

Guidelines for Documentation of a Learning Disorder

Introduction

In order for a learning disorder to be considered a disability, the student must demonstrate through documentation that their condition meets the definition of a disability under the Rehabilitation Act, 1973 and/or the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). **The ADA defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity(s).**

A clinical diagnosis is not synonymous with a disability. That is, evidence sufficient to render a clinical diagnosis might not be adequate to determine that an individual is substantially limited in a major life activity. **The documentation must include the student's specific current functional impairment(s) and describe how the condition substantially limits a major life activity(s) in order for Lenoir Community College to fully evaluate the necessity for any of the following: academic adjustments, auxiliary aids, and/or auxiliary services.**

If the documentation submitted does not sufficiently address the student's current functional impairment or describe how the condition substantially limits a major life activity(s), additional information will be required. It is the responsibility of the student to obtain appropriate documentation and present a copy to the Lenoir Community College ADA Counselor for review.

Individual Education Program (IEP) and Prior Academic Adjustments in Secondary Settings:

Secondary schools and post-secondary institutions are governed under different laws with regard to providing services to students with disabilities. A school plan such as **an Individualized Education Program (IEP), a Comprehensive Evaluation Report (CER), or a 504 Plan** are typically not considered sufficient documentation to establish the rationale for academic adjustments, auxiliary aids and/or services in the post-secondary setting. A possible exception would be an IEP, CER, or 504 Plan that meets all of the requirements defined by these guidelines.

Definition of a Learning Disorder:

Evaluators providing documentation to Lenoir Community College should utilize the definition and diagnostic criteria for a Learning Disorder from the current version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. A **specific diagnosis and corresponding DSM-IV code for a Learning Disorder** must be included in the report. The diagnostician should use direct language in the diagnosis of a learning disorder, **avoiding the use of terms such as "suggests," "is indicative of" or "learning problems."**

A variety of statistical approaches can be used to establish that achievement is substantially below that expected for age, schooling, and level of intelligence. Substantially below is usually defined as a discrepancy between ability and achievement (between one and a half or more standard deviations).

Evaluator Qualifications:

Professionals conducting assessment and rendering a diagnosis of a learning disorder must be licensed professionals such as: a school psychologist, a neuropsychologist, or clinical psychologist. **It is not appropriate for professionals to evaluate members of their family or others with whom they have personal or business relationships.**

Documentation Requirements:

Diagnostic reports must include the names, titles, and professional credentials of the evaluator(s) and include the signature of the professional(s) and the date(s) of testing. The report **must be typed** and submitted on professional letterhead. Specific reporting format is left to the professional, but the required components must be clearly presented and easily discernable. Handwritten scores are not acceptable. In addition, **assessment reports must include all of the following information (A through E) listed below:**

A. Statement of Presenting Problem:

Describe the individual's presenting problem in terms of current academic functioning.

B. Diagnostic Interview:

The information obtained in the diagnostic interview must consist of more than self-report. The diagnostic interview with information from a variety of sources must include, but not necessarily be limited to, the following:

Relevant developmental history.

Family history for presence of LD and other educational, learning, physical, or psychological difficulties deemed relevant by the examiner.

Relevant medical and medication history.

Relevant psychosocial history.

A thorough academic history of all levels of education completed to date.

Review of prior psycho-educational test reports to determine whether a pattern of strengths or weaknesses is supportive of learning problems.

History of academic adjustments including information about specific conditions under which the academic adjustments were utilized (e.g., standardized testing, final exams, licensing or certification examinations) and the extent to which they were beneficial.

C. Testing:

1. The assessment of the individual must not only establish a diagnosis of learning disorder, but must also demonstrate the current impact of the learning disorder on an individual's ability to take standardized tests. Therefore, psycho-educational testing is required in determining the current impact of the learning disorder on an individual's ability to function in an academic setting.
2. **Psycho-educational testing must be recent** in order to accurately describe a student's current functional limitations and need for academic adjustments, auxiliary aids and/or services.

