

Guidelines for Documentation: Learning Disabilities

Students who are seeking disability support services from Vincennes University for a learning impairment on the basis of a diagnosed learning disorder are required to submit documentation to the Office of Disability Services for review. Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, students with verified disabilities who are otherwise qualified to attend the university are protected from discrimination and assured equal access to educational programs. Eligibility is determined on a case-by-case basis and is based upon documentation of a *current* disorder that substantially limits a major life activity, including learning.

The following guidelines are provided in the interest of ensuring that evaluation reports are appropriate to 1) document eligibility and 2) support requests for reasonable accommodations, and/or auxiliary aids.

1. **Testing must be *current*.** In almost all cases, this means that the testing has been conducted *within the past three years*. The provision of all reasonable accommodations and services is based upon assessment of the *current* impact of the student's impairment on his/her academic performance. Disability Services reserves the right to request updated or augmented documentation in order to have a more accurate picture of the current level of functioning.

2. **Testing must be *comprehensive*.** The administration of one test alone is not sufficient for the purposes of diagnosis or to establish that a substantial limitation of a major life activity currently exists in individuals with a previous diagnosis. *Minimally*, the domains addressed must include (but are not limited to):

a. **Aptitude**

A Wechsler Intelligence Test (WAIS-III or WISC-III, depending on the student age) with subtest scores is the preferred instrument. A comprehensive assessment instrument such as the Wechsler intelligence scales or the Stanford-Binet is required.

Screening tests, such as the Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test (KBIT), ***are not sufficiently comprehensive*** to provide the kinds of information necessary to diagnose a learning disability or make accommodation decisions.

b. **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 areas relevant to that student's learning disability, such as reading (decoding and comprehension), mathematics (calculation and reasoning) and oral and written language. Comprehensive batteries, such as the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT) or the Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery, may be used; specific achievement tests which assess skills in a particular academic area, such as the

Test of Written Language or the Nelson-Denny Reading Skills Test, may also be used.

Screening tests, such as the Wide Range Achievement Test, *are not sufficiently comprehensive* to provide the kinds of information necessary to diagnose a learning disability or make accommodation decisions, and are therefore not useful if used as the sole measure of achievement.

c. Information Processing

Specific areas of information processing (e.g., short- and long-term memory, sequential memory, auditory and visual perception/procession speed) must be assessed. Information from subtests on the WAIS-III or the Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Cognitive Ability, as well as other instruments relevant to the learning problems (i.e., Halsted-Reitan, Wisconsin Card Sort, etc.) may be used to address these areas. If the individual has memory/work retrieval problems, instruments such as Wechsler Memory Scale – III, the Boston Naming Test, or the Test of Adolescent/Adult Work Finding are recommended.

- 3. There must be clear, specific evidence and identification of a learning disorder/impairment.** Individual “learning styles,” “learning differences,” and “test difficulty or anxiety” in and of themselves do not constitute a learning disorder/impairment. The diagnostician is encouraged to use direct language in the diagnosis and to avoid the use of terms such as “suggests” or “is indicative of.” If the data indicates that a learning disorder is not present, the evaluator should state that conclusion in the report.
- 4. The tests used must be reliable, valid, and standardized for use with a similar age population.**
- 5. Actual tests scores must be provided. Standard scores are required;** percentiles and grade equivalents are *not* acceptable unless standard scores are also included. This is important since decisions regarding a student’s eligibility for services depend on the Disability Services Coordinator receiving actual test data. In addition to the test scores, interpretation of the results in an integrated report is required. Test protocol sheets or scores alone are not sufficient.
- 6. Professionals conducting assessment and rendering diagnoses of learning disorders must be qualified to do so.** Trained, certified, and/or licensed psychologists, school psychologists, neuropsychologists, and other professionals with training and experience relevant to students and their evaluation are typically involved in the process of assessment. It is not considered appropriate for professionals to evaluate members of their own families.
- 7. All diagnostic reports must be (a) dated, (b) typed, (c) signed by the evaluator, and (d) include the name, title, and professional credentials of the evaluator as well as the dates of testing.** Handwritten scores or summary sheets alone are *not* acceptable.

8. The report should include the summary of a comprehensive diagnostic interview. The summary should include (a) a description of the presenting problem, (b) the student's developmental, educational, family, medical, psychosocial, and employment histories as relevant, and (c) a discussion of dual diagnosis where indicated.

9. Reports should establish the rationale for any academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids that are recommended, using test data to document the need.

10. Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or 504 plans alone are not sufficient documentation. However, it is useful if a copy of the student's IEP or 504 Plan be submitted with the required comprehensive report as it will provide useful information about services previously provided to the student.

The determination of whether a diagnosed impairment substantially limits a major life activity, and identification of reasonable adjustments or auxiliary aids to offset the impairment, will be determined by the Office of Disability Services. Reasonable adjustment, support services, and auxiliary aids are defined as those which:

- Offset the effects of the disorder by providing effective access to academic programs and the university environment,
- Do not constitute fundamental alteration of the nature of the course or of essential course requirements,
- Do not cause undue administrative or financial burden to the university in effecting implementation, and
- Are not items or services of personal use nature.

These guidelines are provided so that the Office of Disability Services can respond appropriately to the individual needs of the student. The office reserves the right to request additional documentation, and determine eligibility based on the quality of the submitted documentation.

Please submit documentation and/or inquiries to:

Vincennes University
Office of Disability Services
1002 N. First Street
Vincennes, IN 47591
Phone: 812/888-4501
Fax: 812/888-2087
disability@vinu.edu

All documentation is confidential