INTRODUCTION

The New Hampshire Learning Disabilities (LD) Task Force is an informal collaboration by representatives of state agencies. Members are committed to improving opportunities for adults with learning disabilities. We meet to share information and to identify ways to be more helpful to our clients and students with diagnosed or suspected learning disabilities.

The LD Task Force began as a result of New Hampshire’s participation in a National Institute for Literacy conference on learning disabilities in 2001 and has continued since then, facilitated by Linda Swenson, LD specialist for the TANF program and for adult education, until her retirement in 2011.

This year the Task Force identified as a priority a need to provide clear information about learning disabilities and existing services. This publication is the result of our efforts to gather information for the use of staff members, clients and students.

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT LEARNING DISABILITIES

By Robin Letendre

What are the types of learning disabilities (LD)?

LD is a broad term. There are many different kinds of learning disabilities, most often falling into three broad categories:

1. Reading disabilities, which are often referred to as dyslexia.
2. Written language disabilities, which are often referred to as dysgraphia.
3. Math disabilities, which are often referred to as dyscalculia.

Other related categories include disabilities that affect memory, social skills, and executive functions such as deciding to begin a task, the steps to do a task, and the ability to follow through on a task.

Dyslexia, which is commonly known as difficulty reading, is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. To read successfully, one must:

- Focus attention on the printed symbols.
- Recognize the sounds associated with letters.
- Understand words and grammar.
- Build ideas and images.
- Compare new ideas to what you already know.
- Store ideas in memory.

A person with dyslexia can have problems in any of the tasks involved in reading. Researchers, however, have found that a significant number of people who have dyslexia are unable to distinguish or separate the sounds of spoken words.
Being able to hear separate sounds and being able to rhyme are key components of being able to learn how to read.

Reading is not just about being able to recognize words. If the brain is unable to form images, or relate new images and concepts to what is stored in a person’s memory, then the reader cannot understand or remember the new concepts. This is problematic when it comes to reading comprehension skills.

**Characteristics of people with reading difficulties are:**

- Does not read for pleasure.
- Does not use reading to gather information.
- Has problems identifying individual sounds in spoken words.
- Relies heavily on context to read new or unused words.
- Oral reading contains many errors, repetitions, guesses, and pauses.
- Efforts in reading are so focused on word recognition that they detract from reading comprehension.
- Have problems with comprehension that go beyond word recognitions.
- May have limited language skills that affect comprehension.
- Has limited use of reading strategies.
- An inactive reader, which means not previewing text, monitoring comprehension, or summarizing what is read.
- Rarely practices reading, which may compound reading difficulties.
- Lacks complex language and word knowledge.

**Dysgraphia,** or the difficulty with writing involves several brain areas and functions. The brain networks for vocabulary, grammar, hand movement, and memory must all be in good working order. A developmental writing disorder may result from problems in any of these areas.

**Characteristics of people with writing difficulties are:**

- Have difficulty communicating through writing.
- Written output is severely limited.
- Writing is disorganized.
- Lack a clear purpose for writing.
- Do not use the appropriate text structures.
- Show persistent problems in spelling.
About Learning Disabilities—Information for New Hampshire Adults

- Have difficulties with mechanics of written expression.
- Handwriting is sloppy and difficult to read.
- Demonstrate difficulties in revising.

**Dyscalculia**, or difficulty with mathematics, impacts many areas of a student’s mathematical life. Math involves recognizing numbers and symbols, memorizing facts, aligning numbers, and understanding abstract concepts like place value and fractions. Problems with numbers or basic concepts are likely to show up in learners with math difficulties.

**Characteristics of people with math difficulties are:**

- Do not readily remember and/or retrieve math facts.
- Do not use visual imagery effectively.
- Have visual-spatial deficits.
- Become confused with math operations, especially multi-step processes.
- Have difficulties in language processing that affect the ability to do math problem solving.

**What is a Specific Learning Disability?**

A learning disability stems from a neurological condition within the individual that makes one or more of the processes of learning extremely difficult.

It is a disability that can be diagnosed throughout the life span of the individual. It may be diagnosed in early childhood, elementary school, high school, or adulthood. When a disability is identified in adulthood, it typically occurs when a parent has their own child identified, and begins to see that their child’s problem with learning resembles their own.

To be identified with a learning disability, the individual must undergo an IQ test as well as an achievement test. If the achievement test scores are in line with the IQ test, the individual does NOT have a learning disability. If the person is achieving less than expected based on his or her IQ, a learning disability diagnosis is possible.
Characteristics of a Specific Learning Disability

- Affects thinking.
- Based on conditions within the individual, or intrinsic, to the individual.
- There is no single "checklist" that works for identifying a specific learning disability. Each person has a unique set of characteristics for his or her own specific learning disability.
- Neurologically based, or simply said, the learning disability results from a person's brain being "wired" differently.
- Differences in brain structure and function.
- Affects specific academic and functional tasks.
- It is possible to have SLD with other conditions, but those conditions cannot be the cause of the SLD. This is known as co-morbidity. For example, a person may have ADHD and LD, or LD and mental health issues, but the first condition does not cause the specific learning disability.
- They are real.
- They are a "hidden disability."
- There are marked differences, or patterns of strengths and weaknesses, in specific areas of functioning; for example, a person may excel in math computation, but may have difficulty with reading comprehension.
- To be considered an individual with a specific learning disability, the individual must have average to above average intelligence, but demonstrate deficits within a narrow range of specific performance.
- Individual variability is significant.
- Specific learning disabilities begin in childhood and span across the individual's lifetime.
- Specific learning disabilities do not go away.
- Individuals with a specific learning disability learn to compensate, and may also strengthen the area of need, but that area will remain as a relative challenge for the duration of the individual's life.
**Definition of Specific Learning Disability**

This definition was created by the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities in 2007. The definition reads, "Strong converging evidence supports the validity of the concept of SLD, or specific learning disability. This evidence is particularly impressive because it converges across different indicators and methodologies. The central concept of SLD involves disorders of learning and cognition that are intrinsic to the individual. SLD are specific in the sense that these disorders each significantly affect a relatively narrow range of academic and performance outcomes. SLD may occur in combination with other disabling conditions, but they are not due primarily to other conditions, such as mental retardation, behavioral disturbance, lack of opportunities to learn, or primary sensory deficits."

**Specific Learning Disability as defined by IDEA (2004):**

- **The term "specific learning disability"** means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language. The language may be spoken or written. The disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.
- **Disorders included:** specific learning disability includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.
- **Disorders not included:** specific learning disability does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.
Areas of Specific Learning Disabilities in the Academic Setting
- Oral expression
- Listening comprehension
- Written expression
- Basic reading skills
- Reading fluency skills
- Reading comprehension
- Mathematics calculation
- Mathematics problem solving

Areas of Specific Learning Disabilities in the Vocational Setting
- Attention
- Reasoning
- Processing
- Memory
- Communication
- Reading
- Writing
- Spelling
- Calculation
- Coordination
- Social competence
- Emotional maturity

Effects of Specific Learning Disability
- Negatively affects schooling experience.
- Negatively affects post-secondary schooling.
- Negatively affects post-secondary training.
- Negatively affects employment.
- Negatively affects interpersonal relationships.
- Negatively affects community integration.
- Critical for a person’s success in life is a match between a person’s strengths and weaknesses and his or her learning and employment environment.
Learning disabilities are difficult to understand for the individuals with the disability and for their friends, family, acquaintances, and co-workers since LD is a “hidden disability.”

