

# Carnegie Mellon

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<http://hr.web.cmu.edu/dsrg/index.htm>

## Learning Disabilities Fact Sheet

This sheet is intended to assist faculty/advisors in helping students. The information is generic in nature and is not specific to a certain student. If information about an individual student is needed, the instructor should request that the student share their individualized letter and accommodation plan. For more information about this disability or any other disability, contact Larry Powell in the Equal Opportunity Services office.

**Definition:** Learning disabilities is a generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities, or of social skills. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual and presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction. Even though a learning disability may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (e.g., sensory impairment, mental retardation, social and emotional disturbance), with socio-environmental influences (e.g., cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction, psychogenic (mental disorders) factors), and especially attention deficit disorder, all of which may cause learning problems, a learning disability is not the direct result of those conditions or influences.

Learning disabilities can be lifelong conditions that, in some cases, affect many parts of a person's life: school or work, daily routines, family life, and sometimes even friendships and recreation. In some people, many overlapping learning disabilities may be apparent. Other people may have a single, isolated learning problem that has little impact on other areas of their lives.

### Definitions:

Dyslexia - Severe difficulty with reading printed material

Dyscalculia - Severe difficulty with numbers and/or mathematical problems (even simple math)

Dysgraphia - Severe handwriting problems, lack of organization and neatness

### Associated Difficulties:

Slow reading rate and/or difficulty in modifying reading rate in accordance with material difficulty.

Poor comprehension and retention. Difficulty identifying important points and themes.

Poor mastery of phonics, confusion of similar words, difficulty integrating new vocabulary.

Difficulty expressing ideas in writing which seem to be understood.

Cannot tell a story in proper sequence.

Incomplete mastery of basic facts (mathematical tables).

Reverses numbers (123 to 321 or 231).

Confuses operational symbols, especially + and x.

Copies problems incorrectly from one line to another

Difficulty recalling the sequence of operational processes.

Difficulty with sentence structure (incomplete or run on sentences, poor use of grammar, missing inflectional endings).

Frequent spelling errors (omissions, substitutions, transpositions) especially in specialized and foreign vocabulary.

Inability to copy correctly from a book or the blackboard.

Slow writer.

Poor penmanship (poorly-formed letters, incorrect use of capitalization, trouble with spacing, overly-large handwriting).

Difficulty speaking grammatically correct English.

Inability to understand and retain abstract concepts.

Difficulty comprehending word problems.

Reasoning deficits.

### Tips for Instructors:

- ✓ Provide students with a detailed course syllabus. Make it available on the first day of class.
- ✓ Clearly spell out expectations before course begins (grading, material to be covered, due dates).
- ✓ Start each lecture with an outline of materials to be covered that period. At the conclusion of class, briefly summarize key points.
- ✓ Speak directly to students, and use gestures and natural expressions to convey further meaning.
- ✓ Present new or technical vocabulary on the blackboard or use a student handout. Terms should be used in context to convey greater meaning.
- ✓ Give assignments both orally and in written form to avoid confusion.
- ✓ Announce reading assignments well in advance.
- ✓ Provide study questions for exams that demonstrate the format, as well as the content of the test. Explain what constitutes a good answer and why.
- ✓ If necessary, allow LD students to demonstrate mastery of course material using alternative methods (extended time limits for testing, oral exams, taped exams, individually proctored exams in a separate room).
- ✓ Permit use of simple calculators, scratch paper, spellers' dictionaries during exams.
- ✓ Provide adequate opportunities for questions and answers, including review sessions.
- ✓ If possible, select a textbook with an accompanying study guide for optional student use.
- ✓ Encourage students to use support services.

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