

# Documentation Guidelines for Learning Disabilities\*\*

## Policy

Federal law (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990) and the Americans with Disabilities Amendment Act of 2008 established the rights of individuals with disabilities. Northern State University is committed to compliance with all applicable federal laws and regulations regarding reasonable accommodations needed to provide equal educational opportunity to all students. Final determination as to the appropriateness of an accommodation is evaluated on a case-by-case basis. In accordance with federal and state regulations, disability-related information will be treated in a confidential manner.

## Procedure

The student is responsible for providing documentation that supports his/her request for accommodation services. It is important that the documentation clearly establishes that the student has a disability as defined by federal regulations and that the documentation clearly supports the individual's request for accommodation. The following documentation guidelines are provided in the interest of ensuring that documentation of a learning disability demonstrates a significant impact on a major life activity and supports the individual's request for accommodation.

## Documentation Guidelines

### **1. A qualified professional must conduct the evaluation:**

It is important that the evaluator have comprehensive training and direct experience with adolescents and adults with learning disabilities, such as a licensed psychologist, learning disabilities specialist, educational therapist or neuropsychologist. The name, title, and professional credentials of the evaluator, including information about license or certification and employment, should be clearly stated in the documentation. All reports should be on letterhead, dated, signed, and otherwise legible.

### **2. Documentation should be current:**

The provision of accommodations is based upon assessment of the current impact of the student's disabilities on his or her academic performance and

learning style. Documentation that is outdated or inadequate in scope or content; does not address the student's current level of functioning; or does not address changes in the student's performance since the previous assessment was conducted may not support requested accommodations. When appropriate, additional supportive documentation will be requested. Documentation will generally be considered current if it has been completed within the last five (5) years.

### **3. Diagnosis of a learning disability:**

AN IEP or 504 Plan in and of itself **is not sufficient** documentation but can be included as part of a comprehensive evaluation. A comprehensive assessment battery and report typically includes:

- a. Diagnostic interview
  - Presenting problems, medical, development, psychosocial, etc., and a discussion of dual diagnosis where indicated.
- b. Assessment of aptitude
  - A complete intellectual assessment with all sub-tests and standard scores reported (i.e., WAIS, Stanford Binet, Woodcock-Johnson Test of Cognitive Abilities).
- c. Academic achievement
  - A comprehensive academic achievement battery should include current levels of functioning in relevant areas such as reading (decoding and comprehension), mathematics, and oral and written language (i.e., Woodcock-Johnson Achievement battery).
- d. Information processing
  - Specific areas of information processing (e.g., short and long term memory, sequential memory, auditory and visual perception/processing, processing speed, executive function, and motor ability) should be evaluated and diagnosed as appropriate (i.e., Wechsler Memory Batter).
- e. Specific diagnosis
  - It is important to rule out alternative explanations for problems in learning such as emotional, attentional or motivational problems that may be interfering with learning but do not constitute a learning disability. The diagnostician is encouraged to use direct language in the diagnosis and documentation of a learning disability, avoiding the use of terms such as "suggests" or "is indicative of" a learning disability.
- f. Test scores
  - The test findings should document the nature and severity of the learning disability, and data should logically reflect a substantial limitation to learning. Standard scores and/or percentiles should be included and are expected to correlate

with identified functional limitations and recommendations for accommodation.

**4. Interpretative summary based on a comprehensive evaluative process should include:**

An interpretative summary should include a demonstration of the evaluator's having ruled out alternative explanations for academic problems (e.g., poor education, poor motivation, emotional problems, attentional problems and cultural/language differences); indication of patterns in the student's cognitive ability, achievement, and/or information processing reflecting the presence of a learning disability; indication of the substantial limitation to learning or other major life activity presented by the disability and the degree of impact in the learning context; indication of why specific accommodation or auxiliary aids are needed and specific conditions under which they were used in the past. Medical information, as appropriate, should include the impact of medication on the student's ability to meet the demands in a postsecondary environment.

**5. Recommendations for accommodations:**

- a. Include specific recommendations and rationale for accommodations;
- b. Include a description of the impact of the diagnosed learning disability on specific major life activities;
- c. Recommendations should be supported by specific test results and/or clinical observations.

**\*\*These guidelines are not meant to be used exclusively or as a replacement for direct communication with Student Accessibility Services regarding the individual nature of a disability. While submitted documentation meeting the above guidelines may be acceptable to Student Accessibility Services at NSU, it is important to be mindful that they may/may not meet the documentation guidelines required in other academic or testing organizations.**