

*They are, by definition, of average to above average or superior intelligence.*

*They come here to learn,  
and do so with significant learning challenges to overcome.*

## ***Listening to Students with Learning Disabilities***

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## Listening to Students with Learning Disabilities...

*“Being a student who came from a community college that wasn’t as big or diverse as Sac State and also who’s learning challenges hindered her time in college. Here I’ve been provided with a lot of support and resources to succeed.*

*This being my first semester so far my experience has been an adjustment but a good one. I’m happy here.”*

—learning challenges

*“I’m a freshman and it’s a very welcoming school. They take interest in students joining clubs and people are very nice.”*

—female, 18, slight case dyslexia, new to college

*“The problem I have is adjusting as a transfer student with learning challenges. It is very difficult to be heard and get the accommodations I need from student services, but the professors on campus are very informative and helpful.*

*I’m getting more help from professors in my major.... The ... professors truly help me in moving towards my degree.*

*I really like that there are professors on campus who really care for students and step out of bounds to provide their help.*

*I do not like (staff) who are not considerate or provide help for their students. It would be better if they truly accommodated with their students. As a student with dyslexia I do not enjoy being told to use a magnifying glass if I have problems reading a book.”*

—a 21 year old

*“Its great being here, feels like home.*

*(I like) To study/knowledge I got from here.”*

—female, 22, hetero, dyslexia, anxiety

*“It can be challenging, sometimes frustrating, but I find ways to make it through and pass my classes.”*

—Older, Returning to School & has a learning disability

*“I like that the instructors have open office hours. This makes it really great to form connections”*

—female, transfer student, dyslexia

***“It can be difficult in class or embarrassing with dyslexia. Students aren’t nice because they don’t understand how it works.***

***(I like) Teachers who really care about their students ... & TAs who go out of their way to help students....”***

—female, 19, dyslexia, New to College

***“I find that none or very few of my teachers don’t take me seriously. Some teachers just look at me + don’t take me seriously because I look like a ‘typical sorority girl’ + they think I don’t take school seriously so they dismiss me.***

***But I do really like it here at Sacramento State + I am glad I chose this school, because I think it would be worse at other schools.***

***The teachers I have got close to I am still in touch w/.”***

—Female, 21, 4<sup>th</sup> year, dyslexic, sorority

***“Some of my challenges do make school harder. I think the teachers assume if someone has a learning disability they wouldn’t be in college so they don’t take it into consideration. Some teachers also don’t take mental challenges into account either.”***

—young female that is new to college

***“It is an interesting experience. Throughout my education I have faced trials in my education. Those trials have molded me into the student I am today at Sacramento State. Sacramento State has catered to the continuation of my educational journey with the resources available on campus.***

***As a transfer student I mainly think about the resources and the guidance a student like myself can get. From the orientation to SSWD to the tutoring services I have found the ability to be successful here at Sacramento State.***

***Meeting new faces has made it interesting. Some of these faces became study buddies and together we have prospered in our classes.”***

—Learning Challenged

***“I don’t feel there’s much support, and that it can be rather dangerous. I don’t feel safe taking night classes or studying for any activities on campus after dark. Most of the advisors are unhelpful at best, and a few have outright laughed at me. I don’t feel this is a place that cares about me, my well-being, or even my education.***

***Despite what I’ve said above, there have been a few teachers who have been very supportive and encouraging.***

***The majority of the staff are only out for themselves and to make money.”***

—Female, early 20’s, dyslexic

***“Being a white, twenty two year old male who struggles with diagnosed Dyslexia and ADD makes life as a student athlete very difficult. School has always been a challenge for me, and being successful in all areas of my life seems nearly impossible when regarding the hours in a day. There just aren’t enough.***

***I like the library and the availability of the professors, fortunately most teaches have office hours.”***

—No student specifics given other than what is stated above

***“It’s really hard to hear when professors talk to the board, and some teachers don’t write at all. When I record, some don’t like it. If they don’t allow, then I’m not shy at all about stopping them when I have questions.***

***SSWD has been awesome. I like the little rooms—I have ADD so I don’t get distracted in the room all by myself where I can focus. And they’re awesome about giving reading programs like KURZWEIL... where I can see and hear the material.”***

—Auditory Processing Disorder since kindergarten (I have to be able to see and hear)

***“I was diagnose with dyslexia and it makes learning harder for me I am determine to keep trying and for that will not stop my future. Other students have it ‘easier’ due to not suffering with a learning challenge.***

***I would want to share that students are very nice and helpful so don’t be afraid to ask for help.***

***I really enjoy CSUS because its very naturely environment and perfect distance from my home. I also liked how there is many people that try to work with you.”***

—female, 19, dyslexia freshman

***“It is always hard to read for me, I have to read things over and over. For one person something might take 30 minutes, but for me it would take 60 minutes unless I had KURZWEIL.***

***Some of the professors are good and willing to work with you. But not all. I need someone to sit down and show me the steps, one by one, like reverse engineering. I have this professor who is doing that with me this semester.***

***Learning is about the individual process, not just getting a grade, but what you take from the class.”***

—male, 33, straight, returning student, psychological depression, anxiety, OCD, physical challenges. A returning student, too.