**Effects of Specific Learning Disability, continued**

- Individuals with SLD do not feel “smart,” which leads to a lack of confidence in their own ability.
- Individuals with specific learning disabilities tend to have low academic skills, and require intense, frequent, and multi-sensory instruction and practice.
- Students with specific learning disabilities may have gaps in academic knowledge that are not typically determined by large-scale testing like CASAS or TABE.
- A low skill/high need profile is further complicated by secondary problems with self-esteem, self-management and motivation.
How Common are Specific Learning Disabilities?
While some educational outcomes for students with learning disabilities have shown improvements in recent years, overall they remain unacceptably low.

- Close to half of secondary students with SLD perform more than three grade levels below their enrolled grade in essential academic skills (45% in reading, 44% in math).\(^1\)
- 67% of students with SLD graduate from high school\(^2\) with a regular diploma vs. 74% of students in the general population.\(^3\)
- 20% of students with SLD drop out of high school\(^4\) vs. 8% of students in the general population.\(^5\)
- 10% of students with SLD are enrolled in a four-year college within two years of leaving school, compared with 28% of the general population.\(^6\)
- Among working-age adults with SLD versus those without SLD: 55% vs. 76% are employed; 6% vs. 3% of adults are unemployed; and 39% vs. 21% are not in the labor force partly because of lack of education.\(^7\)

\(^2\) IDEA Part B Exiting data, 2009-2010, Students 14-21, [www.IDEAdata.org](http://www.IDEAdata.org)
\(^4\) IDEA Part B Exiting data, 2009-2010, Students 14-21, [www.IDEAdata.org](http://www.IDEAdata.org)

More Statistics Relating to Specific Learning Disabilities
- The estimated incidence of learning disabilities in the general population is between 10 and 15 percent.
- Past surveys from Adult Basic Education (ABE) report an estimated incidence between 10 and 80 percent. The likely reason for this wide range is a lack of understanding about learning disabilities. It is possible that people with lower abilities were included in the teacher estimates and/or that students over-reported SLD.
Whatever the actual incidence, because adult education students have not been successful in “mainstream” education, it is reasonable to estimate that between 30-50% of ABE students have diagnosed or undiagnosed SLD.

Is Specific Learning Disability Genetic?
Researchers studying specific learning disabilities currently point to a link between genetics and specific learning disabilities. If a member of the family has a learning disability, odds increase that others in the family will too.

When a parent sees how much a child struggles with school, this may be a “light bulb” moment. The parent may realize that his or her own personal learning difficulties in school may be linked to a disability, just like the child’s.
Specific Learning Disability in Adulthood

Risks and Rewards

Learning disabilities can affect skills in listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, mathematics and reasoning skills that adults must use every day in fulfilling their roles as family members, employees and citizens. They may occur with, and be complicated by, problems in attention and social skills.

Experiences and hardships that adults with specific learning disabilities faced as younger individuals do not always go away during the adult years. Helping adult students recognize the risks and rewards of having a learning disability as an adult is the first step in helping them to manage their SLD and lead a successful life.

The Risks

Limited Educational Opportunities

Not all educators understand or are responsive to the needs of people with specific learning disabilities. When teaching methods are not appropriate, people with learning disabilities may become frustrated and experience failure. This may cause them to drop out of educational programs or make them afraid to enter other programs.

Limited Vocational Options

People with specific learning disabilities may have trouble finding and keeping a job. Limited literacy skills and poor organizational skills are also factors that might
result in low job satisfaction and underemployment. Some employers may not understand the nature of learning disabilities or know if they have a legal responsibility to provide reasonable accommodations.

**Isolation**

Adults with learning disabilities may misinterpret others' gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice. They may have trouble responding appropriately in social situations. This may cause some adults with specific learning disabilities to be isolated from others, both at work and in their communities. Adults with specific learning disabilities may feel inadequate and incapable. They may remember being teased, criticized, or even rejected by their peers. As a result, they may have a poor self-image and lack the confidence to try new things.

**Difficulty with Independent Living**

Adults with severe learning disabilities may have difficulty with tasks such as writing checks, filling out forms, taking phone messages and following directions.

**The Rewards**

![Image of people celebrating]

**Creative Problem-Solving**

Adults with learning disabilities must learn to work around their disabilities. This experience allows them to think "outside the box," often leading to more creative solutions and imaginative answers to problems.

**Outgoing Personality**

Many adults with learning disabilities develop outgoing personalities in an
attempt to compensate for their learning problems.

**Strong Compensatory Skills**

To make up for their learning disabilities, many people develop strong skills in other areas.

**Persistence**

Often, people with specific learning disabilities do not give up when attempting a difficult task. Despite frustrations, they keep trying until they meet with success.

**Empathy**

Persons with specific learning disabilities often provide support and understanding for others. Because they themselves have experienced the frustration that can result from having a learning disability, they can be much more supportive of others.


**Successful Living**

Adults with learning disabilities can make successful life adjustments and lead fulfilling lives. Here are some words of advice from successful adults with LD who have overcome obstacles and achieved success in school, at work, and in the community. Adults with learning disabilities can build their own success story if they:

- Recognize and accept their disability.
- Understand their disability and how it affects their life.
o Understand and value their unique strengths, talents and abilities.
o Learn strategies and techniques to work around the disability.
o Are goal-oriented and persevere in working toward and achieving positive results.
o Learn from failures and take action to change what’s not working.
o Build a support network of teachers, family members, friends, counselors and co-workers.

In addition to taking advice from others, many adults with learning disabilities have learned to use assistive technology to help them be more successful and productive in school, at work and at home.

Success doesn’t happen overnight. It’s a continuous process of understanding one’s strengths and challenges, and then making adjustments as needed.

Taken from:  www.ncld.org

The Learning Disabilities of America website has a variety of resources for adults living with a learning disability, including articles about how to be successful in employment, college, and parenting. See these at http://www.ldanatl.org/aboutld/adults/index.asp.

Possible Positive Consequences of Specific Learning Disabilities in Adulthood are:

o Problem-solving skills.
o Outgoing personality.
o Strong compensatory skills.
o Empathy.
o Persistence.
o Students with identified learning disabilities have at least average intellectual functioning—often above average to superior.
o Individuals with specific learning disabilities have the potential to improve skills and make progress with the right instruction and accommodations.
o Based on years of both failure and success in the classroom, in the workplace, and in life, individuals with specific learning disabilities often know what works best for them and in contrast, what does not work for them. They possess self-awareness for their success.
Possible Negative Consequences of Specific Learning Disabilities in Adulthood are:
- Restricted educational opportunities.
- Limited vocational options.
- Isolation.
- Poor self-concept.
- Dissatisfaction with life.
- Emotional overlay, which mean a repeated failure cycle which can lead to a poor self-concept, a lack of motivation to learn, and increased frustration and anxiety.
- Social stigmas.
- Limited awareness of rights and resources.
- Ineffective strategies.

Increasing the Success of Adults with Specific Learning Disabilities

To increase success, adults with specific learning disabilities must:
- Recognize the full extent of their specific learning disability.
- Understand exactly what their specific learning disability is and how it is evident in their adult life.
- Accept the full range of strengths and challenges associated with their specific learning disability.
- Develop a plan consistent with these strengths and challenges in order to attain their goals.
IDENTIFYING LEARNING DISABILITIES

What Is a Screening and How It Can Be Helpful?

A screening is not a formal evaluation. A screening takes place when a student has been suspected of having a specific learning disability in any of the 8 areas:

- Oral expression
- Listening comprehension
- Written expression
- Basic reading skills
- Reading fluency skills
- Reading comprehension
- Mathematics calculation
- Mathematics problem solving

An informal screening is to be conducted by a certified teacher. A screening can also be called an informal inventory. The purpose of an informal screening is for the teacher to try and glean from the student as much information as needed to help the student identify the areas in which there is an academic need.

