

Appendix D

Guidelines for Documentation of a Specific Learning Disability

A Qualified Professional

Professionals conducting assessments and rendering diagnoses of specific learning disabilities must be qualified to do so. Experience in working with an adult population is essential. When selecting a qualified professional, the following suggestions are offered for students/consumers:

The name, title, date(s) of testing and professional credentials of the evaluator, including information regarding areas of specialization, experience with adult assessment, employment and state in which individual practices, should be clearly stated plus any relevant licensing or certification information (e.g., licensed Psychologist). For example, the following professionals would generally be considered qualified to evaluate specific learning disabilities: Clinical or Educational Psychologists, Neuropsychologists, Learning Disabilities Specialists and Medical Doctors professionally recognized to treat specific learning disability conditions. An evaluation by someone whose training is not consistent with the criteria herein does not meet eligibility requirements.

Evaluation Report

The evaluation report should include a diagnostic interview, current and appropriate tests or assessments, specific diagnosis, actual tests scores, description of requested accommodation, and information on any previous accommodation. All reports must be typed and otherwise legible.

The Diagnostic Interview

Because learning disabilities are most commonly manifested during childhood, historical information of learning difficulties in elementary, secondary and post-secondary education must be included. An evaluation report must also include a comprehensive diagnostic evaluation by a qualified professional who addresses relevant background information to support the diagnosis. Such information includes:

1. Developmental history
2. Academic history including results of prior standardized testing and reports of classroom performance and behavior
3. Family history
4. Psychosocial history
5. Medical history and physical examination
6. History of prior psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy
7. Discussion of a diagnosis of alternative or co-existing mood, behavior and neurological and/or personality disorders
8. A description of the presented learning problem(s)

Testing must be current

In most cases, the student should have been tested within five years before seeking

accommodation. Because the provision of all reasonable accommodations and services is based upon assessment of the current impact of the student's disabilities on his/her academic performance, it is in a student's best interest to provide recent and appropriate documentation.

The report must include a specific diagnosis

The nature and severity of the functional limitation(s) must be supported by the test data, academic history, anecdotal and clinical observations that may include the student's level of motivation, study skills and other non-cognitive factors. These findings must support the fact that the individual's functional limitations are due to the stated disabilities. Individual "learning styles", "learning differences" and "academic problems" in and of themselves do not constitute a learning disability.

Actual test scores must be provided

Standard scores must be provided for all normative measures. Percentiles are also acceptable. Grade equivalents are not acceptable unless standard scores and/or percentiles are included. The assessment must show evidence of discrepancies and intra-individual differences. The particular profile of the student's strengths and weaknesses must provide a rationale for the accommodations that are recommended.

A description of requested accommodations

The diagnostic report must include specific recommendations for accommodations, rationale and relevant recommendations regarding the curriculum as well as testing considerations. A detailed explanation must be provided as to why each accommodation is recommended and should be correlated to specific test results or clinical observations.

Previous accommodations

If other institutions in the past provided any accommodation, it should be discussed. Information about specific conditions under which the accommodations were used (e.g., standardized testing, final exams, national board examinations) and whether or not they benefited the student should also be included. For example, if the diagnosed condition is a learning disability, what is the processing disorder and what is the relationship between the disorder and the requested accommodation? Any school plan (e.g., individualized education program) is not sufficient in and of itself, but can be included as part of a more comprehensive assessment battery as described in this document.

If no prior accommodations have been provided, the qualified professional and/ or the student should include a detailed explanation as to why no accommodations were used in the past and why accommodations are needed at this time.

Types of Tests

The Neuropsychological or Psychoeducational Evaluation. The neuropsychological or psychoeducational evaluation for the diagnosis of a specific learning disability must be submitted on letterhead of the qualified professional, and must provide clear and specific evidence of a learning disability. Tests used to document eligibility must be technically sound. The tests used must be reliable, valid and standardized for use with an adult population.

The test findings should document both the nature and severity of the learning disabilities. Tests must include aptitude, achievement, and information processing evaluations. In most cases, it is

not acceptable to administer only one test, nor is it acceptable to base a diagnosis on only one of several parts of a single test (subtests). Objective evidence of a substantial limitation to learning must be provided. Minimally, domains to be addressed must include the following:

Aptitude Tests

A complete battery of standard aptitude tests is required with all students. This must include at least one of the following:

- Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale - Revised (WAIS-3) (the preferred instrument)
- Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery – Revised Tests of Cognitive Ability
- Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale: Fourth Edition
- The Slosson Intelligence Test - Revised and the Kaufman Brief Adult Intelligence Test (K-BIT) do not constitute adequate intelligence test measures.

Achievement Tests

A complete battery of achievement tests is required with all students. The battery may include current levels of academic functioning in reading (decoding and comprehension), mathematics and written language. Acceptable instruments include, but are not limited to:

- Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery - Revised Tests of Achievement
- Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WAIT)
- Stanford Test of Academic Skills (TASK)
- Scholastic Abilities
- Test for Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests - Revised
- Stanford Diagnostic Mathematics Test

The Wide Range Achievement Test - (WRAT-3) is not a comprehensive measure of achievement and therefore is not acceptable if used as the sole measure of achievement. The Nelson- Denny is a useful screening instrument when administered under standardized conditions, but should not be used as a basis for diagnosis.

Information Processing Assessment

Specific areas of information processing (e.g., short and long-term memory, sequential memory auditory and visual perception/processing speed, executive functioning, motor ability) must be assessed. Acceptable instruments include, but are not limited:

- Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude-3 (DTLC- 3)
- Information from subtests on the WAIS-R
- The Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Cognitive Ability
- WMS-3
- Other instruments relevant to presenting the learning problem(s).