

Documentation Guidelines for a Learning Disability in Adolescents and Adults

Central Michigan University incorporates the "Guidelines for Documentation of a Learning Disability in Adolescents and Adults" approved by the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) in the requirements for documentation of a specific learning disability. In most cases, CMU requires that diagnostic testing be no older than three years. CMU prefers the use of the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association) criteria.

1. Qualifications of the Evaluator (AHEAD)

"Professionals conducting assessments, rendering diagnoses of learning disabilities, and making recommendations for appropriate accommodations must be qualified to do so. Comprehensive training and direct experience with an adolescent and adult LD populations is essential."

"The name, title, and professional credentials of the evaluator, including information about license or certification (e.g., licensed psychologist) as well as the area of specialization, employment and state/province in which the individual practices should be clearly stated in the documentation. For example, the following professionals would generally be considered qualified to evaluate specific learning disabilities provided that they have additional training and experience in the assessment of learning problems in adolescents and adults: clinical or educational psychologists, school psychologists, neuropsychologists, learning disability specialists, medical doctors, and other professionals. Use of diagnostic terminology indicating a learning disability by someone whose training and experience are not in these fields is not acceptable. It is of utmost importance that evaluators are sensitive and respectful of cultural and linguistic differences between adolescents and adults during the assessment process. It is not considered appropriate for professionals to evaluate members of their families. All reports should be on letterhead, typed, dated, signed and otherwise legible."

2. Substantiation of the Learning Disability (AHEAD)

"Documentation should validate the need for services based on the individual's current level of functioning in the educational setting. A school plan such as an individualized educational program (IEP) or a 504 Plan is insufficient documentation, but it can be included as part of a more comprehensive assessment battery. A comprehensive assessment battery and the resulting diagnostic report should include a diagnostic interview, assessment of aptitude, academic achievement, information processing and a diagnosis."

"Assessment, and any resulting diagnosis, should consist of and be based on a comprehensive assessment battery which does not rely on any one test or subtest."

Evidence of a substantial limitation to learning or other major life activity must be provided. A list of commonly used tests is attached in Appendix A. Minimally, the domains to be addressed must include the following:

1. Aptitude
A complete intellectual assessment with all subtests and standard scores reported.
2. Academic 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 relevant areas such as reading (decoding and comprehension), mathematics, and oral and written language.
3. Information Processing
Specific areas of information processing (e.g. short and long-term memory, sequential memory, auditory and visual perception/processing, processing speed, executive functioning and motor ability) should be assessed."

Clinical Summary (AHEAD)

"A well written diagnostic summary based on a comprehensive evaluation process is a necessary component of the report...It is essential, therefore, that professional judgment be utilized in the development of the clinical summary. The clinical summary should include:

1. Demonstration of the evaluator's having ruled out alternative explanations for academic problems as a result of poor education, poor motivation and/or study skills, emotional problems, attentional problems and cultural/language differences;
2. Indication of how patterns in the student's cognitive ability, achievement and information processing reflect the presence of a learning disability;
3. Indication of the substantial limitations to learning or other major life activity presented by the learning disability and the degree to which it impacts the individual in the learning context for which accommodations are being requested, and;
4. Indication as to why specific accommodations are needed and how the effects of the specific disability are accommodated.

The summary should also include any record or prior accommodation or auxiliary aids, including any information about specific conditions under which the accommodations were used (e.g., standardized testing, final exams, licensing or certification examinations)."

APPENDIX A

Testing for Assessing Adolescents and Adults

When selecting a battery of tests, it is critical to consider the technical adequacy of instruments including their reliability, validity and standardization on an appropriate norm group. The professional judgment of an evaluator in choosing tests is important.

The following list is provided as a helpful resource, but it is not intended to be definitive or exhaustive.

Aptitude

- * *Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-Revised (WAIS-R)*
- * *Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery-Revised: Test of Cognitive Ability*
- * *Kaufman Adolescent and Adult Intelligence Test*
- * *Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale (4th ed.)*

The *Slosson Intelligence Test-Revised* and the *Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test* are primarily screening devices which are not comprehensive enough to provide the kinds of information necessary to make accommodation decisions.

Academic Achievement

- * *Scholastic Abilities Test for Adults (SATA)*
- * *Stanford Test of Academic Skills*
- * *Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery-Revised: Test of Achievement*
- * *Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT)*

or specific achievement tests such as:

- * *Nelson-Denny Reading Skills Test*
- * *Stanford Diagnostic Mathematics Test*
- * *Test of Written Language-3 (TOWL-3)*
- * *Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests-Revised*

Specific achievement tests are useful instruments when administered under standardized conditions and interpreted within the context of other diagnostic information. The *Wide Range Achievement Test-3 (WRAT-3)* is not a comprehensive measure of achievement and therefore is not useful if used as the sole measure of achievement.

Information Processing

- * *Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude-3 (DLTA-3)*
- * *Detroit Test of Learning Aptitude-Adult (DLTA-A)*
- * *WIAS-R subtests*
- * *Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery-Revised: Tests of Cognitive Ability*

Further assessment by an appropriate professional may be required if coexisting or other disabling conditions exist. Documentation must be submitted to the Central Michigan University Student Disability Services in person, by fax (989-774-1326) or by mail: Student Disability Services, CMU, 120 Park Library, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858