During an informal screening, the teacher would look at the areas of reading, writing, and math, and determine if there is an area of strength and weakness when looking at the informal data.

Based on self-reporting, the student is a key reporter to their personal academic history in relating to the findings of the informal inventory.

If the informal inventory points to an area of disability, the recommendation for formal evaluation is made.

Screening instruments have the following characteristics:

- Helpful in determining the need for further testing.
- Inexpensive.
- Quick to administer, score and interpret.
- Appropriate for a large number of persons.
- May sometimes be administered in large groups of individuals.
- Narrow in purpose.
Able to provide a superficial assessment of several areas.

Usable without extensive training of staff.

The 5 step process for determining whether to administer a specific learning disability screening instrument:

1. Gather information about the learner.
2. Review observations with the learner.
   a. Prepare a summary and share with the learner
   b. Ask the learner to interpret the findings
   c. Suggest options to the learner
   d. Explain the process to the learner
3. Determine if the learner desires additional screening for specific learning disabilities.
   a. provide assurances of what will happen next
   b. discuss the next steps of the process
4. Select screening instruments.
5. Obtain informed consent.

Step 1 Defined
In gathering information about the learner, the learner’s work habits have to be considered. When looking at the learner’s work habits, consider:

- Refusal or reluctance to complete some tasks.
- Difficulty concentrating on tasks.
- Noticeable distraction caused by surrounding activity.
- Increasing frustration in completing tasks.
- Work turned in late.
- Difficulty in following a sequence.
- Difficulty in organizing work to get started.
- Inconsistent approaches to tasks.

Consider learner’s work samples:

- Marked differences in the levels of achievement.
- Erratic error patterns.
- Trouble following the procedures of a specific task.

Informal conversations with the learner:

- Conversation breaks caused by misperceptions.
- Limited vocabulary.
- Inappropriate humor.
- Listening comprehension errors.

Learner’s comments or questions pertaining to the informal assessment.

Medical histories that suggest developmental delays or dysfunctions:

- Perceptual-motor problems.
- Use of medications to control attention behaviors.
- Health problems during mother’s pregnancy or delivery.

Official records related to disabilities status:
o Assessment results from past schools or agencies.
o Individualize education plans available from school or agencies that can be obtained with the learner’s consent.

**Step 2 Defined**
After sitting with the student and having conducted the informal inventory, it is a must that you review the findings.

It is critical that you do not specifically say that the student has a learning disability. It is fine to say that there is a suspected disability.

Once the data has been reviewed, ask the student what they think about the data. Ask them:
o Do you think this information is accurate?
o What do you think this information means?
o Why do you think this particular skill is difficult for you?

**Step 3 Defined**
Once the informal inventory is done, it is critical that you have a discussion with the student in regards to following up with a formal assessment. Some points you may want to make during this discussion are:
o Other learners have found information from screening valuable in helping understand their achievement, regardless of results.
o Your interest in helping, but any further action is the learners’ choice.
o The choice does not need to be made immediately.
o The choice does not affect participation in any adult education program.
o Costs for the screening are free, but costs for the formal evaluation will have to be discussed.
o The decisions by the student can change at any time.

Writing the above points down will be helpful to the student so that they will have this information for future reference.

**Step 4 Defined**
Teachers can use screening tools, or informal inventories to help a student determine if they do have a suspected learning disability.

**Step 5 Defined**
When getting written consent from the student to conduct an informal inventory or formal assessment, the consent form should include:
o The name of the screening tests.
o The interval of time for screening.
o The purpose of the screening.
o Who will see the results.
o How the results will be used.
o Where the protocol forms will be stored and for how long.
o The adult’s signature and date.
o The program representative’s signature.
The learner should be given a copy of the informed consent form.

**Steps to Take after the Informal Inventory or Screening Has Been Conducted**

Once the informal inventory or screening has taken place, the following steps need to be taken:
- Prepare a written summary of the results and give a copy to the student.
- Review the results with the learner.
- Discuss the next steps with the learner.
- Prepare a workable plan.
- Discuss and implement any necessary accommodations.
Formal Diagnosis of LD and the Documentation Needed

How are learning disabilities identified?

A comprehensive set of tests is given to see why the student has difficulty.

Necessary Documentation
Guidelines for documenting a learning disability need to meet the following requirements:
1) Qualifications of the evaluator
2) Recency of documentation
3) Appropriate clinical documentation to substantiate the learning disability
4) Evidence to establish a rationale supporting the need for accommodations.

Qualifications of the Evaluator

Professionals conducting assessments, rendering diagnoses of learning disabilities, and making recommendations for appropriate accommodations must be qualified to do so. Comprehensive training and direct experience with an adolescent and adult LD population is essential.

The name, title and professional credentials of the evaluator, including information about license or certification (e.g., licensed psychologist) as well as the area of specialization, employment and state/province in which the individual practices should be clearly stated in the documentation. For example, the following professionals would generally be considered qualified to evaluate specific learning disabilities provided that they have additional training and experience in the assessment of learning problems in adolescents and adults:

- clinical or educational psychologists
- school psychologists
- neuropsychologists
- learning disabilities specialists
- medical doctors
- other professionals

Use of diagnostic terminology indicating a learning disability by someone whose training and experience are not in these fields is not acceptable. It is of utmost importance that evaluators are sensitive and respectful of cultural and linguistic differences in adolescents and adults during the assessment process. It is not considered appropriate for professionals to evaluate members of their families. All reports should be on letterhead, typed, dated, signed and otherwise legible.
Documentation

The provision of all reasonable accommodations and services is based upon assessment of the impact of the student's disabilities on his or her academic performance at a given time in the student's life. Therefore, it is in the student's best interest to provide recent and appropriate documentation relevant to the student's learning environment.

Flexibility in accepting documentation is important, especially in settings with significant numbers of non-traditional students. In some instances, documentation may be outdated or inadequate in scope or content. It may not address the student's current level of functioning or need for accommodations because observed changes may have occurred in the student's performance since the previous assessment was conducted. In such cases, it may be appropriate to update the evaluation report. Since the purpose of the update is to determine the student's current need for accommodations, the update, conducted by a qualified professional, should include a rationale for ongoing services and accommodations.

Substantiation of the Specific Learning Disability

Documentation should validate the need for services based on the individual's current level of functioning in the educational setting. A school plan such as an individualized education program (IEP) or a 504 plan is not sufficient documentation, but it can be included as part of a more comprehensive assessment battery. A comprehensive assessment battery and the resulting diagnostic report should include a diagnostic interview, assessment of aptitude, academic achievement, information processing and a diagnosis.

A. Diagnostic interview

An evaluation report should include the summary of a comprehensive diagnostic interview. Learning disabilities are commonly manifested during childhood, but not always formally diagnosed. Relevant information regarding the student's academic history and learning processes in elementary, secondary and postsecondary education should be investigated. The diagnostician, using professional judgment as to which areas are relevant, should conduct a diagnostic interview which may include:

- a description of the presenting problem(s)
- developmental, medical, psycho-social and employment histories
- family history (including primary language of the home and the student's current level of English fluency)
- discussion of dual diagnosis where indicated
B. Assessment

The neuropsychological or psycho-educational evaluation for the diagnosis of a specific learning disability must provide clear and specific evidence that a learning disability does or does not exist. Assessment, and any resulting diagnosis, should consist of and be based on a comprehensive assessment battery which does not rely on any one test or subtest.

