

Learning Disabilities

A Basic Overview and Introduction



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Learning Disabilities

Here is some basic information as to the term “learning disability”. This information was obtained from the Learning Disabilities Association of America’s website (www.ldanatl.org). This website has some very good information for both teachers and parents.

- A learning disability is defined by the Federal government as “a disorder in the basic cognitive and psychological processes involved in using language or performing mathematical calculations, affecting persons of normal intelligence and not the result of emotional disturbance or impairment of sight or hearing”.
- A learning disability is a neurological disorder that affects one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language. The disability may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or to do mathematical calculations. A learning disability can also interfere with higher level skills such as organization, time planning, and abstract reasoning.
- The types of LD are identified by the specific processing problem. They might relate to getting information into the brain (**Input**), making sense of this information (**Organization**), storing and later retrieving this information (**Memory**), or getting this information back out (**Output**). Thus, the specific types of processing problems that result in LD might be in one or more of these four areas.
- Every individual with a learning disability is unique and shows a different combination and degree of difficulties. A common characteristic among people with learning disabilities is uneven areas of ability, “a weakness within a sea of strengths.” For instance, a child with dyslexia who struggles with reading, writing and spelling may be very capable in math and science.
- Learning disabilities should not be confused with learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps; of mental retardation; of emotional

disturbance; or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantages.

- Generally speaking, people with learning disabilities are of average or above average intelligence. There often appears to be a gap between the individual's potential and actual achievement. This is why learning disabilities are referred to as "hidden disabilities:" the person looks perfectly "normal" and seems to be a very bright and intelligent person, yet may be unable to demonstrate the skill level expected from someone of a similar age.
- A learning disability cannot be cured or fixed; it is a lifelong challenge. However, with appropriate support and intervention, people with learning disabilities can achieve success in school, at work, in relationships, and in the community.

Auditory Processing Disorders

Students with auditory processing disorders have difficulty interpreting auditory information which can hinder language development and the acquisition of reading, writing and mathematical skills. The following is a chart of the different types of auditory processing deficits, how they may present and some basic strategies.

Processing Deficit	Manifestations	Strategies
Auditory Sequencing	Confusion with number sequences, lists or lists of directions. Hearing ninety-four instead of forty-nine.	Provide written instructions as reinforcement or oral instruction. Use visuals with lectures.
Auditory Memory	Difficulty remembering what was heard and remembering important parts of oral presentations. Reading comprehension. Difficulty with spelling.	Provide written instruction to look back upon. Don't penalize spelling, just provide feedback. Provide basic outlines of what is being presented.
Auditory Figure Ground	Trouble hearing sounds over background noises.	Seat student in close proximity to speaker. Limit noise and distractions.
Auditory Discrimination	Often seems to misunderstand directions. Trouble telling differences between similar sounds or words-fish for dish. Seems to hear but not listen.	Provide written lectures to follow. Talk at a slower pace. Give one task at a time.

Visual Processing Disorders

Students with a visual processing disorder have difficulty interpreting visually presented information. The following is a chart that delineates the specific visual skills that encompass visual processing deficits. Visual processing disorders can significantly compromise a student's acquisition of academic skills.

Processing Deficit	Manifestations	Strategies
Visual Sequencing	Problems in using a separate answer sheet. Loses place easily. Problems with reading. Reversing or misreading numbers or letters. Reading words incorrectly. Difficulty with equations.	Read directions aloud. Provide oral instruction. Write on the overhead. Color code words and numbers that are written. For example when writing on the board use a different colors for each question or math problem.
Visual Memory	Difficulty remembering what was seen. Reading comprehension. Difficulty with math equations. Poor recall of information.	Provide handouts that are clearly written. Provide oral instruction. Use "hands on type" of activities.
Visual Figure Ground	Trouble seeing an image within competing background. Picking one line of print from another while reading.	Use an index card or marker when reading to blot out distraction of other words. Less clutter on a page.
Visual Discrimination	Seeing the difference between two similar objects.	Clearly spacing words or problems on a page. Draw attention to details such as color coding vowels or mathematical signs.

Written Language Disability

Students with a written language disability exhibit significant difficulty with the writing process. This disability can manifest itself as difficulty with spelling, poor handwriting and trouble putting thoughts on paper. Students who are diagnosed with a written language disability can benefit from specific accommodations within the classroom, as well as, additional practice and reinforcement needed to be an accomplished writer.

Processing Deficit	Manifestations	Strategies
Spacing	Little or no spacing between letters, words or numbers. Placement of written work may look haphazard and unorganized.	Use of special paper such as graph or lined paper for aligning math problems and organizing work. Designating certain spaces to write on or in.
Letter/Number Formation Illegible Handwriting	Poor letter and number formation. Actual process of writing is tedious and time consuming.	Provide alternatives to written work such as tape recorders and the use of the computer. Shorten assignments and provide short answer, fill in the blank or multiple choices.
Written Expression	Difficulty getting thoughts down on paper. There appears to be a large gap between written ideas and understanding as demonstrated through verbal language skills. Does not consistently apply the rules of capitalization and punctuation although the concepts have been taught. Poor spelling skills.	Limit the amount of written work. Have students proofread their work by developing a checklist for editing work to include spelling, neatness, grammar, syntax, sequencing, etc. Encourage the use of a spell checker. Limit note taking by providing an outline of the notes. Use of a tape recorder or computer.