

- Ask if any family members have similar problems.
- Find out if the student is aware of the condition of learning disability.
- Discover what the student understands about their problem and how they learn best.
- Diplomatically ask if the student would consider having some tests done.
- Discuss the cost of this testing, then, if appropriate, refer the student to a specialist who can help.
- Make the student aware of the symptoms of learning disabilities so they can become more attuned to their learning style.
- Refer the student to a disability officer for support if they are undertaking formal courses.
- If assessment is not wanted, trial a range of interventions to see what works best.

Often the cost of the assessment to investigate the cause of the problem is prohibitive for students. Most teachers and tutors working the field of adult literacy or numeracy are not qualified to diagnose learning disabilities. Adults may feel that they have reached a mature age without diagnosis, and that it is "too late" now. Some adults who have the symptoms of a learning disability may in fact have other reasons for their problems. If these can be ascertained, appropriate learning or teaching strategies can be chosen.

However, if a learning disability is identified, the student can be helped in three main ways:

- The first is by strengthening self esteem. This can occur through awareness of the disability, understanding personal strengths and weaknesses, knowing what compensatory strategies may help and knowing the legal rights and services for which they qualify.
- Assistive technology may also be of use. Tape recorders, electronic notebooks, videos, books on tape or disk and word processing tools such as spelling or grammar check have helped some students.
- Another form of assistance is awareness of teaching strategies that allow extended time and accommodate a range of learning styles. A range of assessment techniques may allow learning disabled students to demonstrate their knowledge or skills.

Memory Tips for Students with Learning Disabilities

- Sort information - group new information into categories so it is easier to retrieve.
- Review frequently - study new information the same day it is heard, then do a small review each day.
- Use humour or exaggeration - information stays in the memory longer if it is novel and interesting.
- Explore the senses - try learning visually, verbally and kinaesthetically, or combine the senses, to find what works best.
- Colour code - use coloured pens, highlighters, post it notes, or flags to store information so it makes an impression on the memory.
- Make visual aids - draw pictures or cartoon characters, graphs, tables, charts, timelines etc to aid memory.
- Rehearse aloud - study with someone or use a tape recorder to say what needs to be memorised.
- Make it physical - pacing, jumping, throwing a ball or writing may enhance the memory. Typing or rewriting notes is effective for some people.

**For more information, contact:
SPELD Qld Inc, 3 Oriel Rd, Clayfield, Q 4011
Dyslexia Information Service, 213 Fullarton Rd, Eastwood, SA 5063**

References:
<http://www.idonline> <http://www.interdys.org/abcsofdyslexia> <http://www.dircsa.org.au/pub/docs/dysl.htm>
Ryan, M. Social and emotional problems related to dyslexia, The International Dyslexia Association
Adults with learning disabilities: definitions and issues, National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Centre, Washington DC

*Learning disabilities should not be confused with intellectual disabilities.
The next Tutor Tip will deal with strategies to assist literacy and numeracy students who are intellectually impaired.*



TUTOR S' TIPS

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Strategies for Identifying and Dealing with Learning Disabilities

What is a learning disability?

A learning disability is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide variety of disorders, including disorders in one or more of the basic psychological processes used in understanding or using spoken or written language.

Learning disabilities:

- are very diverse
- can range from mild to severe.
- can be one specific problem or a range of difficulties
- may lie in cognition, perception, language, attention, motor skills or social skills
- often relate to the areas of maths, listening, speaking, reading, writing and spelling
- are often most obvious while a child is at school
- can occur across a person's life span
- are a lifelong condition
- may have negative effects on education and training, vocation, self-esteem, social interaction and independent living



People with learning disabilities:



- have average to above average intelligence
- have ability but this is not matched to their achievement
- regularly perform below their potential
- sometimes try to cope with learning problems through the development of unconventional ways to learn
- may develop low self-esteem, learned helplessness, frustration, stress, anxiety or depression
- may experience related negative effects in family and work relationships

One well known learning disability is dyslexia. Dyslexia is often a language based learning difficulty, but may also be associated with visual or auditory problems. True dyslexia is not curable, but it is manageable, especially if intervention occurs at a young age. A dyslexic person can learn to read in spite of seeing things scrambled.

