

Teaching Strategies Learning Disabilities

Learning disability 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.

Simply stated, a learning disability is a processing difficulty and any of the five senses may be impaired.

Learning disabilities are NOT mental retardation, nor are they the result of a poor academic background, emotional disturbance, lack of motivation, or visual or auditory acuity problems (Association of Higher Education and Disability). A person with a learning disability may have average or above average intelligence. In fact, Albert Einstein, Winston Churchill, Nelson Rockefeller, Thomas Edison, Woodrow Wilson, George Patton, Walt Disney, and Hans Christian Anderson are all thought to have had learning disabilities.

The Impact learning disabilities have on academic performance

No two individuals with a learning disability are alike. Adults with learning disabilities require careful clinical assessment to determine (1) the specific nature of their disability and (2) appropriate accommodation strategies. The following list gives examples of the impact that various learning disabilities have on academic performance.

(From: College Students with Learning Disabilities: A Student's Perspective, Carol Wren & Laura Segal, DePaul University, Chicago, IL)

Reading

- Confusion of similar words, difficulty using phonics, problems reading multi-syllable words
- Slow reading rate and/or difficulty adjusting speed to the nature of the reading task
- Difficulty with comprehension and retention of material that is read, but not with material presented orally

Writing

- Difficulty with sentence structure, poor grammar, omitted words
- Frequent spelling errors, inconsistent spelling, letter reversal
- Difficulty copying from board or overhead
- Poorly formed letters, difficulty with spacing, capitals, and punctuation
- Difficulty expressing themselves clearly and precisely

Oral Language

- Difficulty processing information presented orally, despite normal hearing
- Difficulty attending to spoken language, inconsistent concentration
- Difficulty expressing ideas orally although the student seems to understand the ideas
- Problems describing events or stories in proper sequence
- Residual problems with grammar, difficulty with inflectional or derivational ending

Math

- Difficulty memorizing basic facts
- Confusion or reversal of numbers, number sequence, or operational symbols
- Difficulty copying problems, aligning columns
- Difficulty reading or comprehending word problems
- Problems with reasoning and abstract concepts

Study Skills

- Poor organization and time management
- Difficulty following directions
- Difficulty taking notes
- Poor organization of notes and other written materials
- Needs more time to complete assignments
- A general lack of ability to develop strategies

Social Skills

- Difficulty "reading" facial expressions, body language
- Problems interpreting subtle messages such as sarcasm
- Confusion in spatial orientation, getting lost easily, difficulty following direction.
- Disorientation in time, difficulty telling time
- Strategies for Students with Learning Disabilities

Strategies for Students with Learning Disabilities

The following lists provide suggestions of instructional strategies based on each specific learning disability. No student would use all of these strategies. Selection of strategies would be based on the individual needs of the student, the objectives of the course and recommended academic adjustments and services.

Talk to students. They are the best resource about their specific needs.

Remember: A learning disability does not mean that the person cannot learn; it means that they learn Differently. Many instructional strategies which are helpful to students with learning disabilities benefit all students.

Instructional Strategies to Help Students Compensate for an Expressive Language Disability

Characteristics

A student with an expressive language disability may have difficulty with the following tasks requiring written languages: expressing themselves clearly and precisely, using a variety of sentence structures, using mature syntactical patterns, using an appropriate range of words, organizing thoughts, using punctuation correctly, copying from the board, organizing written information note taking, handwriting, and spelling.

Strategies

- Allow student to use a word processor with a spelling checker.
- Grade written assignments for ideas only or provide two grades: one for content and one for technical skills.
- Provide advance notice of written assignments. Encourage students to start assignments early; waiting until the last minute can produce stress which may aggravate the disability.
- Encourage student to use the [Writing Lab](#) and to get tutoring.

- Make sure student understands what is being asked in a written assignment. Explain words like compare and contrast.
- Help student decide on a limited, workable topic for a paper.
- Provide student with a model of what is expected by sharing strong papers that were written by other students.
- If student has a problem with sequencing, require him/her to show you an outline of ideas/information in the order in which he/she intends to present them.
- If you are not testing grammar and punctuation (i.e., if this is not an English class), encourage student to have a friend proofread assignments and make corrections.
- Give all instructions both in writing and verbally.
- Allow student to provide oral responses rather than written ones.
- Encourage the student to make up and answer sample test questions. Go over the student's answers.
- Allow student to tape record lectures.
- Provide student with a note taker.

Instructional Strategies to Help Students Compensate for a Reading Disability

Characteristics

A student with a reading disability may have difficulty with some of the following: decoding unfamiliar words, understanding what is read, knowing the meaning of words read, maintaining an efficient rate of reading, following written directions, identifying main ideas and major details.

