

Learning Disabilities – Documentation Guidelines

OVERVIEW

Students who are seeking disability services through the Office of Specialized Services (OSS) at Ramapo College on the basis of a diagnosed specific learning disability are required to submit documentation to verify eligibility under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as amended. It is important to understand that a diagnosis in and of itself is not sufficient support in the post-secondary setting. Current and comprehensive documentation must be provided in order for a student to substantiate his or her eligibility for appropriate academic adjustments and protection under the law.

Secondary schools and post-secondary institutions are governed under different laws with regard to providing services to students with disabilities. A prior history of accommodation does not in and of itself warrant the provision of a similar accommodation at the post-secondary level. A student's high school Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 Plan is seldom sufficient documentation to establish the rationale for academic adjustments, auxiliary aids and/or services in the post-secondary setting. A possible exception would be an IEP or 504 Plan that meets all of the requirements defined by these guidelines.

The following guidelines are provided in the interest of assuring that documentation is appropriate to verify eligibility and support requests for reasonable accommodations, academic adjustments, and/or auxiliary aids at the postsecondary level.

DOCUMENTATION GUIDELINES

Qualifications of the Evaluator

Professionals conducting assessments, rendering diagnoses of specific learning disabilities and making recommendations for appropriate accommodations must be qualified to do so. A certified or licensed professional such as a school psychologist, a neuropsychologist, or clinical psychologist is expected to be part of the evaluation process. Learning disabilities specialists (LDT-Cs) and educational therapists are considered appropriate to be involved in the process of assessment but should not be the sole evaluator. It is not appropriate for professionals to evaluate members of their family or others with whom they have personal or business relationships.

Clerical Requirements

All assessment reports must include the names, titles, and professional credentials of the evaluators and include the signature of the professionals and the date(s) of testing. The report must be typed and submitted on professional letterhead (when appropriate). Specific reporting format is left to the professional, but the required components must be clearly presented and easily discernable. Handwritten scores are not acceptable.

Background Information

Relevant background information regarding the student should be included within the assessment reports. The information should be from a variety of sources and should include such things as: history of presenting symptoms, developmental history, family history, medical and medication history, psychosocial history, academic history of elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education, and summary of prior psycho-educational evaluations.

Current Assessment

Psycho-educational testing must be recent in order to accurately describe a student's current functional limitations and need for academic adjustments, auxiliary aids and/or services. Testing information that is less than three years old is typically considered current. Information that is more than three years old may be considered out of date depending on such factors as the student's current age and student's age at time of testing.

Reliable and Valid Instruments

Tests utilized in the evaluation must be statistically reliable, statistically valid, and based upon the current version utilizing the most recent age based norms (grade based norms are not acceptable). These standards are defined by the current version of the "Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing" developed jointly by the American Educational Research Association (AERA), American Psychological Association (APA), and the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME).

Comprehensive Testing

A full psycho-educational battery (series of tests) is expected. A battery includes measures of aptitude/intelligence and achievement. It is not sufficient to administer only one test or subtest for the purpose of diagnosis of a specific learning disorder. The following are recommended aptitude and achievement tests that are considered technically sound and standardized. However, other tests of aptitude or achievement can be utilized as long as they meet the quality and testing practices mentioned above. Short-form or abbreviated tests (i.e., WASI, WRAT, K-BIT) will not be adequate as sole measures of ability or achievement.

Aptitude/Intelligence Tests

A complete aptitude/intellectual assessment with all subtests, cluster scores, standard scores, and percentiles reported is anticipated. Examples of acceptable aptitude tests include the current versions of:

- The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale
- The Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale

Academic Achievement Tests

A comprehensive academic achievement battery is anticipated. Subtests, cluster scores, standard scores, and percentiles need to be reported. The battery is expected to include current levels of academic functioning in reading, writing, math, and other relevant areas. Examples of acceptable achievement tests include the current versions of:

- The Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-educational Battery, Tests of Achievement
- The Wechsler Individual Achievement Test

Accommodations

It is helpful if the assessment reports include specific recommendations for accommodations as well as an explanation as to why each accommodation is recommended based on the evaluation. In addition, a description of any accommodation and/or auxiliary aid that has been used at the secondary or postsecondary level should be discussed. Information about the specific conditions under which the accommodation was used (e.g., standardized testing, final exams) and whether or not it benefited the student is useful. If no accommodations have been previously provided, it would be productive to explanation why none has been used and the rationale for the student's currently needing accommodation(s).

Documentation Retention

All submitted materials will be held in OSS as educational records under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Students have a right to review their educational record. However, students are encouraged to retain their own copies of disability documentation for future use as the college is not obligated to produce copies for students. Under current New Jersey record retention requirements, disability documentation is mandated to be held for only two years after a student has stopped attending the college.