

STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES (SLD) AT HIGH SCHOOL

Strategies and Accommodations

Students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) have significant difficulty in one academic area while coping well, or even excelling, in other areas of academic, sporting, or artistic achievement. This difficulty interferes with the student's capacity to both access the curriculum and demonstrate his or her skills and knowledge.

Increasingly, these students are becoming more aware of the possibilities that are open to them in educational settings and are asking for access to accommodations that will reduce the impact of their learning disabilities and allow them to demonstrate their strengths.

Unfortunately, because specific learning disabilities are not clearly visible and are easily misunderstood, these students often find it more difficult to persuade authorities that they have a legitimate need for assistance. The Disability Discrimination Act (1992) states that a person with a learning disability is someone who has "a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction." The Act specifies that teaching programs must be developed in such a way that all students, including those with learning disabilities, are able to participate. This means that learning disabled students should be provided with opportunities and strategies that allow them to access the curriculum (ICT, assistive technology, e-books, curriculum summaries, subject glossaries etc). The Disability Standards for Education (2005) states that "the assessment procedures and

methodologies for the course or program should be adapted to enable the student to demonstrate the knowledge, skills or competencies being assessed".

Accommodations should not result in educational standards and requirements being reduced. Rather they should include adaptations and modifications to classroom practice which will bolster and promotes learning in the students. These adaptations and modifications involve differing teaching styles, materials used and assistive technology.

Some of the strategies and accommodations recommended in the literature are listed below. More detailed information regarding accommodations at a tertiary level can be found at the Opening All Options website also noted below. These strategies are also suitable for secondary school students.

Obviously, students with specific learning disabilities are not all the same and will have different requirements, depending on the type and severity of their learning disability. These differences will need to be taken into account when choosing the type of accommodations that will best serve their needs.

Examinations / Timed Assessments:

- If required, allow extra time for examinations. The usual amount of time is 10 minutes for each hour of an examination; however this will vary depending on the severity of the

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SLD and the resulting functional impact.

- Allow the use of a scribe or a word processor for a student with severe handwriting difficulties.
- Do not penalise students with learning disabilities for spelling errors.
- Allow the examination questions to be read to students with reading disabilities. This could be done on a tape recorder or by using a reader in cases when the student has a severe reading disability.
- If required, allow for alternative examination locations in a separate room.
- Provide practice exam questions that demonstrate the format of questions.
- Allow for alternative presentation of exams:
 - Large print.
 - Electronic format (on computer).
 - Coloured paper or Coloured overlays (if they have been found to reduce the impact of the Learning Disability).
- Consider timetable changes, so as to not overload the student.
- Split exam papers (due to extra time, fatigue).
- Allow rest days between exams.

Assessments / Homework

- Allow alternative assignment formats e.g. oral reports, demonstrations, recorded on video or audio tape.
- Allow assignments written in 'dot point' rather than essay format for students who have difficulties with the sequencing

and structure of written expression.

- Time extensions for written assignments should be permitted.
- Don't penalise for handwriting, grammar and spelling when a word processor is not available.
- Provide scaffolding to ensure the student is able to demonstrate knowledge, skills & understanding.
- Provide explicit teaching of essay-writing formats and provide examples of well-structured essays to the students.

A number of these strategies were accessed through the Opening All Options website:

http://services.admin.utas.edu.au/options/teaching_strategies.htm

