

Documentation Guidelines for TCU Students with Disabilities

Learning Disabilities/Learning Differences

Learning Disabilities (LD) are a group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, spelling, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical ability. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span. In addition, there may be problems in organization skills, self-regulatory behaviors, and social skills. A learning disability is **NOT** the result of:

1. Mental illness
2. Visual, hearing, or motor impairments
3. Mental retardation
4. Emotional disturbance, or
5. Environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage

I. A Qualified Professional Must Conduct the Evaluation

Professionals conducting this evaluation must be qualified to conduct an assessment, render a diagnosis of a specific learning disability, and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations for adolescents and/or adults. The report should include the evaluator's name, title, and professional credentials, including license and/or certification information. Professionals who are qualified to evaluate specific learning disabilities include, but are not limited to clinical or educational psychologists, school psychologists, neurophysiologists, and learning disabilities specialists who have training and experience in the assessment of learning problems in adolescents and/or adults. (Note: It is not appropriate for professionals to evaluate members of their own family.)

II. Testing Must Be Current

Although a learning disability is normally viewed as life-long, the severity of the condition may change over time. Because reasonable accommodations and services are based upon TCU's assessment of the current impact of the individual's disability on his/her academic performance, recent and appropriate documentation should be submitted. Typically, comprehensive testing should be conducted within the past five years.

III. Prior Documentation

A high school plan, such as an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 plan, is *insufficient documentation* in and of itself. However, sometimes this type of documentation in addition to a current comprehensive assessment is useful in determining appropriate services.

IV. Documentation

Actual test scores must logically reflect a substantial limitation to learning for which the individual is requesting accommodations. Documentation should indicate a significant discrepancy calculation (based on industry standards) relative to expectancy.

- A. **Expectancy** is defined as a standard score (or intelligence quotient) obtained on an intelligence test. In cases where a significant difference is calculated between verbal and performance scores, the verbal, performance, or full-scale score (whichever best represents the individual's intelligence level, as documented) may be used.
- B. **Significant discrepancy** is defined as a negative difference of more than 15 standard score points between the standard score on the intelligence test and the standard score obtained in an academic area as well as in a specific processing ability area. This discrepancy in scores must be documented in terms reported in the technical manual for the individual test instrument. Evidence of a significant academic deficiency relative to expectancy as well as to a significant discrepancy in at least one area of cognitive processing must be present.

Based on expectancy, a **statistically significant discrepancy of at least one standard deviation** shall be calculated, in one or more of the following academic areas as measured by standardized tests:

1. Reading/Reading Comprehension
2. Written Expression
3. Mathematics (Calculation and/or Applied Problems)

In addition to the discrepancy measured between expectancy in at least one academic area, a discrepancy must also be found in at least one area of specific processing ability. These abilities as measured by standardized tests include:

1. Visual Processing (e.g., visual-perceptual speed, visual-spatial abilities, visual-motor)
2. Auditory Processing (e.g., auditory sequencing ability, auditory discrimination, auditory concentration skills, auditory memory)
3. Verbal Processing (e.g., word retrieval abilities, verbal fluency)
4. Reasoning Ability (e.g., ability to approach problem solving in a logical and sequential manner, ability to shift cognitive strategies as the specific task requires)

V. The Written Report

A current and comprehensive report should include the following:

- A. **A Diagnostic Interview:** This should include (but is not limited to) relevant historical information regarding the individual's academic history and learning processes in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education. Also, the report should include information that summarizes previous testing completed by other clinicians. A combination of individual self-report, interviews with others, and historical documentation (e.g., transcripts, standardized testing, etc.) is recommended. Also, information should be provided that summarizes any developmental history and current or relevant medical history and must indicate the exclusion of the following as the primary handicapping condition:

- Mental handicap according to DSM-IV standards
- Visual impairment
- Hearing impairment (deaf or hard of hearing)
- Physical impairment that interferes with accurate test results
- Emotional disorder
- Poor educational background or lack of opportunity to learn
- Cultural differences or lack of experience with the English language

B. Assessment of Aptitude: There should be a minimum of one comprehensive IQ test and one processing test. See below for a list of suggested information processing tests.

C. Measurement of Academic Achievement: A standard score for the basic achievement areas of reading (word recognition, vocabulary, comprehension), math (calculation, application), and written language (mechanics, composition) needs to be available. Testing must include at least two achievement test scores in the specific area of the documented disability.

NOTE: Raw scores, standard scores, and percentile scores are also required for each of the tests completed.

In general, most students will have average or above intelligence with a significant deficit in at least one area of information processing (i.e. acquisition, integration, storage, retrieval). There may be a discrepancy between verbal and performance scores on a measure of overall intelligence, but this is not always the case. Documentation of a "learning disability" must be based on the specific criteria outlined above.

D. Summary: The assessment/test results must include a clear statement of the presence of a learning disability, discussion of possible alternative explanations for the results, a statement of functional limitations, and suggestions for reasonable accommodations, which must be directly linked to the stated limitation and supported by the test scores.

The following recommended standardized tests are used in the field of learning disabilities:

Intellectual

- Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale - 3rd Edition (WAIS-III)
- Woodcock-Johnson III (WJ III) - Tests of Cognitive Abilities
- Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale (4th Ed.)
- Leiter International Performance Scale
- Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test (K-BIT) (only if supported by a comprehensive IQ test)
- Test of Non-Verbal Intelligence (TONI-2) (only if supported by verbal IQ measure)

Information Processing

- Bender Visual-Motor Gestalt Test
- Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude - Adult
- Halsted-Reitan Neuropsychological Test Battery for Adults
- Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT)
- Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale - 3rd Edition (WAIS-III)
- Weschler Memory Scales - 3rd Edition, (WMS-III)
- Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery: Part I - Tests of Cognitive Ability

Achievement

- Nelson-Denny Reading Test
- Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, 3rd Edition (PPVT-III)
- Scholastic Abilities Test for Adults (SATA)
- Stanford Test of Academic Skills (TASK)
- Test of Adolescent Language - 2 (TOAL)
- Test of Reading Comprehension (TORC)
- Test of Written Language Revised (TOWL-2)
- Test of Written Spelling Revised (TWS-2)
- Weschler Individual Achievement Test, 2nd Edition (WIAT II)
- Wide Range Achievement Test, 3rd Edition (WRAT-III) (Will only be accepted if supported by other achievement tests in the area that is being measured)
- Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery 3rd Edition (WJ-III): Part II - Tests of Achievement