

LEARNING DISABILITY DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

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A Learning disability (LD) is a lifelong, neurodevelopmental disorder commonly manifested, but not always diagnosed, in childhood. Diagnosis of a specific LD requires evidence of a significant impairment in some area of academic achievement relative to other students of the same age. **A diagnosis must demonstrate how processing deficits are conceptually linked to academic achievement delay.**

In Canada, a LD can be formally diagnosed only through a comprehensive psychoeducational assessment completed by a registered clinical psychologist or psychological associate. Accurate diagnosis of LD is necessary in order to distinguish this disorder from other potential causes of presenting symptoms or problems. Accurate diagnosis is also fundamental to the development of proper supports and accommodations in the academic context.

The University of Waterloo accepts psycho-educational reports that uses the definition of a Learning Disability or Specific Learning Disorder (SLD) as approved by the Learning Disability Association of Ontario(LDAO) or the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual V (DSM-V), respectively. For simplicity, both LD and SLD will be referred to as LD in this document.

DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

Students with LD **must submit a psycho-educational assessment report** in support of their request for academic accommodation at the University of Waterloo.

Psychoeducational assessment reports must be completed by one of the following qualified professionals:

- Clinical or education psychologist
- School psychologist
- Neuropsychologist
- Clinical Psychological Associate

AGE OF REPORT

University of Waterloo requires that psycho-educational assessments for LD be completed within the last 3 years. *Assessments completed within the last 3 to 5 years will be considered on a case-by-case basis.*

A LD is normally viewed as ongoing and lifelong. However, the severity and manifestations of the condition may change over time. A functional limitation or learning challenge for a student in Grade 8 may change as they mature and acquire new coping and learning strategies during high school. An up-to-date, comprehensive assessment gives the student and AccessAbility Services the most accurate information about their current learning strengths and challenges to best inform accommodation and support planning best suited in an adult learning environment like university.

OUTDATED ASSESSMENTS

Students whose assessment is out-of-date **may be granted interim accommodations** until an updated assessment can be completed. These interim accommodations are approved on a term-by-term basis and may be available for **up to one full academic year**. Interim accommodations are approved based on information available to AccessAbility Services, including the student's report of their lived experience of their disability. Interim accommodations are usually minimal and are intended to address the student's most pressing access needs. Depending on the quality of information available about the student's current functioning, interim accommodation may not fully address all of the student's access needs.

AccessAbility Services updates and adjusts student accommodation plans in a timely fashion upon receipt of current documentation.

AccessAbility Services can assist students who have outdated assessments. Students eligible for the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) may also be eligible for financial support. Please speak with your Accommodation Consultant for more information.

ASSESSMENT REPORT CRITERIA

A psycho-educational assessment includes a special battery of cognitive and academic tests, student interview, parent and/or teacher surveys, and a review of relevant records (i.e., school reports).

Assessment of the following domains must be included at a minimum:

1. Aptitude/Cognitive Ability – complete intellectual assessment with all subtests and scores, using age-appropriate measures
2. Information Processing – auditory and visual perception/processing, processing speed, visual-motor processing, phonological processing, executive functioning
3. Academic Achievement – comprehensive battery, with all subtests and scores reported, including current functioning level in reading (decoding and comprehension), mathematics, oral and written language
4. Informal Observations – of the student during assessment, including their effort, and its impact on reliability of the test scores

Note: The relationship between the identified areas of academic impairment and the deficient information-processing skills should be logically evident.

Assessment reports must:

- Describe the presenting problem
- Summarize the student’s psychosocial history, family history, primary language information, and any major life events or activities that may impact on learning to rule out medical, psychiatric, or other basis for deficits
- Include a complete academic history:
 - Elementary and secondary school reports
 - Post-secondary grades, if applicable
 - Standardized testing results (e.g., LSAT, MCAT, GRE, etc.), if applicable
- Detail the results of assessment measures as described above, including test scores/percentages
 - Note: assessment measures are to use **age standardized norms**
- State explicitly that the student’s results meet the LDAO or DSM-V diagnostic criteria of a learning disability

SCORES: Actual test scores and/or percentiles must be reported for all standardized measures administered. In a competitive, adult-learning academic environment like the University of Waterloo, scores reported using adult norms should be used.

CLINICAL INTERPRETATIVE SUMMARY

Psychoeducational assessment reports must include a clinical interpretative summary that:

- Rules out psychological, medical, attentional, motivation or behavioral explanations for academic delay
- Describes the patterns of cognitive ability, information processing, and academic achievements that were used to make the LD diagnosis
- Specifies the student’s functional limitations as demonstrated by the assessment measures
- Specifies the degree to which the LD affects the student in a university academic context



RECOMMENDATIONS

Any support and/or accommodation recommendations included in the report must be directly linked to specific tests or clinical observations.

Accommodations: AccessAbility Services conducts a full intake assessment that includes reviewing all disability documentation and interviewing the student about their lived experience of their disability. Using this assessment, **the University of Waterloo reserves the right to grant academic accommodations that support the student's equitable and dignified access to the learning environment while protecting and preserving academic standards and integrity.**

IDENTIFICATION VERSUS DIAGNOSIS

The Education Act, 1990 in Ontario allows for the accommodation and support of identified students without a formal disability diagnosis. Some identified students are granted an individual education plan (IEP). **It should be noted that identification as an exceptional student or being granted an IEP in high school is not the same as a diagnosis of a permanent disability.**

At the University of Waterloo, only students with verified disabilities are entitled to academic accommodations with proper documentation. A prior history of accommodation in high school on its own does not warrant the provision of similar accommodations at the University of Waterloo.