***“I have had learning disabilities since kindergarten, audio visual tracking issues. I’m used to it, had it my whole life.***

***It’s difficult when you have to fight for your services. It took me a year and half to get all of the services that I had at my community college. It was a little frustrating having a lot of support at my community college (Sierra) but not here. At first, (it) was very difficult. I always say, ‘you wouldn’t take away someone’s wheelchair if they can’t walk.’ I’m pretty self-sufficient and independent, but I do need my services or I wouldn’t have fought for them.***

***My teachers have been really receptive and have really accommodated me. The teachers are amazing and help out in any way they can. The Technology Center has worked for me. (Staff has) been awesome here.***

***Other than that, I just do what I do to get out of here. It’s hard when classes are based so much on testing—memorization and in some cases spelling, too. Testing has always been my weakness.”***

—female 33. I’ve been here about a year and a half

***“Very difficult, having dysgraphia is hard enough. Then with ADD added on it just gets tougher.***

***(I like) no-handwriting based work. (I don’t like) classes that require mass amounts of handwriting.”***

—male 20 dysgraphia ADD

***“One thing is my not asking for help with my writing. My learning disabilities make writing difficult.”***

—Female Veteran 40 years old

***“As a student in my shoes, it doesn’t stick me out of the box too much, I don’t see I have any problems or false looks because my, not downfalls, but temporarily struggles. I only find difficulty in testing situations, I am hands-on so written tests lose my attention fast and I begin to panic.***

***Be confident in yourself, there are many people like you and a majority of the staff and students are quite kind and helping.***

***Talking w/ prof. and other students helps a lot w/ my slow learning and loss of focus in long classes. Open your mouth, ask for help and clarification.***

***Some professors do not care enough to help w/your needs, the learning test did not work for me I did not have a ‘Big Enough’ problem so some teachers won’t honor my testing skill difficulties.”***

—Hispanic/Black, female, 23, Hetero, dyslexia, anxiety

*“It’s kind of hard to understand. It’s hard to ask questions in class, so I have to ask in private. Students can be judgmental...I have heard them complain about other students who ask questions.*

*Here at the High Tech Center, they’re very nice and helpful. (A staff member) really cares about her students. Whenever I have a problem, I’m having a bad day, she is there for me.*

*Career Center is helpful, too. I went there to get help with an internship. They were very helpful, and I really appreciated that, I love that they’re so positive and optimistic. There are some great ... professors. AIRC has really great technology. I’m happy to get a job on campus—a great way to add more to my resume and get good experience.*

*It’s a negative environment. Some of the staff are really rude, maybe because they don’t like their jobs. Other students with disabilities agree. They need to understand the ADA act, even though they think they do. At my community college, I got more help.”*

—I have a learning disability

*“It’s pretty expensive to be me (I pay predominantly out of pocket). I can only take two classes because of my anxiety, but the price is set for 12 units and below or above. I had a hard time getting my accommodations, took fewer classes I couldn’t keep up with the reading.*

*They have a pretty well-thought out system here. I’m pretty pleased with my accommodations here. The SSWD specialist’s reconsideration and granting me KURZWEIL was huge. After getting accommodations, I now feel really confident I can keep up with my classes.*

*I’m not just some lazy person. I want to learn. I like that the classes I am taking now are not entry-level. They are more detail-oriented, upper division. I feel like I’m excelling. It is exciting.*

*(A staff member) has been awesome, and all of the staff here in answering all of my questions.*

*I do not like the Testing Center because you’re in a classroom with other people who have accommodations. Without special accommodations, you don’t get private accommodations (like I did at my J.C.). I have ADHD and auditory processing problems, so I need to talk through test questions, but don’t want to distract the other students in the room. I’m kind of worried about the WPJ test.”*

—Female, 29, first generation student, a couple of learning disabilities and processing disorders (my reading, spelling, and writing was below average when tested), and test anxiety

*“It’s really nice that they offer the extra time, especially for the exams.*

*The Testing Center really does help. The High Tech Center also helps as a resource, with e-text to read books.*

*With all of the resources, I’m good. It actually works out pretty well.”*

—25 dyslexia

*“A common generalization with people with dyslexia is that they tend to draw back and not talk about it (most). However, I grew up with my learning disability very early on so with me there is less of the wanting to draw back, of the not expressing what I need.*

