

Learning Disability Documentation Guidelines

University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee

It is the policy and practice of the UWM to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, other federal mandates, and state and local requirements regarding individuals with disabilities. Under these laws, no qualified individual with a disability shall be denied access to or participation in services, programs, and activities of the UWM. Students with learning disabilities (LD) are protected under these laws and may request reasonable accommodations for their disabilities. Academic accommodations for students with LD are intended to provide equal access to instruction and assessment. Each academic accommodation is determined on an individual basis and made available to the extent it meets the student's needs and does not compromise the academic integrity of the university program.

UWM endorses the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) definition of learning disabilities. It states that a **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. Problems in self-regulating behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not by themselves constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (for example, sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance) or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction), they are not the result of these conditions or influences. (NJCLD, 1988)

Students are responsible for providing documentation that supports the LD diagnosis, and substantiates the need for the requested accommodations. Documentation must include, but is not restricted to the following:

a. **Diagnostic Interview**

A diagnostic interview including a description of the presenting problem(s); relevant educational, developmental, medical, psycho-social histories; family history (including primary language of the home and the student's current level of English fluency); and a discussion of co-morbidity where indicated.

b. **Assessment**

A neuropsychological or psycho-educational evaluation is required and must provide clear and specific evidence that a learning disability exists and that alternative explanations for lower than expected performance have been ruled out. Assessment, and any resulting diagnosis, must consist of and be based on comprehensive assessment that relies on **multiple forms of evidence** (i.e., standardized test results, informal assessment results, observational and historical data) that support a learning disability diagnosis. It is not acceptable to administer only one test in making a diagnosis of LD. Evidence should be precise, objective, valid and acceptable in the field. Reports should follow statistically sound and widely accepted practices for interpreting data. Testing scores *identifying a discrepancy between or among test scores is not sufficient to warrant the diagnosis of a learning*

disability or establish eligibility for accommodation. Evidence must establish a clear link between specific deficit areas and the functional limitations experienced by the individual.

For the neurological or psychological evaluation to illustrate a substantial limitation to learning, the comprehensive assessment battery must contain the following domains:

- **Aptitude/Cognitive Ability**

The *Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale – III (WAIS-III)* and the *Woodcock Johnson Psychoeducational Battery III: Tests of Cognitive Ability (WJPEB-III)* are the preferred testing instruments.

- **Academic Achievement**

The student's current level of functioning in written language, reading, and mathematics must be assessed. Acceptable testing instruments include: *Woodcock Johnson Psychoeducational Battery III: Tests of Achievement, (the preferred instrument); Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT); Stanford Test of Academic Skills.*

Specific achievements tests such as: *Nelson Denney Reading Test; Tests of Written Language; Stanford Diagnostic Mathematics Test; and the Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests – Revised.*

The Wide Range Achievement Test -3 (WRAT-3) is not a comprehensive measure of achievement and therefore is not useful as the sole measure of achievement.

- **Information Processing**

Specific areas of information processing to be assessed should include short and long term memory, sequential memory, auditory and visual perception/processing and processing speed. Acceptable instruments include: *Information from subtests on the WJPEB-III: Tests of Cognitive Ability; WAIS-III; Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude – Adult (DTLA-A) as well as other relevant instruments which can assess information processing.*

Testing data including subscores must be included and should be provided in standard scores and percentiles for all normed measures. Grade equivalents alone are not sufficient or useful.

c. Specific Diagnostic

A specific diagnosis that conforms to DSM-IV criteria for a specific learning disability. Individual "learning styles", "learning differences", and "test difficulty or anxiety" do not in and of themselves constitute a learning disability. It is important to rule out alternative explanations for learning problems, i.e. emotional, attentional or motivational problems that may interfere with learning but do not constitute a learning disability.

d. Clinical Summary

A clinical summary which: (a) indicates the substantial limitations to major life activities posed by the specified learning disability, (b) describes the extent to which these limitations impact the academic context for which accommodations are being requested, (c) suggests how the specific effects of the learning disability may be accommodated, and (d) states how the effects of the learning disability are

mediated by the recommended accommodations. Submission of testing data or protocol sheets without an interpretation of the results is not acceptable.

e. Qualifications of the examiner

A qualified professional trained in the diagnosis of learning disabilities in adults (e.g. psychologist, neuropsychologist, LD Specialists) should conduct the assessment. The diagnostic report must include the name(s) of the examiners, titles, and professional credentials of the examiners, dates of testing and the testing instruments used.

To establish the need for accommodation, documentation must clearly reflect *the current impact* of the learning disability on the individual's academic progress. It is in the student's best interest to provide testing done as recently as possible. It is most useful if there is a comprehensive psycho-educational or neuropsychological assessment done the last year of high school or as an adult.

For questions about the learning disability documentation guidelines, please contact the Learning Disabilities Program at 414 229-6239.

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