

KNOW YOUR STUDENT

FACT SHEETS TO GUIDE THE
LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT
OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC NEEDS



Learning disability

Definition

Learning disability is a general term used to describe a diverse group of neurological conditions, which may cause the learner to receive and process information differently. Some examples of a specific learning disability are dyslexia, dysgraphia or aphasia.

A common characteristic of **dyslexia** is that the learner may have difficulty with written language, particularly with reading and spelling. Learners may also have difficulties with phonological processing, auditory processing, visual processing or short-term memory. (Refer to Fact sheet 'Dyslexia' for more information).

The term **dysgraphia** is used to identify difficulties with written expression (hand writing) regardless of the ability to read. Learners with dysgraphia may be able to read quite well however often lack coordination and may find other types of fine motor tasks difficult.

Aphasia is the term for loss of the ability to produce and/or comprehend language. This is usually as a result of an injury to the brain. Characteristics of aphasia can include difficulty with communicating spontaneously, reading and writing, and comprehending written or spoken language.

It is common for a learner to have more than one type of specific learning disability. **It is essential that the learner's specific area of learning disability is identified correctly to assist with support strategies.**

Impact on training and assessment

The training environment may increase the levels of anxiety which may impact on the learner's true abilities. Individuals may experience difficulty with:

- note taking;
- written expression;
- auditory processing;
- memory and sequencing;
- reading and comprehension;
- participation – possible reluctance to offer opinion, responses or read in front of groups;

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- organisational skills.

Delivery and assessment strategies

The following strategies are suggestions. Each student with a learning disability will have their own individual support and learning needs and it's recommended as a first step, that you ask them and/or their family or support network (if such a network is present and accessible) what the best ways to support their learning is.

When liaising with anyone other than the student directly, ensure you maintain confidentiality, as per TAFE Queensland Privacy Policy.

Presenting and communicating information

- Use visual aids to link concepts.
- Vary training methods – use videos, handouts, diagrams.
- Use the Principles of Universal Design in all communications.
- Check for learner understanding – try alternative words or phrases.
- Provide learning materials before training commences if requested.
- Provide additional time to copy material from whiteboards and take notes.
- Give clear instructions on the learning material to be covered and the timelines for completion so that the learner can manage the workload.
- Assist the learner to create a vocational vocabulary list and encourage the use of a dictionary or thesaurus.

Utilising technology to maximize student engagement

- A reader/scribe can assist learners with reading and writing material.
- Learning materials and information can be converted into formats that are accessible for the learner e.g. audio files (such as MP3 format), Braille (a tactile reading and writing code, which is read using the fingers) or large print.
- Screen reading software such as Job Access With Speech (JAWS) reads electronic material aloud to the user. It provides audible access to electronic information, software applications and the internet.
- Electronic magnification devices are available in portable, transportable, desktop and laptop based forms. They magnify or scan print based materials and objects.
- Magnification software (e.g. Microsoft Magnifier, ZoomText) enlarges the whole computer screen including text and application buttons / navigation.
- Anti-glare screens and reducing the brightness or changing the contrast of computer screens can benefit.

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- Connect (also referred to as Desire2Learn) has numerous options to increase accessibility to information provided within Connect. Options such as screen readers, keyboard-only navigation, colour contrast accessibility features and zooming options are all available within Connect. Educators can access information about these options at <https://connect.tafeqld.edu.au/shared/help/student/content/en/Accessibility.html>.
- Audio recording of training delivery or note taking (a person or digital note taker such as the Neo Notetaker) to assist learners with handwriting difficulties and / or with mishearing and misquoting.
- A Disability Coach or Disability Support Worker can assist the learner with planning and organizing. The benefit to requesting a Disability Coach/Support Worker is that they may be able to look holistically at the support and learning needs of the student and provide some helpful ideas regarding software, or education strategies to help increase the student's understanding, participation and engagement.

All of the delivery strategies may be of assistance for assessment

- Provide additional time to complete assessments, if required.
- Provide opportunities for continuous assessment throughout training.
- Use multiple choice and short answer questions in preference to long answer questions.
- Use a variety of assessment methods such as verbal assessment, taped interviews, slide presentations, handmade models or photographic essays.

References

- The Physical Disability Council of NSW, <http://www.pdcnsw.org.au/>
- Australian Disability Clearing House on Education and Training, <http://www.adcet.edu.au/>

Further Resources

- Australian Council for Private Education and Training, Learning Disability Resource, <http://www.adcet.edu.au/Ld/>
- Creating Accessible Teaching and Support - Learning Disabilities, http://www.adcet.edu.au/Cats/Specific_Impairments/Learning_Disabilities.chpx
- Learning Difficulties Australia, <https://www.ldaustralia.org>
- SPELD Specific Learning Difficulty Association School information series, <http://www.speld.org.au/>