

Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities are neurological-based conditions that interfere with the acquisition, storage, organization, and use of skills and knowledge. They are identified by deficits in academic functioning and in processing memory, auditory, visual and linguistic information.

The diagnosis of a learning disability in an adult requires documentation of at least average intellectual functioning along with a deficit in one or more of the following areas:

- Auditory processing
- Visual processing
- Information processing speed
- Abstract and general reasoning
- Memory (long-term, short-term, visual, auditory)
- Spoken and written language skills
- Reading, decoding and comprehension skills
- Mathematical calculation skills and word problems
- Visual spatial skills
- Fine and gross motor skills
- Executive functioning (planning and time management)

Some Considerations

- A learning disability is not a disorder that a student outgrows. It is a permanent disorder affecting how students with normal or above-average intelligence process incoming information, outgoing information, and/or categorization of information in memory.
- Learning disabilities are often inconsistently manifested in a limited number of specific academic areas, such as math or foreign languages. There may have been problems in grade school, none in high school and problems again in college.
- Learning disabilities should not be equated with psychiatric or intellectual disabilities, although learning disabilities can coexist with other conditions such as ADHA or a psychiatric disability.

- Common accommodations for students with learning disabilities include alternative print formats, taped lectures, peer note takers, extended time on exams and consultations regarding study skills and strategies.

Instructional Strategies

- Include a disability access statement in the course syllabus such as: “To obtain disability related accommodations and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact Access Services as soon as possible by calling (507) 457-1465.”
- Keep instructions as brief and uncomplicated as possible. Repeat exactly without paraphrasing.
- Assist the student in finding effective peer note takers from the class.
- Allow the student to tape record lectures.
- Clearly define course requirements, the dates of exams and when assignments are due. Provide advance notice of any changes.
- Present lecture information in both an auditory and visual format (e.g. chalkboard, overheads, PowerPoint slides, handouts, etc.)
- Use more than one way to demonstrate or explain information.
- Have copies of the syllabus ready no less than six weeks prior to the beginning of the semester so textbooks can be converted to auditory format in a timely manner.
- When teaching, state objectives, review previous lessons and summarize periodically.
- Allow time for clarification of directions and essential information.
- Provide study guides or review sheets for exams.
- Provide alternative ways for the students to do tasks (e.g. substituting oral for written work).
- Provide assistance with proofreading written work.
- Stress organization and ideas rather than mechanics when grading in-class writing assignments.

- Allow the use of spell-check and grammar assistive devices when appropriate to the course.
- When in doubt about how to assist the student, ask him or her as privately as possible without drawing attention to the student or the disability.