

OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES
INFO PAGE

SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES

Learning disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by *significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities*. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, *presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction*, and may occur across the life span. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not by themselves constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with o/ther handicapping conditions (for example, sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance) or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction), they are not the result of those conditions or influences. (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1988. *Collective perspectives on issues affecting learning disabilities: Position papers and statements*. Austin, TX. PRO-ED.)

A **learning disability** is a lifelong disorder that affects the manner in which individuals with *normal or above average intelligence select, retain, and express information*. Incoming or outgoing information may become scrambled as it travels between the senses and the brain.

In adults, learning disabilities are commonly recognized as *deficits* in one or more of the following academic areas:

- comprehension
- spelling
- written expression
- problem solving
- math computation /

Less frequent, but no less troublesome, are problems in organizational skill, time management, and social skills. Many adults with learning disabilities may also have language based and/or perceptual processing problems. (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 1988)

Diagnostic testing to determine the presence of a *specific learning disability* includes an IQ test, an achievement test battery, and other tests which screen for memory impairment and/or other processing deficits. A discrepancy of 1.5-2.0 standard deviations must exist between the student's IQ score (potential) and achievement test scores in order to receive a diagnosis of specific learning disability.

Some specific learning disabilities are the following, which may occur alone or in combination:

- Auditory processing disability
- Visual processing disability
- Reading disability (including dyslexia)
- Written expressive language disability (including dysgraphia)
- Oral expressive language disability
- Math disability
- Psychological disabilities (including memory, reasoning, and higher order cognition deficits)
- Social/emotional disabilities (deficits in interpersonal skills and self-concept).

The student with learning disabilities may require a variety of services, including the following: tutorial services, special academic advisement, basic skill remediation, assistance in organization and development of adequate study skills, and additional program accommodation or modification. Some students with learning disabilities **may not** require extensive use of personnel, extra funds, or assistance from professors, **but may** need appropriate program modifications and use of auxiliary aids. These include readers, scribes, note takers, extended time policies for assigned papers, projects, or tests, and taped books or lectures.

However it must be noted that these services are designed to **equalize** opportunities, not to lower the academic standards for these students or to alter the essential nature of the degree requirements. There are, however, instances where a student is unable to master a particular course because of his disability. In those cases, course substitutions may be in order if the course in question is not essential to the degree program or related to a licensing requirement. (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 1998)

For more information: <http://www.ldanatl.org>