Evidence of a substantial limitation to learning or other major life activity must be provided. A list of commonly used tests is included in Appendix B. Minimally, the domains to be addressed must include the following:

1. Aptitude

A complete intellectual assessment with all subtests and standard scores reported.

2. Academic achievement

A comprehensive academic achievement battery is essential with all subtests and standard scores reported for those subtests administered. The battery should include current levels of academic functioning in relevant areas such as reading (decoding and comprehension), mathematics, and oral and written language.

3. Information processing

Specific areas of information processing (e.g., short- and long-term memory, sequential memory, auditory and visual perception/processing, processing speed, executive functioning and motor ability) should be assessed.

Other assessment measures such as non-standard measures and informal assessment procedures or observations may be helpful in determining performance across a variety of domains. Other formal assessment measures may be integrated with the above instruments to help determine a learning disability and differentiate it from co-existing neurological and/or psychiatric disorders (i.e., to establish a differential diagnosis). In addition to standardized tests, it is also very useful to include informal observations of the student during the test administration.

C. Specific diagnosis

Individual "learning styles," "learning differences," "academic problems" and "test difficulty or anxiety," in and of themselves, do not constitute a learning disability. It is important to rule out alternative explanations for problems in learning such as emotional, attention or motivational problems that may be interfering with learning but do not constitute a learning disability. The diagnostician is
encouraged to use direct language in the diagnosis and documentation of a learning disability, avoiding the use of terms such as "suggests" or "is indicative of."

If the data indicate that a learning disability is not present, the evaluator should state that conclusion in the report.

D. Test scores

Standard scores and/or percentiles should be provided for all normed measures. Grade equivalents are not useful unless standard scores and/or percentiles are also included. The data should logically reflect a substantial limitation to learning for which the student is requesting the accommodation. The particular profile of the student's strengths and weaknesses must be shown to relate to functional limitations that may necessitate accommodations.

The tests used should be reliable, valid and standardized for use with an adolescent/adult population. The test findings should document both the nature and severity of the learning disability. Informal inventories, surveys and direct observation by a qualified professional may be used in tandem with formal tests in order to further develop a clinical hypothesis.

E. Clinical summary

A well-written diagnostic summary based on a comprehensive evaluation process is a necessary component of the report. Assessment instruments and the data they provide do not diagnose; rather, they provide important elements that must be integrated by the evaluator with background information, observations of the client during the testing situation, and the current context. It is essential, therefore, that professional judgment be utilized in the development of a clinical summary. The clinical summary should include:

1. demonstration of the evaluator's having ruled out alternative explanations for academic problems as a result of poor education, poor motivation and/or study skills, emotional problems, attention problems and cultural/language differences.

2. indication of how patterns in the student's cognitive ability, achievement and information processing reflect the presence of a learning disability.

3. indication of the substantial limitation to learning or other major life activity presented by the learning disability and the degree to which it impacts the individual in the learning context for which accommodations are being requested.

4. indication as to why specific accommodations are needed and how the effects of the specific disability are accommodated.
The summary should also include any record of prior accommodation or auxiliary aids, including any information about specific conditions under which the accommodations were used (e.g., standardized testing, final exams, and licensing or certification examinations).

1. For assistance in finding a qualified professional:
   - contact the disability services coordinator at the institution you attend or plan to attend to discuss documentation needs.
   - discuss your future plans with the disability services coordinator. If additional documentation is required, seek assistance in identifying a qualified professional.

2. In selecting a qualified professional:
   - ask what his or her credentials are.
   - ask what experience he or she has had working with adults with learning disabilities.
   - ask if he or she has ever worked with the service provider at your institution or with the agency to which you are sending material.

3. In working with the professional:
   - take a copy of these guidelines to the professional.
   - encourage him or her to clarify questions with the person who provided you with these guidelines.
   - be prepared to be forthcoming, thorough and honest with requested information.
   - know that professionals must maintain confidentiality with respect to your records and testing information.

4. As follow-up to the assessment by the professional:
   - request a written copy of the assessment report.
   - request the opportunity to discuss the results and recommendations.
   - request additional resources if you need them.
   - maintain a personal file of your records and reports.

The Identification and Diagnosis Process Simply Stated

The overall goal of a Learning Disability (LD) assessment is to clearly identify the existence and impact of a biological, neurological or acquired (from brain injury) learning disability. Recommended “best-practice” suggests a comprehensive process that includes not only standardized test results and interpretation, but...
history, observation, and the functional limitations of a learning disability on the adult’s performance in school, work, and life.

A comprehensive process of assessment for adult learning disabilities should include the following components:

- Personal, medical, family, and language background
- Educational history of difficulties and/or special service
- Previous assessment results (if available and current)
- Observations
- Tests used and results for intellectual performance or cognitive abilities
- Identification of cognitive strengths and weaknesses
- Tests used and results for academic achievement skills
- Identification of achievement strengths and weaknesses
- Diagnosis statement for the learning disability
- Educational and/or vocational recommendations for instruction, accommodation, and/or referral

In addition, the above components must be documented in a professional written report on letterhead and signed by the examiner(s) for review by various agencies determining eligibility for service or approval for accommodations.

**Tests for Assessing Adolescents and Adults**

When selecting a battery of tests, it is critical to consider the technical adequacy of instruments including their reliability, validity and standardization on an appropriate norm group. The professional judgment of an evaluator in choosing tests is important. The following list is provided as a helpful resource, but it is not intended to be definitive or exhaustive.

**Aptitude**

- Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale - Revised (WAIS-R)
- Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-educational Battery - Revised: Tests of Cognitive Ability
- Kaufman Adolescent and Adult Intelligence Test
- Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale (4th Ed.)

The Slosson Intelligence Test - Revised and the Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test are primarily screening devices which are not comprehensive enough to provide the kinds of information necessary to make accommodation decisions.

**Academic achievement**

- Scholastic Abilities Test for Adults (SATA)
- Stanford Test of Academic Skills
Specific achievement tests such as:

- Nelson-Denny Reading Skills Test
- Stanford Diagnostic Mathematics Test
- Test of Written Language - 3 (TOWL-3)
- Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests - Revised

Specific achievement tests are useful instruments when administered under standardized conditions and interpreted within the context of other diagnostic information. The Wide Range Achievement Test - 3 (WRAT-3) is not a comprehensive measure of achievement and therefore is not useful if used as the sole measure of achievement.

**How is a Diagnosis Made?**
A diagnosis is made when the evaluator has the student undergo a battery of formal evaluations, and the findings support that the student’s achievement in particular areas are not supported by the student’s IQ.

**When Is it Useful for an Adult to Have a Formal Diagnosis?**
It is useful to have an adult have a formal diagnosis of specific learning disability when they are applying for accommodations for the GED Tests or are looking at applying to post-secondary schooling or training.

A student who has a documented specific learning disability is able to use the documentation at post-secondary schooling to help them get the appropriate and reasonable accommodations that are necessary for them to be successful in their post-secondary schooling or training.
It is important for adults with specific learning disabilities to be aware of, and understand, their legal rights and responsibilities in regards to their SLD.

Adults with specific learning disabilities need to know that there are federal laws that protect their rights, and that they know how to advocate for themselves in both work and school environments.

Laws regarding special education change as an adult leaves secondary schooling and pursues post-secondary schooling, training, or employment.

Adults with SLD must know these laws so that they know what their rights are and they know how to ask for accommodation in either the work place or in school.

There are 3 federal laws that affect adults with specific learning disabilities

1. IDEA, or Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
2. Rehabilitation Act, or Rehab Act, and more commonly known as Section 504
3. ADAAA, or the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act. This was amended in 2008.

