

LEARNING DISABILITIES (LD)

Learning disabilities (LD) affect the manner in which individuals with average or above intelligence take in, process, retain, and/or express information. A learning disability is NOT to be confused with generalized low ability. Learning disabilities are invisible, but may affect a student's performance in reading, writing, spoken language, mathematics, orientation in space and time, and/or organization. The areas of difficulty will vary from one LD student to the next.

The one factor that all LD students have in common is the discrepancy between their apparent ability and their actual achievement in specific areas. The variation in the LD student's performance can be striking, as with a student who excels in class discussion but fails tests due to poor reading ability, or a student who reads and writes well but cannot grasp mathematical concepts.

LD students have difficulty processing information, despite adequate hearing and vision. Therefore, it is important that they receive and transmit information in a modality that works for them. The more channels you tap into in your teaching--visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile--the greater the opportunity for student learning. LD students consistently report that they learn best in classes in which instructors write down key terms as they lecture and give students opportunities for hands-on activities.

Notetaking can be very difficult for some LD students because it requires the integration of so many processes: listening carefully, remembering what you heard, sorting through it to determine what is important, writing rapidly, and remembering how to spell the words you want to write. You can help by providing outlines, emphasizing important ideas, presenting terminology in written as well as spoken form, allowing students to use tape recorders or lap-top computers, and encouraging students to share notes.

Many LD students have difficulty with reading. You can help them by previewing the main ideas and key vocabulary in that night's reading assignment at the close of each class. Also, please make reading assignments well in advance to allow for students' slow reading rate. The poor reader will also require extra time to complete examinations.

You can also help LD students by making all assignments, exams, etc., concise and clearly typed. Make sure that there is adequate space between words and lines so that different sections are clearly separated.

Some LD students have major problems with spelling, not the occasional misspelled word we all experience, but difficulty remembering the spelling of many words, even short ones. When writing, these students often limit themselves to the words they can spell with confidence, with the unfortunate consequence that the level of ideas they can express is limited by the level of words they can spell. Encourage the use of word processors for assignments and exams. (The campus computer lab is available for assignments, and DSS can make arrangements for exams.) Hand-held electronic spelling

devices are useful for in-class writing assignments. Be aware that deducting total credit on tests for answers that are correct, but misspelled, will put some LD students at a disadvantage.

Encourage students to take advantage of library orientations and workshops at the Counseling/Career Development Center to improve their study skills.

Considerations when advising LD students: Consider limiting course load to 12 units and avoid 3-hour classes.

A learning disabled person may exhibit several or many of the following behaviors:

1. Demonstrates marked difficulty in reading, writing, spelling, and/or using numerical concepts in contrast with average to superior skills in other areas.
2. Has poorly formed handwriting. A student may print instead of using script; write with inconsistent slant; have difficulty with certain letters; space words unevenly.
3. Has trouble listening to a lecture and taking notes at the same time.
4. Is easily distracted by background noise or visual stimulation; unable to pay attention; may appear to be hurried and anxious in one-to-one meetings.
5. Has trouble understanding or following directions; is easily overwhelmed by a multiplicity of directions or over-stimulation; may not understand information the first time.
6. Confuses similar letters such as "b" and "d", or "p" and "q"; confuses the order of letters in words repeating "was" for "saw" "teh" for "the"; may misspell the same word several different ways in the same composition.
7. Omits or adds words, particularly when reading aloud.
8. Confuses similar numbers, such as 3 and 8, or 6 and 9, or changes the sequence of numbers such as 14 and 41; has difficulty copying numbers accurately and working with numbers in columns.
9. Exhibits an inability to stick to simple schedules; repeatedly forgets things; loses or leaves possessions; and generally seems "personally disorganized."
10. Appears clumsy or poorly coordinated.
11. Seems disorganized in space: confuses up and down, right and left; gets lost in buildings; is disoriented when a familiar environment is rearranged.
12. Seems disoriented in time, i.e. is often late to class, unusually early for appointments, or unable to finish assignments in the standard time period.

13. Displays excessive anxiety, anger, or depression because of the inability to cope with school or social situations.
14. Misinterprets subtleties in language, tone of voice, or social situations.

(Note: This checklist was developed by Linda Donnels and Karen Franklin at George Washington University.)