3. Tests utilized must be **statistically reliable, statistically valid**, and based upon the **current version utilizing the most recent age based norms (grade based norms are not acceptable)**. These standards are defined by the current version of the "Standards for Educational and Psychological testing" jointly published by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education.
4. A full psycho-educational battery (series of tests) is required to meet the guidelines for a learning disorder. A battery includes measures of **aptitude test (IQ) and achievement**. It is unacceptable to administer only one test or subtest for the purpose of a new diagnosis or with individuals with a previous diagnosis of a learning disorder. The following are recommended aptitude and achievement tests that are considered technically sound and standardized. However, other tests of aptitude or achievement can be utilized as long as they meet the quality and testing practices mentioned above.

Short-form or abbreviated tests (i.e., WASI, WRAT, K-BIT) will not be acceptable as sole measures of ability or achievement.

a. Aptitude Tests:

A complete intellectual assessment with all **subtests, cluster scores, standard scores, and percentiles** reported is required. **Examples of acceptable aptitude tests include the current versions of:**

- The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale
- The Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale

b. Academic Achievement Tests

A comprehensive academic achievement battery is required. **Subtests, cluster scores, standard scores, and percentiles** must be reported. The battery must include current levels of academic functioning including **reading, writing, math, and other relevant areas**.

Examples of acceptable achievement tests include the current versions of:

- The Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-educational Battery, Tests of Achievement
- The Wechsler Individual Achievement Test

D. Summary and Significant Functional Impairment

1. Test protocol sheets or scores alone are not sufficient. A well-written interpretative summary based on a comprehensive evaluative process is required (i.e. interpretation of historical data, observation, and objective diagnostic measures).
2. The evaluator must investigate and discuss the possibility of **dual diagnoses and alternative or co-existing mood, behavioral, neurological, physical, and/or personality disorders**, which may confound the diagnosis of a learning disorder. This process should include exploration of possible, alternative diagnoses, and medical and psychiatric disorders as well as educational and cultural factors impacting the individual, which may result in behaviors mimicking a learning disorder.
3. A discussion of how these symptoms significantly impair the individual's functioning in a classroom setting and other settings is necessary to determine eligibility for services. **A diagnosis of a learning disorder is not enough to indicate functional limitation(s) in an academic setting. The evaluator must include the specific functional limitations of the student being evaluated in order for LCC to fully evaluate the necessity for academic adjustments, auxiliary aids or services.**

E. Academic Adjustments, Auxiliary Aids and/or Services

1. The evaluator should describe the impact, if any, of the diagnosed learning disorder on a specific major life activity. A multifaceted evaluation should address the **intensity and frequency of the symptoms and whether these behaviors constitute impairment in a major life activity**. The student's functional limitations from the learning disorder specifically in a classroom setting must be discussed.
2. The diagnostic report should include **specific recommendations for academic adjustments, auxiliary aids and/or services that are realistic for a post-secondary**

institution that include the degree to which the condition and symptoms impact the student in a learning environment (i.e., the classroom) for which the academic adjustments, auxiliary aids and/or services are being requested.

3. A **rationale for each requested academic adjustment, auxiliary aid, and/or service and how the effects of the learning disorder** are mediated by the requested academic adjustment, auxiliary aid, and/or services.
4. A statement of **whether or not the student was evaluated while on medication, and whether or not there is a positive/negative response to the prescribed treatment.**
5. **Records of prior academic adjustments, auxiliary aids, and or services** including information about specific conditions under which the academic adjustments, auxiliary aids, and/or services were used (e.g., standardized testing, final exams, licensing or certification examinations) and whether or not the individual benefited from them.

Please send the completed report to: ADA Counselor Lenoir Community College PO Box 188

Kinston NC 28502 Fax: 252-233-6879 Phone: 252-527-6223 x 331