Under IDEA, students with SLD are provided with:

- Individualized education programs, or IEP’s
- Free and appropriate education, or FAPE
- Protection of the rights of adults and children with disabilities
- Least restrictive environment, or LRE
Provision of funds to states to provide special education services
Under the Rehab Act, or Section 504, students with SLD are provided with:
  - Civil rights law
  - Discrimination is unlawful in federally funded employment and activities, which includes school.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act, or ADAAA, students with SLD are provided with:
  - Civil rights law
  - Extends Section 504 of the Rehab Act
  - Prohibits discrimination in all aspects of society upon the disabled.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, individuals with specific learning disabilities are guaranteed certain protections and rights of equal access to programs and services; thus the documentation should indicate that the disability substantially limits some major life activity.

**IDEA**
Serves the needs of students from early identification, birth, through the completion of school with a high school diploma, or which must occur on the student’s 21st birthday.

IDEA ends when the student exits school with a high school diploma or when they age out at 21.

Students who are suspected of having a disability are referred to school personnel for identification and diagnosis.

It is the responsibility of the school system to provided diagnostic services. IEP’s will be developed if a disability is identified. The IEP identifies the special services that are to be provided by the school district to allow the student to receive a free and appropriate education.

The IEP states the services that are to be provided to the family, at NO COST. The student is entitled to these services, free of charge, due to IDEA.
The entitlement of services is supported directly by funding to the schools for special education services and also related services such as speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy and counseling.

**Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, 1973**

To date, the act has not been updated. The language is outdated. "Handicapped persons" is used instead of people with disabilities.

The Rehabilitation Act was enacted to prevent discrimination against individuals with disabilities. The Rehab Act applies to organizations receiving federal funds, which includes educational organizations and employers.

The one purpose of the Rehab Act is to offer individuals with disabilities the same opportunities to succeed as non-disabled individuals. This is known as “equal access”.

Equal access means that qualified persons with disabilities should have an equal opportunity to participate in or benefit from, their educations or employment situation.

Within the Rehab Act is “reasonable accommodations”. This means specifically that services, “that are not required to produce the identical result or level of achievement for handicapped or non-handicapped persons, must afford handicapped persons equal opportunity to obtain the same result, to gain the same benefit, or to reach the same level of achievement.”

This can be commonly referred to as “leveling the playing field”.

The Rehab Act was not designed to give individuals with disabilities advantages, but to allow them to participate with reasonable accommodations.

The Rehab Act does not require an educational program or employer to reach out to the individual or identify the individual as having a disability.

Once a person has been admitted to an educational program or is employed, it is up to the individual to self-disclose a disability in order to obtain accommodations or services.

Within the Rehab Act, there are no guidelines provided or mentioned for evaluation or assessment. An individual under the Rehab Act must provide their own documentation stating their disability.
Post-secondary institutions are under NO obligation to pay for evaluations or assessments.

Under “order of selection”, individuals with learning disabilities tend to find themselves at the bottom of the hierarchy of need within federally funded organizations that offer assistance and evaluations for individuals with disabilities. Individuals with SLD tend to fall at the bottom of the scale since their disabilities are not severe, as compared to blindness, deafness, or mental retardation for example. Individuals with more severe disabilities are services first through state vocational agencies that receive federal funds.

The Rehab Act does provide funding for services, but services are not guaranteed and they are competitive based on need.

ADAAA
American with Disabilities Act was enacted in 1990. It was amended in 2008. The ADAAA is a civil rights act, and it extends the concepts in the Rehab Act of 1973.

The purpose of the ADAAA is to make a broad range of American society non-discriminatory, not just entities that receive federal funding. The ADAAA does NOT provide services to individuals.

The ADAAA encompasses most adult life situations. Education, employment, public services, everyday facilities, such as the bank and the grocery store, telecommunications and transportation.

The ADAAA is applicable to all individuals of all ages. It does require self-disclosure, and is based on reasonable accommodations.

The ADAAA does NOT receive funding for its services.
Disclosing a Learning Disability

Considerations to Make When Deciding to Disclose

How and When to Disclose
In a disability context, “disclosure” means “people with disabilities share personal information about their disability for the specific purpose of receiving accommodations.”

Accommodations are defined as, “supports that an individual needs to function in learning environments to compensate for the diagnosed disability.

Once an individual discloses that they have a disability, they have legal rights. Adults with disabilities have to make the decision about what they want to disclose, and to what extent, they want to disclose, to the school or the employer.

For many adults, the decision to disclose can be a difficult decision to make.

The adult with the SLD has to decide who they will disclose to and how much they will disclose.

Adults with SLD should be able to provide documentation supporting their self-disclosure. This documentation can take the form of: a letter or report from a professional.

The documentation should state how the learning disability affects the individual’s performance and recommend reasonable accommodations.

Self-disclosure is a difficult topic to approach for many adults with disabilities. Many adults choose NOT to self-disclose because:

- They may feel that self-disclosure would lead to exclusion by peers or supervisors.
- They may be afraid that they will be treated differently.
- They may feel that others will view their disability as a sign of weakness.
They may have not learned how to self-advocate.
They do not have documentation to prove that they do have a disability. For adults who do not have documentation, acquiring the proper documentation is costly.

When an adult does choose to self-disclose, they benefit from:
Receiving reasonable accommodations to pursue school activities more effectively.
Development of a support network of trained professionals, teachers, employment providers and so on, to help the adult with the disability adjust to the challenges that they have to face in education and in employment.
Legal protection against discrimination, as provided to them by the Rehab Act and also ADAAA.
Improving the adult’s self-image by helping him or her develop and improve their self-advocacy skills.
Empowers the student.

Where to Disclose
When a person decides to self-disclose that they have a learning disability, they must consider their work setting as well as their education setting.

In a work setting, the appropriate place to self-disclose would be the human resource officer. If there is no human resource officer, then the adult with the learning disability would want to self-disclose directly to their employer.

In an education setting, when an adult decides to self-disclose, he or she would want to go to the disability office. In a smaller setting, the adult with a learning disability would want to seek out the person in charge of intake or ask for the appropriate person to speak to in regards to learning disabilities. An adult with learning disabilities may also choose to self-disclose to the individual teacher, tutor or counselor.

An individual with a learning disability should disclose prior to enrollment in the education program, or during the interview process if there is one. The adult with SLD should talk with the person conducting the interview about any accommodations that may be needed during the interview process.
If an adult with SLD anticipates that they will need accommodations to complete schooling or to complete job tasks, it is at this initial meeting that would be most beneficial to the adult to self-disclose the nature of the learning disability.

Individuals with disabilities may disclose this information at any time in the schooling career or employment.

Self-disclosure is most beneficial when it is done before issues begin to arise, due to the lack of accommodations.

**What Information to Self-Disclose**

- Information about the disability, including assessments and documentation of the disability.
- Types of academic and employment-related accommodations that have worked in the past.
- Types of academic and employment-related accommodations the individual may anticipate needing.
- How the learning disability affects the individual’s capacity to learn, study, and work efficiently.

**How to Self-Disclose**

When it comes to self-disclosure, it really is up to the individual with the learning disability to decide how they will self-disclose. However, when self-disclosure takes place, confidentiality is vital. The adult with SLD may prefer to set up a time and place to have a one-on-one private conversation within the academic setting or work place. If an individual were to begin to disclose their disability, it is critical that the conversation be taken to a private place.

If a learning disability has been evaluated in the past, bringing the documentation to the self-disclosure would be helpful.

