

Texas Christian University

Documentation Guidelines for TCU Students with Disabilities

Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)

In accordance with the current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), a Specific Learning Disorder (SLD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that has a biological origin. It is manifested by an individual's persistent difficulty to learn keystone academic skills during the years of formal schooling which can occur in early school years or later when learning demands increase and exceed an individual's learning capacity. An individual with a SLD will perform substantially and quantifiably below average in the affected academic skills area(s) for that individual's age and can cause significant interference with academic performance as confirmed by individually administered standardized achievement measures and comprehensive clinical assessment. However, the underachievement cannot be attributable to an intellectual disability; economic/environmental disadvantage; chronic absenteeism; lack of education; lack of proficiency in the language of academic instruction; or neurological, motor, vision, or hearing disorders.

- TCU requires documentation to evaluate your request and to determine eligibility for accommodations and/or services.
- **Documentation must be presented to the Disabilities Services Office in a typewritten report on professional letterhead that bears the evaluator's name, title, license number, professional credentials, business location, contact information, and original signature. Additionally, the evaluator's business card should be included.**
- Information concerning a student's disability is treated in a confidential manner in accordance with University policies as well as applicable state and federal laws.
- Documentation shall be reviewed by appropriate University professionals to verify the existence of a disability and to determine the need for appropriate accommodations. Should accommodations be authorized they are not retroactive. They take effect upon delivery of accommodation letters to and after conferencing with the student's professor(s).

Documentation requirements for **Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)** include, but are not limited to, the following:

I. A qualified professional must conduct the evaluation.

- Professionals conducting assessments and rendering a diagnosis of a specific learning disability must be qualified to do so. **Comprehensive training in the differential diagnosis of Specific Learning Disabilities and direct experience in diagnosis and treatment of adolescents and adults with Specific Learning Disabilities is necessary.**
- Professionals who are qualified to evaluate for a specific learning disability include neuropsychologists, 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 relatives or family members.)

II. Testing must be current.

- Although a Specific Learning Disability is typically viewed as life-long, the severity and functional limitations may change over time. TCU assesses **current impact** on academic performance to determine the need for reasonable accommodations and services.
- Comprehensive testing should be considered current up to three (3) years. Evaluators should use instruments normed for adults.

III. Records of academic history should be provided. (Self-report alone is not sufficient.)

- A high school plan such as an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 plan is insufficient documentation in and of itself. However, **in addition to** a current comprehensive assessment, it can be helpful in determining reasonable accommodations and services. **Please have your high school provide a copy of previous evaluations, IEPs, or 504 plans.** This information should be given to the Disabilities Services Office. If accommodations were given informally (no written plan), please ask your high school counselor to provide a letter on the school's letterhead with his/her original signature, outlining what informal accommodations were provided and the basis for providing those services.
- **If accommodations on the ACT or SAT were granted**, the Disabilities Services Office may ask you to provide a copy of the letter that granted the accommodations.

IV. The documentation must substantiate the specific learning disability diagnosis.

- A complete and current *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* diagnosis must be provided with an accompanying description of the specific symptoms the student experiences.
- This diagnosis must be based on **psycho-educational testing and a comprehensive clinical interview.**
- A **comprehensive clinical interview** which meets mental health service provider standards of care in length (50 min.) and focus (complete developmental, familial, psychological, social, and medical history, and mental status exam) is required.
- Documentation should explain how symptoms have manifested across **various settings over time**, how the student has coped, and what success the student has had in their coping efforts.
- Discussion of steps taken to **rule out** other disorders with similar presenting characteristics.
- The documentation should include: a summary of a diagnostic/clinical interview, assessment of the major domains of cognitive and academic functioning, a list of tests administered including all standard scores, expert interpretation of the results, a clear diagnosis and statement of disability, discussion of the functional limitations and academic functioning levels, and recommendations. Areas of weakness identified in prior evaluations must be thoroughly explored in the current evaluation.

V. Significant functional limitations of the disability must be identified.

- Based on the most current DSM criteria, the documentation must substantiate that the disability **significantly limits cognitive or academic functioning.**

VI. Each recommended accommodation must include a rationale.

- Recommended accommodations must be relevant to a *University* setting with supporting rationale.
- Accommodations are not granted on the basis of a diagnostic label.
- Each requested accommodation must be linked to evidence of current functional impairment that supports its use.
- Recommendations must be based on assessments of aptitude, academic achievement, and cognitive and information processing (see VII: B, C, and D below.)
- A prior history of accommodations **without demonstration of a *current need*** does not in itself warrant the provision of like accommodations.

