnostic summary based on the comprehensive evaluation process is a necessary component of the report. The clinical summary should include:

    a. Demonstration of the evaluator's having ruled out alternative explanations for academic problems.

b. Indication of how patterns in the student's cognitive ability, achievement, and information processing reflect the presence of a learning disability.

c. Assessment of the substantial limitation to learning or other major life activity presented by the learning disability and the degree to which it impacts the individual in the learning context for which accommodations are being requested.

d. A list of recommended accommodations and justification as to why specific accommodations are needed and how they address the academic needs associated with the specific disability.

SUGGESTIONS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

1. Take advantage of the accommodations and support services offered by this office, Accessibility and Disability Service, Shoemaker Building, 301.314.7682.

2. Become knowledgeable and comfortable with describing your disability so you can advocate for yourself with professors. Be sure to inform your professors of your needs early in the semester so they can accommodate you appropriately. An accommodations authorization sheet (stamped during the current semester) from ADS is required to make this request.

3. Inform your academic advisor that you have a learning disability. Your advisor is in a better position to help you if he or she is aware that you have special needs. You should plan a carefully balance load so that you aren't overloaded with courses requiring heavy reading, large quantities of memorization and/or extensive writing. Your schedule should also consider any needs for extended exam time.

4. Keep one calendar with all relevant dates, assignments, and appointments. Do not try to keep a schedule in your head. Help with organization skills is available from the Learning Assistance Service 301-314-7693.

5. Establish a set time and place to study. Estimate ahead of time how long a given class assignment will take. Generally plan on two hours of study time outside of class for every hour of class. Build in study breaks; fatigue is a big time waster.

6. Sit toward the front of the classroom. This will minimize distractions and help you focus on the instructor.

7. If you have questions about course material or trouble structuring an assignment, do not hesitate to talk to your professors, preferably during their scheduled office hours. It is important that you seek help as soon as you need it so you don't fall behind. Individual department tutorial services may also be available.

8. If you don't understand, ask for rephrasing rather than repetition and for examples or applications.

9. Participate in class discussions. This will get you involved, and if your professor gives extra credit for participation, it can bring up your grade if you have trouble with tests.

10. Attend all review sessions that are offered by your professors. If you learn well by studying with others, join or start a study group to discuss and review material for your courses. You can share notes, ask each other questions, and work out problems as a group.

11. Index cards are good aids for memorization of terms and facts. Use them like flash cards, writing the key word on the front of the card and the definition or fact on the back. After you've learned them, return to them later to review for tests. Other helpful study strategies are available at the Learning Assistance Service (301.314.7693).

12. Make an appointment to talk with someone in the Counseling Service (301-314-7651) if you are experiencing emotional difficulties. Emotions such as anxiety and depression can interfere with your academic success.

Learning Disability Services

ADS **Accessibility and Disability Service**	COUNSELING SERVICE
Test Accommodations	Adjustment Difficulties
Note Taking Services	Interpersonal Problems
Priority Registration	Career Guidance
Technological Assistance	Individual Sessions
Recorded Books and Materials	Special Groups
ADS **0106 Shoemaker** **301.314.7682**	**Counseling Center** **Shoemaker (1st floor)** **301. 314.7651**