If a person does not have documentation, then the adult is still helped by having the person tell you the most that they can about their disability and what makes them think that they have a disability.
Interview Questions to be Used When a Student is Self-Disclosing

The following two interviews may be helpful:

**Student Interview One** is a special list of progressive interview questions to ask of American-born ABE students who may have specific learning disabilities.

**Student Interview Two** is an additional and more generic list of questions to elicit and document student self-knowledge of what works and what does not work for them.

**Student Interview One**

Name_________________

**Directions:** Not all questions need to be asked. Begin with #1 and proceed to #2, #3, etc., if ‘yes’ responses are given or if information is essential for program planning. Discontinue the questions when a sequence of ‘no’ responses is given. Discontinue if the student appears uncomfortable or offended by the questioning.

1. Did you receive any special help in school?  
   _____yes _____no

2. What subjects did you receive help in?

3. What type of special help was useful?

4. What type of special help was not useful?

5. Did other family members (parents, siblings) receive any special help while in school?  _____yes _____no
6. Did you receive help in:
   elementary school? _____yes _____no
   middle school? _____yes _____no
   high school? _____yes _____no

7. Do you remember being tested for a learning disability? _____yes _____no

8. Do you remember having an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) or yearly meetings about your IEP? _____yes _____no

9. Do you remember receiving any special accommodations (or changes) in your classes, assignments, or testing? _____yes _____no

10. What special accommodations were helpful?

Note: Often Chapter or Title 1 service is discontinued at middle school due to limited funding. Special education, by law, must continue if needed until graduation or age 22 years.
Student Interview Two

Name______________________

Directions: The following questions can be asked of American-born or foreign-born students. The purpose is to determine a more complete history of education and reported school experiences. The interviewer may pick and choose the questions that will provide useful information for understanding and program planning.

1. Where did you go to school?

2. How many years of school did you complete?

3. Was your attendance regular or irregular?
   _____yes _____no

   Please explain any attendance problems.

4. What was your favorite subject? Why?

5. What was your least favorite subject? Why?

6. How long have you been out of school?
7. Do you read, write, or do math at home or work?  _____yes _____no

If yes, what do you do?

8. How do you learn new things at home or work?

9. If you are having difficulty learning new things at home or work, what do you do to help yourself?

10. What is most important for a teacher or tutor to know about you and how you learn?
Confidentiality

The educational setting and workplace setting are responsible for keeping a person’s disability confidential. The educational setting and workplace setting MAY NOT release any part of the documentation without the person’s informed AND written consent.

If confidentiality is broken, this could result in a violation of the person’s rights under the Rehab Act or ADAAA.

Each program needs to develop their own personal plan to keep records confidential.

Programs need to develop policies, procedures and practices for keeping records confidential.

Disability-related information is often stored in locked files with limited access.

Disability-related information should only be shared directly with the parties involved and when there has been a written release of information signed by the student.
Accommodations

It is important to recognize that accommodation needs can change over time and are not always identified through the initial diagnostic process. Conversely, a prior history of accommodation does not, in and of itself, warrant the provision of a similar accommodation.

The diagnostic report should include specific recommendations for accommodations as well as an explanation as to why each accommodation is recommended.

The evaluators should describe the impact the diagnosed learning disability has on a specific major life activity as well as the degree of significance of this impact on the individual.

The evaluator should support recommendations with specific test results or clinical observations.

If accommodations are not clearly identified in a diagnostic report, the disability service provider should seek clarification and, if necessary, more information.

The final determination for providing appropriate and reasonable accommodations rests with the institution.

In instances where a request for accommodations is denied in a postsecondary institution, a written grievance or appeal procedure should be in place.

Accommodations Defined

Accommodations adjust the manner in which instructional or testing situations are presented and/or evaluated, so that individuals with documented disabilities can learn and/or demonstrate their learning in a fair and equitable fashion.

Selecting and monitoring the effectiveness of accommodations should be an ongoing process, and changes, with involvement of students and educators, should be made as often as needed. The key is to be sure that chosen accommodations address students' specific areas of need and facilitate the demonstration of skill and knowledge.

Some frequently used accommodations within the classroom are:

- Extended time to complete exams, quizzes, and/or in-class writing assignments
- Quiet, distraction-reduced testing location
- Reading assistance, for example reading the test questions aloud to the student, clarifying test questions, rewording test questions
- No penalty for spelling mistakes, or for using spell check
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- Use of a calculator
- Splitting up lengthy test exams into sections
- Use of hand written test response rather than using a test booklet
- Use of alternative media, such as audio-books
- Use of the computer and word processing
- Text-to-speech software
- Speech-to-text software
- Enlarged print
- Shared note-taking

Guidelines for Accommodations

Accommodations should be chosen to fit the specific needs of the individual asking for them.

Accommodations should:

- Allow the most integrated experience possible.
- Not compromise the essential course or program requirements.
- Not pose a threat to personal or public safety.
- Not impose an undue financial or administrative burden on the program.

Classroom Accommodations That Are Helpful for Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

- Presentation:
  - Provide on audio tape
  - Provide in large print
  - Reduce number of items per page or line
  - Provide a designated reader
  - Present instructions orally
- Response:
  - Allow for verbal responses
  - Allow for answers to be dictated to a scribe
  - Allow the use of a tape recorder to capture responses
  - Permit responses to be given via computer
  - Permit answers to be recorded directly into test booklet
- Timing:
  - Allow frequent breaks
  - Extend allotted time for a test
- Setting:
  - Provide preferential seating
  - Provide special lighting or acoustics
  - Provide a space with minimal distractions
  - Administer a test in small group setting
  - Administer a test in private room or alternative test site
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• Test Scheduling
  o Administer a test in several timed sessions or over several days
  o Allow subtests to be taken in a different order
  o Administer a test at a specific time of day

• Other
  o Provide special test preparation
  o Provide on-task/focusing prompts
  o Provide any reasonable accommodation that a student needs that does not fit under the existing categories

Effective Instruction for Students with Specific Learning Disability

Students with learning disabilities benefit from instruction that is explicit and well sequenced.

Effective teachers help students with specific learning disabilities learn how to use strategies for managing their assignments. For example, a teacher might teach students to use a graphic organizer that outlines the important information from a text. A different type of organizer might be used to help students remember to bring home the right supplies for a homework assignment.

Teachers often need to provide accommodations to help students learn in class. These are changes in how tasks are presented or responses are received that allow the student to do the same work as their fellow students. Students might receive the assignment in larger print or be allowed to take a spelling test by reciting the words instead of writing them. They might be given more time to complete an assignment.

Principles for Teaching Adults with Specific Learning Disabilities

For a teacher to be effective when teaching a student with specific learning disabilities, they must:
  o Select the appropriate curriculum.
  o Take into consideration the learner’s background.
  o Prepare and transform the information in ways that will make it more understandable.
  o Provide structure for lessons.
  o Incorporate specific instructional techniques into each session that compensate for specific learning disabilities.
  o Model the lesson.
  o Utilize the “I do, we do, you do” model.
  o Use a variety of techniques that will engage the learner in the lesson.
  o Work on critical thinking skills.
  o Activate prior knowledge.
Bridges to Practice (1999) defined “LD appropriate instruction” as lessons that follow these eight principles:

1. During all stages on instruction, the student is given choices about goals, objectives, pace, environments, and strategies.
2. The student must be regularly informed about progress towards goals or objectives.
3. Instruction must be explicit, direct, and systematic to ensure understanding and mastery.
4. Instructional lessons must follow a similar structure.
5. Lessons for skill mastery are structured differently than lessons for content mastery.
6. The teacher or tutor must be knowledgeable about the skill or content to be taught.
7. The teacher or tutor must use a variety of methods, materials, and accommodations.
8. The student must view the teacher or tutor as an ally or mentor in the learning process.
SERVICES AND ACCOMMODATIONS FOR ADULTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Vocational Rehabilitation  by Tina Greco

1. What services can be provided for adults with learning disabilities?
   http://www.education.nh.gov/career/vocational/faq.htm#services

2. What services can be provided for those who are not diagnosed but who are suspected of having learning disabilities?
   If you suspect that you may have a learning disability, and want to work, then VR can assist you in exploring options that may be available to you to provide diagnostic testing.