VII. As explained below, the comprehensive report should include (A) the diagnostic interview, (B) assessment of aptitude/cognitive ability, (C) measurement of academic achievement, and (D) investigation of cognitive and information processing.

A. Diagnostic interview:

- *Relevant historical information* regarding the student's academic history and learning processes in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education;
- *Observational data*, gathered during the evaluation, of behavior such as affect, concentration, mental fatigue, executive functioning, and fluency;
- *Description of psycho-active medication in use at the time of the evaluation*, including its effect;
- *Summary of previous testing completed by other clinicians*;
- *Restatement of prior diagnosis*, including dates and data used to establish diagnosis. (Evidence must be more than a self-report.)
- *Summary of reports* such as individual self-report, family report, interviews;
- *Developmental history*;
- *Current or relevant medical history*;
- *Exclusion* of the following as the primary disabling condition:
Intellectual disability according to *DSM* standards;
Attention disorder;
Visual impairment;
Deafness or hearing impairment;
Physical or systemic impairment (that interferes with accurate test results);
Emotional disorder;
Poor educational background or lack of opportunity to learn;
and cultural differences or lack of experience with the English language;
- *Accommodations history*;
- *Functional limitations statement*; and
- *Recommendation of accommodations relevant to a University setting*.

B. Assessment of aptitude/cognitive ability: One comprehensive (full not brief) aptitude test with all subtests and standard scores provided.

C. Measurement of academic achievement: A standard score for the basic achievement areas of

reading (word recognition, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency), **math** (calculation, problem-solving/reasoning, fluency), **written language** (mechanics, composition, fluency, spelling), and **oral language** (oral expression and listening comprehension) needs to be provided. Testing must include at least two achievement subtest scores in each specific area. (See suggested assessments in APPENDIX (C) Academic Achievement measurements below).

D. Areas of cognitive and information processing: Based upon the nature of the referral, the applicant's clinical presentation, and prior test results, evaluators should investigate realms of cognitive and information processing by conducting a minimum of two processing tests. These domains include, but are not limited to the following:

- a. **memory** (i.e., visual and verbal acquisition, retrieval, retention, and recognition);
- b. **processing speed and cognitive fluency** (e.g., timed psychomotor or graphomotor tasks, decision and naming fluency);
- c. **attention** (e.g., visual and auditory spans of attention, scanning tasks, and vigilance assessment, including continuous performance tasks);
- d. **sensory-perceptual functioning** (e.g., high-level visual, auditory, and tactile tasks);
- e. **executive functioning** (e.g., planning, organization, prioritization, sequencing, self-monitoring);
- f. **motor functioning** (e.g., tests of dexterity and handedness); or
- g. **visual acuity** and possible need for prescription eye glasses.

APPENDIX

Suggested assessments of VII (B) aptitude/cognitive ability, (C) academic achievement and (D) cognitive and information processing.

(B) Aptitude/cognitive ability assessments:

- Kaufman Adolescent and Adult Intelligence Test;
- Stanford-Binet 5 (SB5);
- Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale – IV (WAIS-IV); or
- Woodcock-Johnson – IV Tests of Cognitive Abilities.

(C) Academic achievement measurements:

- Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement, Third Edition (for students <25);
- Wechsler Individual Achievement Test – III (WIAT-III); or
- Woodcock-Johnson– IV Tests of Achievement.

***Supplemental achievement tests such as:**

- Gray Oral Reading Test-V (GORT 5th Ed);
- Nelson-Denny Reading Test (with standard and extended time);
- Stanford Diagnostic Mathematics Test- Fourth Edition;
- Test of Written Language – 4 (TOWL-4); or

<http://www.acs.tcu.edu/disability>

- Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests – Third Edition.

(D) Cognitive and information Processing:

- Brown Attention-Deficit Disorder Scales;
- California Verbal Learning Test-Third Edition (CVLT-III);
- Conners' Continuous Performance Test- 3rd Edition (CPT-3);
- Integrated Visual and Auditory Continuous Performance Test (IVA+Plus);
- Tests of Variable Attention (TOVA);
- Wechsler Memory Scales – IV (WMS-IV);
- Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function – Adult Version (BRIEF-A);
- Delis-Kaplan Executive Function System (D-KEFS);
- Stroop Color and Word Test;
- Trail Making Test Parts A and B; or
- Bender Visual Motor Gestalt Test.

*Please note: Specific supplemental achievement tests are useful instruments when administered under standardized conditions and when the results are interpreted within the context of other diagnostic information. The Wide Range Achievement Test-4 (WRAT-4) or the Nelson-Denny Reading Test are **NOT** a comprehensive measure of achievement and should not be used as the sole measure of achievement.