



Learning Disabilities

Implications of Learning Disabilities in the Postsecondary Education Setting

Learning disabilities result from neurological differences that may alter an individual's ability to store, process, retrieve, or produce information. Some people with learning disabilities may have difficulty in only one of these areas; others may have difficulty in more than one. These difficulties may impact the following tasks:

- Reading
- Auditory processing
- Visual processing
- Writing
- Speaking
- Retrieving information from short-term memory
- Performing mathematical calculations

Students with learning disabilities by definition have average or better than average intelligence. These students often accommodate their disability by determining the ways they process and/or express information the best and focusing on those. A person with dyslexia—a type of learning disability that affects reading—for example, may prefer to get books and lectures on tape as an accommodation.

Tips for Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities

Initial Preparations for the Semester

- **Prepare the course syllabus, assignment list, and reading list early so they are available, should they be requested before the class begins.** These materials may need to be read onto audiotape or the student may need additional preparation time.
- **Provide examples of good projects or research papers from previous years when making such assignments.** Most students will be honored to give you consent to use their assignments as successful models for fellow students.
- **Provide study questions or practice exams that familiarize students with the format and the content of the test.** Provide an example of a good response and explain why it is acceptable.
- **Allow time for an early draft of a paper or project to be turned in for feedback.**
- **Use multiple formats, such as visual aids, three-dimensional models, charts or graphics, when presenting information.**

- **Allow students with learning disabilities to demonstrate understanding of course material using approved accommodations.** These may include extended time for taking a test, oral exams, taped exams, or a reduced-distraction environment for testing.
- **When ordering textbooks, ask the publisher about the availability of an electronic version.** When possible, choose a text from a publisher that provides digital formats.

Considerations for Instruction During the Semester

- **Allow students to record lectures on tape.** Laws that entitle people with disabilities to equal access entitle students to tape record lectures. If you are concerned about copyrighted materials or materials that you plan to publish in the future, you may wish to have the student sign an agreement not to release the recording or to erase it at the end of the semester.
- **Be aware that some students may choose to use note-taking devices that make some noise, such as a laptop computer.** Seating arrangements can be discussed to minimize the impact of the sound of these devices on other students.
- **Your academic standards or course content should not be modified.** You may need to modify the presentation of the materials and the form of student evaluation, but hold all students to the same standards of competencies. This ensures that all students receive the same quality of education.
- **Allow students the option to use a note taker during class and/or provide copies of your own notes if you wish.** Consider using overheads instead of chalkboards (to avoid erasing important terms, outlines, and concepts) and provide students with copies of the overheads to look at during and after class.

Guidelines for Preparing and Administering Exams

In order to be certain that testing procedures provide equal access without giving the student an advantage over other students, disability service providers on college and university campuses develop guidelines for providing testing accommodations. Consult with your disability services office or administration to help determine which modifications are appropriate for a particular student.

- **Discuss plans for modifying testing procedures prior to the first exam.** Appropriate accommodations may include extended time, use of adaptive equipment, and a reduced-distraction location for taking the test.
- **Remember that the use of adaptive equipment or an alternate format such as audiotape, large print, or a scribe takes extra time.** Be prepared to provide up to double the time allowed other students to complete the test.
- **Recognize that it may take time to get the information transferred into the appropriate format for testing.**