

# Fact Sheet

Developed by The Center for Disability Studies and Universal Access

## Learning Disabilities Learning Disabilities

### Quick Facts

According to the National Joint Committee for Learning Disabilities, learning disabilities are a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities. The specific causes of learning disabilities are not clearly understood, however, they are presumably related to central nervous system function. The effects of a learning disability are manifested differently for each individual and can range from mild to severe. Learning disabilities may also be present with other disabilities such as mobility or sensory impairments. Often people with attention deficit disorder also have learning disabilities.



Leonardo DaVinci was a great painter, designer, scientist, futurist and thinker. He also had the gift of dyslexia. One remarkable indication that Leonardo was dyslexic is in his handwriting. Leonardo was constantly sketching out his ideas for inventions. Most of the time, he wrote his notes backwards.

Specific Types of Learning Disabilities Include:

- **Dysgraphia** An individual with dysgraphia has a difficult time with the physical task of forming letters and words using a pen and paper and has difficulty producing legible handwriting.
- **Dyscalculia** A person with dyscalculia has difficulty understanding and using math concepts and symbols.
- **Dyslexia** An individual with dyslexia may mix up letters within words and sentences while reading. He may have difficulty spelling words correctly while writing. Letter reversals are common. Some individuals with dyslexia have a difficult time with navigating and route finding tasks as they are confused by directions and spatial information such as left and right.
- **Dyspraxia** A person with dyspraxia may mix up words and sentences while talking. There is often a discrepancy between language comprehension and language production.
- **Non-verbal Learning Disorder** Poor motor coordination, visual-spatial organization and/or a lack of social skills may characterize non-verbal learning disorders.
- **Auditory Processing Disorder** A person with an auditory processing disorder intermittently experiences an inability to process verbal information accurately.

### Successful Classroom Strategies

- Give assignments both in written and oral form.
- Provide students with chapter outlines or study guides that cue them to key points in their readings.
- Use plenty of examples, oral or otherwise, in order to make topics more applied.
- Establish the clarity of understanding that the student has about class assignments.
- Make lists of required readings available early and arrange to obtain texts on tape from Recording for the Blind or a Reading/Typing Service.

## FYI Environment.

In 1994, Reiff, Gerber, & Ginsberg reported results from interviews conducted with 71 adults with specific learning disabilities who had achieved significant success in their careers. The interviews were designed to determine if there were patterns to their success. The factors were divided into two categories, internal decisions and external manifestations. The internal decisions are:

- Desire to succeed.
- Goal orientation.

They found that successful adults exhibit a powerful desire to succeed and are goal-oriented. A strong motivator for these individuals was a desire to gain control of their lives. They recognized that their learning abilities presented them with significant challenges that require determination and hard work to overcome.

The external manifestations of factors contributing to the success of people with disabilities were found to be:

- Persistence.
- Learned creativity.
- Goodness of fit between abilities and work envi-

Successful adults with learning disabilities demonstrated a willingness to take risks and were resilient when they encountered setbacks, keeping their eye on the ultimate goal. These individuals were also astute in their selection of goals for themselves, choosing careers that capitalized on their strengths; they developed creative strategies and techniques to compensate in their areas of weakness. Perhaps the most notable characteristic of this group of individuals was their persistence and commitment to hard work. "The idea of working hard and long was not something to be applied occasionally but was simply a way of life. Additionally, persistence was emblematic of a powerful resiliency, the ability to deal with failure by "not giving up and trying again."

Reference: Reiff, H. B., Gerber, P. J., & Ginsberg, R. (1994). Instructional strategies for long-term success. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 44, 270-288,



## Resources and Further Information



### *About the Center*

*Our Office was developed with the support of a Department of Education Grant, Supporting Students with Disabilities through Professional Faculty Development and Student Curriculum. We are committed to improving the educational environment for students with disabilities and believe that an effective way to reach our goals is to promote an environment of **Universal Education Access (UEA)** to all people regardless of background or characteristics.*

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