

Guidelines for Documenting a Learning Disability

1.) **Qualified Evaluator.** Professionals conducting assessments, diagnosing learning disabilities, and making recommendations for appropriate academic accommodations must be qualified to administer the required comprehensive test battery and be licensed to diagnose learning disorders as defined by *DSM* guidelines. Appropriate training and direct experience with adolescents and/or adults with learning disabilities (LD) is essential. The evaluator may not be a family member. The documentation must:

- include evaluator's name, title, professional credentials, license and/or certification number,
- be presented in English on the professional's letterhead, typed, dated, signed, and legible.

2.) **Current Documentation.** A learning disability's impact can change over time. To determine appropriate accommodations, LD documentation must be current – preferably within the past 3 to 5 years.

3.) **A Comprehensive Evaluation.** LDs are complex, affecting each person differently., LD documentation must give a full picture of the individual, not simply a diagnosis. This includes:

- Thorough discussion of:
 - relevant developmental, psychosocial, employment, family, and medical history,
 - an academic history with a history of LD-related accommodation,
 - cultural and linguistic background and level of English-language fluency,
 - co-morbidity or alternate disorders which may mimic or exacerbate symptoms of LD.
- an individually administered **Aptitude Test** battery (Intelligence or Cognitive tests) based on adult norms with all subtests included. **The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale – 4th Edition (WAIS-IV)** is preferred.
- an **Achievement Test** battery, also called an academic achievement battery. **The Woodcock Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery: Tests of Achievement** is preferred. The Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) and the Nelson-Denny Reading test (NDTR) are not comprehensive and are not acceptable as the sole measures of achievement. Achievement tests must show current academic functioning in:
 - reading - decoding and comprehension of long passages typical of college texts,
 - mathematics - applied word problems and calculations, specifically algebra problems,
 - written language skills - spelling and written expression.
- an **Information Processing** battery, preferably the subtests from the WAIS-IV or the Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude (DTLA). These assessments must describe strengths, weaknesses, and deficits in:
 - visual-spatial abilities,
 - memory (auditory and visual; short-term and long-term),
 - executive functions including, processing speed, attention, and auditory processing.
- a **clear, unequivocal** diagnosis of a learning disability based on *DSM* criteria with diagnostic code and discussions of ruling out alternate explanations and co-morbid diagnoses.
- an interpretation of test scores leading to the diagnosis
- a description of current treatments used to ameliorate the impact of the LD.
- a description of the current functional limitations of the individual in an academic environment – the ways that the diagnosed LD currently substantially limits the student's learning.
- Appropriate and specific recommendations for a post-secondary academic environment including:
 - detailed explanation as to why each accommodation is recommended must be provided,
 - correlation to functional limitations previously described.
- a presentation of all test scores including all raw, broad, standard scores, and percentile ranks.

4.) **Supporting Documentation.** While required, the report of the qualified evaluator is by no means the only documentation we can use to better understand and accommodate the student. Other helpful documents are records of accommodation on standardized tests such as SAT, ACT, GRE, or LSAT, high school 504 plans or IEP's, previous psycho-educational evaluations, report cards, transcripts, and teacher, tutor, therapist, or employer reports. If needed for evaluation purposes, DASS may access students' SMU transcripts and records and contact current or former SMU instructors.