

# **Documentation Guidelines for Individuals with Learning Disabilities**

**Disability Support Services  
Jacksonville State University**



## **Introduction**

Students with learning disabilities are guaranteed protections and rights that pertain to equal access to programs and services. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended are the laws under which all institutions that receive federal funds operate. High school students with disabilities are accustomed to operating under the auspices of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which substantially differs from ADA and Section 504. One of the biggest differences between the two sets of laws is the definition of what constitutes acceptable documentation. Students with disabilities who are new to college life would be well served to make efforts to familiarize themselves with the laws that are applicable to their postsecondary experience.

## **Documentation Guidelines**

**Evaluator Qualifications:** The evaluator must meet the qualifications required in order to properly make a diagnosis of the presence of a learning disability. The evaluator should also be experienced in working with individuals with a learning disability in order to recommend appropriate accommodations.

All results should be presented on letterhead, typed, dated, and signed. The results of the evaluation should be recorded in a format that includes:

1. Name and Credentials
2. Area of Expertise
3. Employer
4. Address

**Documentation:** The requirements to provide all reasonable accommodations and services are based on the assessment of the effects that a student's disabilities have on his/her academic performance at a specified time in the individual's life. Jacksonville State University requires current documentation that is no older than three years because a person's level of functioning may change over time. Students who present documentation that is older than three years may be asked to update their testing.

**Necessary Components of a Comprehensive Evaluation and Diagnostic Report:**

- A. **Diagnostic Interview-** An evaluation report should include a summary of a comprehensive diagnostic interview consisting of relevant information concerning the student's background, and academic history.
- B. **Assessment-** The formal neuropsychological or psychoeducational evaluation that is used to support a diagnosis of a learning disability must provide clear evidence that a learning disability exists and should not rely on any one test or subtest. The testing must evaluate the following list of domains as a minimal requirement.
  1. **Aptitude/Intellectual Assessment-** The results of the evaluation must include a complete intellectual assessment including all subtests and standard scores.

2. **Academic Achievement-** The results of the evaluation must include information that describes the individual's current levels of academic functioning in areas that include reading, mathematics, and oral and written language.
  3. **Information Processing-** The results of the evaluation must include information concerning the individual's current level of functioning in short- and long-term memory, sequential memory, auditory and visual perception, processing speed, executive functioning, and motor ability.
- C. **Specific Diagnosis-** The diagnosis should be well defined and preferably meet the criteria included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV (DSM IV). Generally, documentation used in high school does not include a specific diagnosis. Terms such as "suggests" or "is indicative of" are not sufficient to indicate the presence of a learning disability.
- D. **Test Scores-** Standard scores and percentiles should be included in any documentation that consists of normed measures. Grade equivalents are not useful if standard scores and or percentiles are not included. The results should also clearly reflect a substantial limitation to learning that is consistent with the student's request for accommodations.
- E. **Clinical Summary-** The results of the formalized evaluation must include a well-written diagnostic summary based on the evaluation results. The summary should include:
1. A demonstration of the fact that the evaluator has ruled out alternative explanations for academic problems that may be a result of poor education, lack of motivation, poor study skills, emotional problems, attentional problems, and cultural or language differences.
  2. An explanation of how deficits in the areas of cognitive ability, achievement, and information processing indicate that the student has a learning disability.
  3. An indication of the substantial limitation to learning or other major life activity caused by the presence of a learning disability.
  4. A justification for the request of specific accommodations.
  5. A specific diagnosis must be included in the report and should preferably be based on the criteria included in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual- Fourth Edition* (DSM-IV).

The summary should also include all prior accommodations received by the student and any information concerning the specific conditions under which the accommodations were used.

**Recommendations for Accommodations:** The diagnostic report should include specific suggestions for potential accommodations and a brief explanation of the reasons for the request.

**Confidentiality-** JSU follows all legal provisions concerning our students' rights to privacy as mandated under various state and federal statutes.

These guidelines have been modified and adapted from the AHEAD Guidelines for the documentation of a learning disability. *The Association on Higher Education and Disability*, Columbus, Ohio, 1997.