A person with dyslexia may see:

Saw the bog unber the huose? instead of: Was the dog under the house?

People with dyslexia may spell poorly and try to hide their spelling problems. They can have an inadequate vocabulary and avoid writing or taking notes. They may have trouble with summarising. Working or reading slowly, with inaccuracies and misreading information may also indicate dyslexia. Grasping abstract concepts can be difficult. Other signs may be inconsistent errors and difficulty remembering sequences. Understandably, dyslexic people often have social and emotional problems as a result of their disability.

Some adults who need literacy or numeracy help may have an undiagnosed learning disability. Others who have heard the label may have "self diagnosed" as being learning disabled. Without a full psychological assessment, administered by a qualified person, it is not possible to determine the real cause of the problem. If a person is able to understand and accept their condition and receive assistance to manage it, they may be able to make adjustments to assist their learning.

Whatever the cause of literacy and numeracy problems, these can be addressed by finding the learning style and strategies that best suit the individual.

What are the characteristics of people with learning disabilities?

Possible characteristics of people with learning disabilities

- Language, visual or auditory problems.
- Poor spelling
- Inadequate vocabulary
- Avoidance of writing
- Misreading information
- Lose place when reading
- Work or read slowly, with inaccuracies
- Poor grasp of abstract concepts
- Poor memory skills
- Trouble with summarizing
- Work in jobs below intellectual capacity
- Have difficulty planning and organizing
- Have problems with time
- Inconsistent performance
- Tire easily
- Have constant nagging uncertainty
- Competent in oral language
- Well developed memory skills
- Good people skills
- Spatially talented
- Entrepreneurial

Interventions

- (Early intervention is best - kindergarten / first grade)
- Work on one area at a time
- Give individual attention
- Give information more than once
- Give more practice
- Relate concepts to past experience
- Give extra time to organise and complete work (NB copying)
- Read material out aloud
- Split long words into syllables
- Focus on comprehension
- Focus on a small section of text
- Grade work on content, not spelling errors
- Test orally
- Be positive - reward often - build self esteem
- Use any tool that works - tapes, calculators etc
- Provide a quiet learning environment
- Focus on the student's strengths to compensate for the weaknesses
- Meet the student's needs

Auditory and visual processing disorders are commonly symptoms of learning disabilities.

Possible characteristics of auditory processing disorders

- Difficulty analysing or making sense of information taken in through the ears
- Unable to recognise or isolate individual sounds in a word
- Unable to recognise similarities between words (eg rhyming words)
- Unable to identify the number of sounds in a word
- Difficulty following verbal instructions
- Trouble recalling information heard
- Difficulty remembering order of items in a list or sounds in a word
- Trouble blending sounds to make a word

Interventions

- Give oral instructions plus written and visual clues
- Simplify verbal directions
- Slow rate of speech
- Minimalise distractions
- Rhyming / sorting games



Possible characteristics of visual processing disorders

- Hindered ability to make sense of information taken in through the eyes
- Difficulty perceiving words and numbers as separate units
- Directionality problems in reading and maths
- Confusion of similarly shaped letters eg. b/d/, p/q
- Poor visual discrimination - identifying objects based on colour, form, shape, pattern, size and position
- Poor visual closure - recognising a symbol if entire object is not visible
- Unable to recognise familiar objects
- Difficulty perceiving parts of or whole objects
- Poor fine or gross motor skills

Interventions

- Enlarge the print
- Use window to block out peripheral material
- Use ruler or finger to focus on words
- Use paper with dark lines
- Use work sheets with simple structure
- Limit amount of material
- Divide paper into large and distinct sections



How does a tutor or teacher deal with an adult literacy or numeracy student who is intelligent but has unexplained difficulties in learning?

The approach will differ with each situation and personality, but these suggestions may be appropriate:

- Investigate the student's educational background.
- Find out if the student has ever had testing or assistance for the problem at school.