3. Who is an appropriate referral to VR?
   http://www.education.nh.gov/career/vocational/faq.htm#apply

4. How does participation with VR affect NHEP status?
   Participation in VR does not affect your status with NHEP. Where appropriate, there may be opportunity for cost sharing of services, and if needed, VR can provide NHEP with verification of activities that you are participating through VR.
Learning Disability Policies for TANF Recipients

The New Hampshire Employment Program is the employment program under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) financial assistance program. The mission of the New Hampshire Employment Program (NHEP) is to promote economic independence and help maintain and strengthen family life by enabling able-bodied adults with dependent children to assume responsibility for their families through work. Work is to be promoted by:

• Offering employment services, support services, and transitional financial, nutritional and medical assistance with the expectation that participants will move quickly towards employment; and
• Developing long-term employment skills that lead to self-sufficiency.

1) What policies are there about clients with Learning Disabilities? - Allowable work activities for NHEP are defined by federal regulations at 45 CFR 261.2. Most clients are required to participate in NHEP work activities as a condition of TANF eligibility. Federal law also requires minimum hours of participation in those activities. The State of New Hampshire’s administrative rules further define our policies for work activities and participation requirements at He-W 637.

NHEP activities further defined at He-W 637.22, Vocational Educational Training and 637.23, Post Secondary Education, specify accommodations for those with documented learning disabilities. Per federal regulations, both these activities have durational time limits. Per our State administrative rules, these time limits do not apply for those with a documented learning disability. Participants with a documented learning disability, verified by a state certified educational professional or licensed psychologist, are provided extended time to participate in these activities as indicated on the documentation that specifies the need and length of time for the accommodation.

Additionally, financial assistance under the TANF program has a lifetime limit of 60 months. Per our State administrative rules, an extension to the lifetime limit may be granted due to a learning disability of an adult family member. A signed statement from a licensed psychologist or state certified education professional licensed to certify, is required documentation of a learning disability. This documentation must specify that the individual has an existing learning disability that prevents them from working, participating in work-related activities; or prevents them from preparing for work, which will grant the person a 6-month extension to the TANF lifetime limit.

2) What are the options for a client with a learning disability? – For a client with a learning disability participating in the NHEP, a referral to Vocational Rehabilitation is always an option. Within our contracted NHEP services, contractors are expected to inform NHEP Employment Counselor Specialists of a suspected or documented LD to discuss possible referrals and next steps, while
providing individualized support with the reading, writing, and comprehension aspects of the program so a participant may continue to remain active in the program.

3) What steps are currently taken when a client discloses a learning disability? - If a client discloses that a learning disability exists, the NHEP Employment Counselor Specialist will work with the client to obtain documentation of the disability. If no documentation exists or is out of date, the Counselor can refer the participant to Vocational Rehabilitation for documentation, assessment and services.

NHEP Employment Counselor Specialists, along with our contracted staff, utilize the Washington State LD Screening tool for those who disclose, or may be suspected to have a potential LD.
Adult Education by Robin Letendre and Debbie Tasker

The Bureau of Adult Education of the New Hampshire Department of Education helps to fund adult education programs in many New Hampshire communities. See www.nhadulted.org for a map of locations. The programs include...

- Adult Basic Education for those who need to improve basic skills in reading, writing and math
- GED preparation
- English for Speakers of Other Languages
- Adult High School for people earning credits, usually in evening classes to complete a high school diploma
- Adult Learner Services—programs offering individual tutoring and small group classes.

Robin Letendre is the Learning Disabilities consultant for New Hampshire Bureau of Adult Education programs. Teachers and coordinators may call upon her for consultations about how best to serve adult learners with learning challenges. In most cases, the Bureau of Adult Education recommends that teachers work with adult learners to develop effective strategies for learning, rather than focusing on formal diagnosis of learning disabilities.

Some students whose goal is passing the GED Tests may need a formal diagnosis of learning disabilities to qualify for accommodations such as extra time or audio testing. In that case, a student should work with the disabilities coordinator in his/her adult learning center to discuss a way to pay for formal assessment.

Next steps if you already have an identification of a specific learning disability and wish to disclose it in an Adult Education program

If a student already has an identification of a specific learning disability, they must:

- Disclose this disability to their teacher, guidance counselor of the Adult Education program they are enrolled in, or the director of the Adult Education program.
- They must show proof of their identification by way of the documentation that they have from past schooling stating that they do have an identified specific learning disability.
- Documentation must be 5 years or younger to be considered valid for use of applying for accommodations on the GED.
- The student is to work in conjunction with their program’s teachers, guidance counselor and director to make reasonable accommodations that the student needs to be successful within their program.
- Apply for accommodations for the GED Tests utilizing the application process currently being used by GED Testing Service.
Options to Help with the Cost of Assessment and Diagnosis for Adult Education Students without Prior Identification

Being identified as having a specific learning disability is costly. Some students may have private insurance or be eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services because of an employment goal. For New Hampshire adult education low income students who have no other options, there is a scholarship program to help defray the cost of the academic testing.

A student qualifies for the scholarship by being an enrolled student of good standing within an adult education program supported by the state.

An application needs to be filled out by the student and the disability coordinator or program director to verify the financial need of the student.

The completed scholarship application is then reviewed and approved by the New Hampshire Adult Education Disability Committee.

Once the student has been approved for assessment, an evaluator is located to do the assessment for the student and the report. LD consultant Robin Letendre can help make arrangements with qualified evaluators who have agreed to assess adult education students.
1. **What accommodations are available that do not require a formal application?**

Some GED candidates can benefit from simple adaptations that are available for anyone, but they should be requested at the time of registration in order for the local Examiner to be prepared.

Adaptations include:

- Colored transparent overlays.
- Earplugs.
- Scrap paper.
- Straightedge.
- Magnifying device.
- Priority seating.

All of the previous adaptations are available and offered on-site as testing begins; advance approval not needed, but the local Examiner will monitor use of adaptation devices.

Other adaptations are not available on-site and must be requested ahead of time or brought from home.

- One test per day – must be requested at time of registration, including decision of which test on which day; usually **opposite** from usual test/day (e.g., Monday is usually Math & Writing, Wednesday is usually Science, Social Studies & Reading, so a Math test being taken alone would be scheduled for Wednesday).
- Visor or shade from fluorescent lighting (such as baseball cap – must be examined and approved/disapproved by Examiner on-site).
- Cushion – bring from home; must be examined and be approved/disapproved by Examiner on-site.
- Large print test edition – must be requested ahead of time to be sent from NH GED Office.
- Food/beverage in testing room for medical/health reasons – must be requested ahead of time and approved by NH GED Administrator with physician verification.
- Medical devices – may require verification from physician; approval required in advance.
- Medication during test - may require verification from physician; approval required in advance.
- Other personal items - may require verification from physician; approval required in advance.

