

Student Disability Services

Recommendations for Accommodations— It is important to recognize that accommodation needs can change over time and are not always identified through the initial diagnostic process. Conversely, a prior history of accommodation does not, in and of itself, warrant the provision of a similar accommodation. The diagnostic report should include specific recommendations for accommodations as well as an explanation as to why each accommodation is recommended. The evaluators should describe the impact the diagnosed learning disability has on a specific major life activity as well as the degree of significance of this impact on the individual. The evaluator should support recommendations with specific test results or clinical observations.

Confidentiality— The receiving institution has a responsibility to maintain confidentiality of the evaluation and may not release any part of the documentation without the student’s informed and written consent.

Tests for Assessing Adults with Learning Disabilities

When selecting a battery of tests, it is critical to consider the technical adequacy of instruments including their reliability, validity and standardization on an appropriate norm group. The professional judgment of an evaluator in choosing tests is important. The following list is provided as a helpful resource, but it is not intended to be definitive or exhaustive.

Aptitude

- Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale III (WAIS-III)
- Kaufman Adolescent and Adult Intelligence Test
- Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale (4th ed.)

The Slosson Intelligence Test-Revised and the Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test are primarily screening devices that are not comprehensive enough to provide the kinds of information necessary to make accommodation decisions.

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Academic Achievement

- Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery-III: Tests of Achievement
- Stanford Test of Academic Skills
- Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT) and/or specific achievement tests such as:
- Nelson-Denny Reading Skills Test
- Stanford Diagnostic Mathematics Test
- Test of Written Language-3 (TOWL-3)
- Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests-Revised

Specific achievement tests are useful instruments when administered under standardized conditions and interpreted within the context of other diagnostic information. The Wide Range Achievement Test - 3 (WRAT-3) is not a comprehensive measure of achievement and therefore is not useful if used as the sole measure of achievement.

Information Processing— Acceptable instruments include:

- Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude-3 (DTLA-3)
- Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude-Adult (DTLA-A)
- information from subtests on the WAIS-III
- Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery-III: Tests of Cognitive Ability
- as well as other relevant instruments.

SDS Diversity Statement

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 • The staff of Student Disability Services strives to •
 • create and sustain a welcoming, accessible, and •
 • supportive environment. We believe that diversity •
 • strengthens our institution and envision a community •
 • free of bigotry, expressions of hatred or prejudice, •
 • and behaviors that infringe upon the freedom and •
 • respect that every individual deserves. We are •
 • committed to expanding our understanding of the •
 • complex issues surrounding identity in order to •
 • advance the notion "Any person ... any study." •
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Cornell University
Student Disability
Services

*Services for
Equal Access*

Learning Disability Documentation Guidelines

Student Disability Services

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**Alternative formats of this brochure are
available upon request.**

Learning Disability Documentation Guidelines

The definition of a learning disability used by Cornell University was written by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. Learning Disability is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and the use of listening, spelling, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical ability. 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 perceptions, and social integration may exist with learning disabilities but do not, by themselves, constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other disabilities, they are not the result of those conditions or influences.

Qualifications of the Evaluator— Professionals conducting assessments, rendering diagnoses of learning disabilities, and making recommendations for appropriate accommodations must be qualified to do so. Comprehensive training and direct experience with the college-age learning disability (LD) population is essential.

Documentation— Cornell University requires current documentation of a learning disability using well-known psychometric instruments that have been standardized using adult population norms.

Substantiation of the Learning Disability— Documentation should validate the need for services based on the individual's current level of functioning in the educational setting. A school plan such as an individualized education program (IEP) or a 504 plan is insufficient documentation, but it can be included as part of a more comprehensive assessment battery. A comprehensive assessment battery and the resulting diagnostic report should include a diagnostic interview, assessment of aptitude, academic achievement, information processing, and a diagnosis.

Diagnostic Interview— The diagnostician, using professional judgment as to which areas are relevant, should conduct a diagnostic interview which may include: a description of the presenting problem(s); developmental, medical, psychosocial, and

educational history; family history (including primary language of the home and the student's current level of English fluency); and a discussion of dual diagnosis where indicated.

Assessment— The neuropsychological or psycho-educational evaluation for the diagnosis of a specific learning disability must provide clear and specific evidence that a learning disability does or does not exist. Assessment, and any resulting diagnosis, should consist of and be based on a comprehensive assessment battery, which does not rely on any one test or subtest. Evidence of a substantial limitation to learning or other major life activity must be provided. A list of commonly used tests is found on the back page of this brochure. Minimally, the domains to be addressed must include the following:

Aptitude— A complete intellectual assessment with all subtests and standard scores reported.

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.

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.

Specific Diagnosis— Individual “learning styles,” “learning differences,” “academic problems” and “test difficulty or anxiety,” in and of themselves, do not constitute a learning disability. It is important to rule out alternative explanations for problems in learning such as emotional, attentional 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, avoiding the use of terms such as “suggests” or “is indicative of.”

Test Scores— Standard scores and/or percentiles should be provided for all measures. Grade

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equivalents are not useful unless standard scores and percentiles are also included. The data should logically reflect a substantial limitation to learning for which the student is requesting the accommodation. The particular profile of the student's strengths and weaknesses must be shown to relate to functional limitations that may necessitate accommodation. The tests used should be reliable, valid and standardized for use with an adult population. The test findings should document both the nature and severity of the learning disability.

Clinical Summary— A well-written diagnostic summary based on a comprehensive evaluation process is a necessary component of the report. Assessment instruments and the data they provide do not diagnose; rather, they provide important elements that must be integrated by the evaluator with background information, observations of the client during the testing situation, and the current context. It is essential, therefore, that professional judgment be utilized in the development of a clinical summary. The clinical summary should include:

- (1) Demonstration that the evaluator has ruled out alternative explanations for academic problems as a result of poor education, poor motivation and/or study skills, emotional problems, attentional problems or cultural/language differences.
- (2) Indication of how patterns in the student's cognitive ability, achievement, and information processing reflect the presence of a learning disability.
- (3) Indication 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.
- (4) Indication as to why specific accommodations are needed and how the effects of the specific disability are accommodated.

The summary should also include any record of prior accommodation or auxiliary aids, including any information about specific conditions under which the accommodations were used (e.g., standardized testing, final exams, licensing or certification examinations).