

Accommodations for Adults to help at Work

If you have a Specific Learning Disorder (SLD) you may like to consider a number of accommodations at work that are designed to encourage access to equal opportunities and to demonstrate your abilities more accurately, in comparison to your other work colleagues. Accommodations need not compromise your work output.

- Specific Learning Disorders are enduring conditions that may result in: difficulties completing work at the same pace as others, problems with rapidly finding the right word, struggles with storing and retrieving information in short-term memory, and troubles with maintaining an organised work environment.
- At work, you may require extra time to read lengthy documents, think about the information read, or prepare a detailed written report.

General Strategies

Using a variety of strategies, aids and equipment may assist you to perform confidently at work and can help to reduce the stress associated with reading and writing tasks.

- Break tasks down into smaller chunks that you can manage.
- Always ask for help if you are confused or unsure about what to do. You will find that other people like to be asked for advice, and it lets them see that you want to do your job properly.
- Use any equipment that can make tasks easier, for example:
 - > Use a small tape-recorder or voice recorder to help remember things that need to be done later. This tape-recorder can also be used for dictating letters or reports which can be typed up later on.
 - > Consider the use of voice-activated programs that can help make writing easier. Many devices now have software embedded which will allow you to speak and the software will do the typing for you.
 - > TextHelp Read & Write (www.texthelp.com) provides a small box on your word-processing screen which tries to predict the next word you are going to type. It suggests words that you can click on without having to spell them, and reads out loud what you have written so that you can hear if any words have been missed out or written inaccurately.
 - > Use a Spellchecker with a large, clear display screen.
 - > A 'reading pen' is available from www.dyslexic.com which you can run over a word you cannot read. The pen will then say the word out loud or through a small ear-piece.
- Tiredness can affect your ability to read, spell and do number work accurately. Try to arrange your day so that you take care of regular paperwork first thing in the morning rather than later in the day when you are more likely to be tired and less able to deal with visual and sequencing tasks.
- Take regular short breaks to refresh your concentration and improve your performance.
- Slowing down your paperwork tasks can improve your accuracy, and will take you less time in the long run.
- Ask for instructions to be given in writing if possible. Your 'hearing' memory may be weak, and directions in writing can provide a clear framework for you to refer to. If you are speaking on the telephone, just say that you will write down exactly what the person requires while they are on the phone, and read it back to them. People like this, as it reassures them that their request has been clearly understood.

- Try to delegate tasks which you find difficult to another member of staff (if you are in a position to do so). For example, in some small businesses it may be possible to employ someone for one day, or half a day, each week to take care of the paperwork, which will free you to develop other sides of the business.

Organising Your Work

Many adults find it difficult to be well organised, and need some techniques to help. Some of the following may be helpful:

- Use a diary and a calendar to help keep a record of meetings, deadlines, etc.
- Make a 'To do' list of jobs to be done. This will give you control over your work. It will ensure that things are not forgotten, and ticking things off as they are completed can give a sense of satisfaction!
- Keep your diary, calendar and 'To do' list in a place where they can be clearly seen.
- Make a point of checking your 'To do' lists first thing each morning, before lunch, and at the end of the day.
- Use a highlighter pen to clearly emphasise important items or dates.
- Make a plan for each day, showing when you will do writing and number tasks, make telephone calls, go to a meeting, etc. Try to vary your tasks: half an hour's writing might be followed by a change of activity – some work that involves moving around or telephoning people.

Working Methods

With a little thought, you may find that there are daily tasks that can be made a lot easier for you:

- If you have to use complex sets of numbers, use a ruler or highlighter to draw lines across or up and down the list to make it easier to follow along a column of numbers.
- Break up long numbers. For example, **06285619937** is much easier to deal with if you write it with breaks such as **062|856|199|37**.
- Highlight text or alternate lines to help break up information. This will make it easier to read.

Shipwreck D.I.Y.	12.7.00	37196378	\$286.50
Dacey Disks	29.2.99	01749275	\$927.00
Breakdown Boards	11.6.98	88260174	\$271.99
Crash Circuitry	16.9.99	73001846	\$23.75
Crazy Computers	23.9.98	77208814	\$359.55

- At the start of a new project, it helps to brainstorm. This involves writing ideas on a large sheet of paper and linking them by lines. As more ideas grow, they can be linked to ideas that they connect with.
- As work piles up, it can help to be assertive with your manager and point out that extra help may be needed to deal with the overload. Assertiveness does not come easily to most people, and it may be helpful to attend a course in learning to be assertive. It does not mean that that you should be rude to, or angry with, people, but that you should learn how to be clear, rational and firm about explaining the situation.
- Set your priorities: your diary and calendar will tell you which deadlines are coming up, and those jobs that need to be dealt with first.

- Any person with a SLD with impairment in reading or written expression will experience stress when dealing with large amounts of paperwork. It is important to know how to deal with this so that you can avoid headaches, depression, and worse. You can attend a course on stress reduction which will teach you how to become aware of your breathing and relax your shoulders while you are working.
- Adapt your physical working environment so that you are not suffering discomfort for long hours of work. Examples include adjusting the brightness of your computer monitor, the height of your chair, the angle of your keyboard, the positioning of papers that you are copying from, the removal of reflected glare from your computer screen and the provision of proper lighting on your desk.
- Learn a relaxation exercise that helps you visualise a positive situation when you find work is starting to become overwhelming.
- When you're in the same position for an extended period of time, change your body position and remember to adopt a healthy body posture.
- Try to take some time out doing something you truly enjoy on your days off.

It may be beneficial to access **Edge Employment Solutions** (www.edge.org.au), as they are an organisation designed specifically to help students with disabilities establish careers.

The website www.careertips.net.au is another useful resource as it provides practical information and resources for school students with disabilities seeking to make the transition from school to work.