Strategies

- Encourage student to pre-read a chapter before reading it.
- Have student turn headings into questions using words like what, why, and how. The student should then read to find the correct answer to those questions. Student should highlight the answers to questions formulated from headings.
- Student may benefit from using different colored highlighters: one for main ideas, one for key details, and another for definitions.
- Encourage student to develop reasonable and logical points within the text at which the student will stop and check comprehension. Using these checkpoints, the student may want to summarize what has just been read (perhaps into a tape recorder so that the summary may be used as a review later).
- Encourage student to become an active rather than a passive reader. The student should learn to talk to himself/herself. Students should ask questions such as:
 - "Why am I reading this?"
 - "What does this topic have to do with topics discussed earlier?"
 - "What principle do these problems illustrate?"
 - "How can I put this in my own words?"
- If material seems particularly difficult, have the student reread, read aloud, or rephrase information.
- Ask student to use the margins of the text to record key phrases, main ideas, or definitions.
- If student lacks background knowledge, ask him/her to look up the subject in an encyclopedia in order to get an overview of it.
- If words seem to "move around" in the text, show student how to use an index card to guide reading.
- Encourage student to put specialized vocabulary words on index cards for easier review.
- Provide guided notes for each chapter. The notes should contain a summary of the main points and key terms listed in sequential order. (Or teach the student to use the chapter summary so that he/she can do this for himself/herself.)

Instructional Strategies to Help Students Compensate for Receptive Language Disabilities

Characteristics

Students with a receptive language disability may have difficulty processing information presented orally. Despite normal hearing, the student may have problems with the following: differentiating between similar sounds, following oral directions, interpreting and evaluating oral presentations, concentrating, handling distractions, and taking notes.

Strategies

- Realize that the language of a student with a learning disability is likely to be concrete, literal, and non-flexible whereas the language used by instructors and in textbooks is likely to be figurative, metaphoric, analogous, and idiomatic. As people with learning disabilities get older, the gap between their language and language used by others increases.
- Allow student to tape record lectures.
- Help student find a seat in your class that is near the blackboard and as far away as possible from auditory disturbances (doorways, pencil sharpeners, etc.).
- Whenever possible provide student with visual cues by writing on the board, using the overhead, or providing the student with a brief written outline of the material to be covered in that class session.
- Provide student with written copies of your lecture.
- Give instructions/directions orally and in writing.
- Encourage student to check his/her understanding of what was assigned in class before he/she leaves the class.
- Explain how to visualize material that has been orally presented so that the student may revisualize the material before answering questions.
- If student seems easily distracted, work with the student to develop a "secret code" through which you will let the student know when he/she is experiencing a lapse in concentration. (For example, say that you will walk near his/her desk whenever you notice that the student has stopped paying attention.)
- The student may benefit from taking a test alone in a room where there are no distractions.
- Trying to overcome external distractions and auditory confusions may be extremely tiring for a student. Student should be encouraged to take his/her most difficult course at a time when he/she is most alert.
- When lecturing, reduce number of items presented simultaneously.

Instructional Strategies to Help Students Compensate for a Mathematic Disability

Characteristics

Students with a math disability may have problems with the following: working with fractions, decimals, and percentages, mastering basic arithmetic facts, reasoning mathematically, visualizing mathematical problems, recalling the sequence of an operational process, copying numbers correctly, working with numbers in columns, and discriminating between operational symbols (especially = and x).

Strategies

- Permit use of pocket calculators for computations.
- Suggest that student use graph paper to align math problems. (Ordinary notebook paper may also be turned sideways to produce columns.)
- Encourage student to use color coding in order to visualize a problem better. (For example, make the negative signs, exponents, and numbers carried a different color. Make columns of numbers different colors.)
- If student has difficulty learning by watching, suggest that he/she write down on an index card the steps that must be followed in solving a problem. If student is responsible for knowing steps or a formula for a test, he/she may then use these index cards as study tools.
- Provide sufficient opportunities to practice.
- When lecturing, use concrete examples similar to student's experiences. Learning may also be improved if a concept is introduced first and numbers are added later, especially if the concept is explained in a way that students can relate to personally.

- Use as many visual aids as possible. (Video tapes will allow students to have a complicated procedure repeated often enough to understand it.)
- Draw visual breaks (slashes, hyphens, etc.) between each step.
- Use 2D and 3D objects that students can manipulate.

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- Contact WS
- Directory
- Directions

Walters State Community College
500 South Davy Crockett Parkway Morristown, TN 37813-6899
phone: 423.585.2600 toll free: 800.225.4770

TN Transfer Pathway QEP P-16 Council TN eCampus Expect More Finish Faster National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements Achieving the Dream

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