As mentioned, all of these adaptations do not require formal application, but may require pre-approval by NH GED Administrator with physician’s verification note. All require approval and monitoring by on-site Examiner.
2. **What is the process for seeking accommodations for people diagnosed with a learning disability?**
   - First, discuss specific disability and need for accommodations with the local GED Chief Examiner, who will recommend the appropriate form for application.
   - Second, ensure that testing results are available. This may require additional formal achievement and IQ testing by a professional diagnostician. The local GED Chief Examiner will advise.
   - Third, complete the application form with all information filled in by professional diagnostician and/or advocate, including recommendations requested.
   - Fourth, provide application and all testing and requested accommodations documentation to the local GED Chief Examiner, who will examine and complete the application, then forward to the NH GED Administrator and follow up for approval.
   - Fifth, upon receipt of approval (or disapproval) letter from NH GED Administrator, contact local GED Chief Examiner to arrange for testing with accommodations.
   - Finally, special arrangements will be made for accommodated testing, so it is important to show up on time for test sessions as scheduled or call in advance to request a change.

3. **What accommodations are possible for a person with a learning disability?**
   - Extended time, from 25%, 50%, to 100% additional time allowed for each or any particular test.
   - Supervised breaks; either a five (5) minute break every 30 minutes or a ten (10) minute break every 45 minutes.
   - An audiocassette version in addition to extended time (either 50% or 100% additional time).*
   - Scribe for those with a written language disability.*
   - Calculator for both Part I and Part II for those with a Math disability.
   - Talking Calculator for the entire Math test.*
   - Items marked with * will automatically include private room for testing.
   - Other possible accommodations as requested by professional diagnostian.

It is always advisable to consult first with the local GED Chief Examiner in regard to any adaptations or accommodations to know what to expect and for the Official GED Testing Center to be prepared with adaptations or accommodations. Questions are welcome and appreciated.
1. **What is the process for seeking accommodations?**

Accommodations are academic adjustments, such as extended time and separate quiet test environment, which help to put students on a “level playing field” with other students, rather than provide an unfair advantage or disadvantage. All college, all students, including those with learning and other disabilities, must meet the same standards for progress, conduct and professional skills.

To find out about accommodations for college classes, students must contact the college’s Disabilities Services Office. There will be a process to follow. Students are advised to plan to meet with the Disabilities Services Staff and to provide previous school records, including an IEP and/or 504 plan, test reports and any relevant medical records which explain what accommodations are needed and why they are needed. This information is kept confidential and is not shared with other college offices. Students will meet with the college’s Disabilities Services Staff and develop a written document which authorizes the use of accommodations. Students are responsible for giving their professors this document to receive accommodations.

2. **How is the process different from high school?**

Students with learning disabilities must decide to come forward (“disclose”) to request accommodations, provide records, and follow the process of the college. Students must bring their school records (“documentation”) or have them sent to the Disabilities Services Office. These school records are not automatically sent; they must be requested. Students with learning disabilities must meet the same standards as other students, and the curriculum is not modified. That means that assignments are the same for all students. To meet these requirements, students may work with Disabilities Services to use accommodations, study strategies and technology. Each college typically has faculty who are available to assist during their “office hours,” and other academic supports are usually available outside the classroom. These may
include a Writing Center, Math Lab, tutoring, study groups and on-line tutorials. What is available is different at each college, and students need to find out what is offered and decide whether to participate. If a student decides not to disclose and follow the college’s process, then he/she is not eligible for Disabilities Services.

3. **What if you have not been diagnosed with a learning disability and you suspect you have one?**

Students are advised to contact the college’s Disabilities Services Office and ask about a referral for testing. Often staff can work with a student to consider how a student is learning and what seems to be interfering with progress. The college is not required to provide diagnostic testing; however, Disabilities Services Staff may be able to offer advice about possible ways to obtain diagnostic testing. Once a student completes testing, the report can serve as the necessary documentation for participation in Disabilities Services.

Here several possibilities. Students with health insurance may be eligible for assistance for evaluation, depending on the specific coverage. If students are studying toward a career goal, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) may be able to offer support for testing to help a student achieve job-related objectives. Students must follow a process to become eligible and request support. For details and office locations, see [www.education.nh.gov/career/vocational](http://www.education.nh.gov/career/vocational). A student may contact a private evaluator and arrange his/her own payment. It is wise to check with the college’s Disabilities Services Office for recommendations, since it is possible that some evaluators may offer adjustments in fees for college students.

Testing should be completed by a qualified evaluator and should include the tests required by the college to document disabilities. Typically testing should include a test of ability or potential (“IQ”), achievement testing and other relevant testing. Ability testing will explain how the individual person takes in and processes information and present details about processing speed, memory, spatial abilities and logical reasoning. Achievement testing can reveal reading, mathematics, spelling, and writing levels and may include other areas such as speech and language and attention/concentration. The evaluator will also offer specific recommendations.

How can understanding this information be valuable to a student’s success? Sometimes it can be a relief to find out about one’s own strengths and talents and to look at ways to overcome the areas that are more difficult. Once a student understands his/her own way of processing information, he/she can find the best methods for studying. The student can find personal strategies for time management, focus, writing, reading, taking notes and problem-solving.

Find out more at the Learning Disabilities Association of America at [www.ldamerica.org](http://www.ldamerica.org).
Correctional settings by Kathleen Letts

1. What educational services are offered at NH State Prison for people with diagnosed LD who are under the age of 21?

NH State Prison offers a full range of educational services and special education services to individuals under 21 who were diagnosed by their previous school district prior to becoming incarcerated. In addition to many of the typical accommodations found in schools for students with LD, Granite State High School (GSHS) offers smaller class sizes, individual time with the teacher, and time with an LD specialist, if needed. Thorough and complete educational assessment is available within a multi-disciplinary team approach to help discover a student’s strengths and weaknesses and to plan the most effective educational strategy.

2. What educational services are offered at NH State Prison for people with diagnosed LD who are over the age of 21?

NH State Prison offers a full range of educational services to individuals over 21 who were diagnosed with LD. Educational planning includes making recommendations for accommodations in the classroom based on the student’s performance and demonstrated understanding on measures of academic and cognitive development. If these assessments haven’t been given recently, they can be updated by GSHS staff so that current information will be available for use.

Granite State High School has a Reading Specialist in addition to a Learning Disabilities Specialist available to the educational teams. An individual with LD over the age of 21 may learn best, for example, using systematic, repetitive materials that are highly visual. Using a team planning approach, the team identifies instructional strategies for that individual, continues to assess and evaluate various techniques and approaches in the effort to help the student reach their educational goal.

3. What services are there for inmates who suspect they have learning disabilities but who have not been diagnosed?

An individual who believes they may have a disability will be referred to the 504 Coordinator. The Coordinator is able to gather previous educational information and records, seek current input from GSHS educators, and speak with the individual concerning the exact nature of their disability. If it’s decided that psych-educational testing would yield valuable information, the Coordinator can perform that task and interpret the results into meaningful information for the individual and the teachers. A 504 plan may be put into place that details the specifics of any accommodations or modifications that would assist the individual in achieving their educational goals.
4. What services are there to help GED candidates get accommodations on the GED Tests?

Individuals who may require accommodations on the GED exam are assisted with the necessary documentation by the 504 Coordinator, who also is a GED teacher. If the GED candidate doesn't have the required documentation, a physician from Medical Services is available for consultation, or a psychologist is available through the Mental Health Department. Psycho-educational testing can also be done by the 504 Coordinator if a learning disability is suspected.

5. Are there services to help inmates with LD who are ready for release?

Inmates with LD who are ready to re-enter the community can receive assistance through their individual Counselor/Case Managers. Information regarding Vocational Rehabilitation, Adult Education Centers, and other agencies and organizations serving individuals with disabilities is readily available. Additionally, the 504 Coordinator is available as a resource to individuals transitioning out of prison.