

# Learning Disabilities

## DESCRIPTION AND FACTS:

Learning Disabilities (LD) are hidden disabilities. Unlike the person who uses sign language or walks with crutches, the student who has a learning disability shows no visible characteristics of a disability. Because it is a hidden disability, the student may have been accused of “faking it” or “being lazy.” Today, 20% of the population may have a mild to severe learning disability.

Learning disabilities are so individualized that any generalization about specific signs or symptoms is of limited value. Each student will be better able to describe how he or she functions in relation to his or her learning disability. Keeping this in mind, a brief description of problems a student with a learning disability may have to deal with follows. No student exhibits all characteristics, and each student has varying degrees within the categories.

- **Dyslexia:** inability or difficulty reading due to a neurological condition.
- **Dyscalculia:** inability or difficulty with arithmetic.
- **Dysgraphia:** inability or difficulty writing down words.
- **Dysphasia:** impairment of the ability to speak or sometimes understand language.
- **Figure-ground perception:** picking out an object from a background of competing objects.
- **Visual discrimination:** telling the difference between objects.
- **Spatial perception:** seeing things in the right order.
- **Auditory figure-ground perception:** hearing one sound against a background of noises.
- **Auditory sequencing:** hearing sounds in the correct order.
- **Auditory processing:** inability or difficulty understanding verbal directions.
- **Dysfunction in one's sense of balance.**
- **Apraxia:** dysfunction in motor planning or knowing where you are in space.
- **Tactile reflex is disturbed** causing problems with the sense of touch (holding a pencil, turning pages).

## POSSIBLE BARRIERS:

- Decreased speed in performing tasks
- High level of inconsistency
- Decreased self-esteem

## INTERACTION WITH AN INDIVIDUAL WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES:

1. Students with learning disabilities are not mentally retarded or otherwise lacking in intelligence. They have average to above average intelligence.
2. The needs of the students with learning disabilities center around information processing.
3. The capacity for learning of a student with learning disabilities is intact, only the means by which information is processed is different.
4. Sometimes a student may have a poor self-concept from previous failure and frustration.
5. Most students with learning disabilities exhibit a high level of inconsistency in the way they perform. For example, one student might learn to speak fluently in several languages, but she may need to use a calculator for simple math functions.
6. One of the most common but least understood characteristics of people with learning disabilities has recently been coined “social dysperception.” This is the inability to *perceive* accepted rules and customs of society. A common remark, which may be heard concerning individuals with learning disabilities, is that they are immature.

## **TEACHING A STUDENT WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES:**

Here are some things you can do to assist students with Learning Disabilities.

1. Start each lecture with an outline of material that will be covered. At the end of class, briefly summarize key points.
2. Present new or technical vocabulary on the board or use a student handout. Use terms in context to convey greater meaning.
3. Provide study questions for exams that demonstrate the format as well as the content of the test. Explain what constitutes a good answer for an essay exam.
4. Reinforce lectures or discussions by putting major topics or outlines of the materials on the board.
5. Give assignments both in written form and orally to avoid confusion.
6. Encourage the student to ask questions during or after class to ensure that materials are understood.
7. Frequently verbalize what is being written on the board.