*Having to tell your professor you have a disability and you need services. It doesn't matter if you're 18 or 28 and going back to school. I'm from a small town where everybody knew you, and in high school you had an IEP. I never knew how hard it would be to cross that bridge...telling my professors. When I was 18 I didn't want to tell anyone I couldn't read.*

*Students with disabilities, they often don't believe in themselves. You have to know why you're here in order to do it all and tell your professor or other people. You have to be f---ing confident about yourself. Perfect example: When students talk about our registration dates, they know I have the first day when I say my date and they ask why. It happens to me all the time. Sometimes they think I am athlete. So what do you do? A. Go and express yourself with proudness or B. hide it? Are we confident or do we just hide it? I definitely express when I need something. That being said, that goes along with my personality. It's a part of me to be honest and just say I have dyslexia. That's me, but what about others? Do they express?*

*I like that Sac State provides 'safe zones' for students with disabilities: the Tech Center and Testing Center, their way about it and system. At my community college, they didn't have hospitality or technological services. There, they treated everything like an ER, especially during finals, like the 1990s riots. Here, it's not customer service, it's hospitality. They treat you like you're walking into their house, with respect. They never ask too much of you, it's reasonable. So when someone provides hospitality to someone who has never really felt comfortable or welcome, you are drawn in.*

*The technological services and programs here, they actually work. If there's a problem, they fix it, they show me, not just do it for me. They're always really nice at the Tech Center, they're just really good to people and lots of smiles.*

*Some professors are really cool—'I'm just going to shoot you all my powerpoints pre-semester.' That helps things to really make sense for me. Then I can copy notes on the powerpoint slides. Versus 'It's on SacCT' but sometimes they don't download it before class. Then I cannot copy notes—just the slides.*

*I don't feel like I look stupid. I speak well, I'm articulate. So I feel like people, professors, might want to ask if I really need the services (because of how well I speak they question if I really have a disability). I get that a lot. The past few semesters—this is why I don't usually go full forward.*

*I know this is a personal thing, my fault. All of my professors have been great—fantastic—when I do ask for everything (all my accommodations). I know if I just spoke up and asked for all of my services, all of my As and Bs would be As. If it looks like my grades might turn into Cs, then I speak up. 'Oh sh--, I knew I should have asked this sooner.' But I don't want to have to ask for every little thing—that's my debate every semester. That's our issue ... people with disabilities don't want to be seen as incapable. It's a fine line.*

*This has been a problem. Professors are telling me they don't always have time, they're busy. But I don't have time either, to go to SSWD when there's a problem. But I have to be assertive because my education helps me to pay my way.”*

—29 male, straight, learning challenges—dyslexia

*“I want people to know my story. I started school at 18 and now I’m 38. I went to a J.C., had a big problem with life sciences and math—a big issue. Had to take it again, can only repeat it so many times and at four times, if you don’t pass, I’m out. I did everything I could—tutoring, Math Center, lab, nothing worked. Went to the Math Department and the LD department, and asked what I could do. I told them that it was some kind of math dyslexia, but they told me that wasn’t real, ‘You just can’t pass and are making that up.’ I left school because I couldn’t pass. I went to two more schools and about that time I got mad and appealed to the Board of Trustees (at that past other school).*

*When I first came here in 2013, I was really scared because I wasn’t sure that I’d get the accommodations that I got at a J.C., and I was scared to give my accommodations letter to a professor—especially as a black person, because of the perception of black people as slow. I sat down with my professor, and he said, ‘I don’t have to take this letter. It’s my choice, and I won’t.’ I had to fight the professor, and then he said, ‘Just kidding.’ And this was someone with a doctorate. I thought this was very telling that I was treated this way, like a second class citizen. A culture of ‘If you need accommodations then you don’t deserve to be here.’ We’re not meritorious.*

*What I would like to say is the stress, the anxiety, the feeling that I’m not supported. I would like more support for students with disabilities. It’s really hard to feel like you have this invisible disability that’s holding you back. It’s just really hard, painful, embarrassing, sad.*

*Having disabilities is a drain on me and my time. It’s very stressful being LD. It affects your quality of life.*

*Books I need a week or two in advance, if I don’t get that I get stressed because of my visual processing disorder. It takes me about 24 hours to get from page 1 to page 5 because my eyes don’t track and my muscles are weak.*

*I come from a family of highly successful people, both my mom and my dad. It made me want to be more of an advocate. I’m scared about how I’ll do once I graduate. I’m mentally and physically exhausted. I’m worried about debt. All I’ve done is unskilled labor. All I have time for is studying. I don’t have time for friends, dating, socializing.*

*The best part of being here is the High Tech Center because it’s really a place where the community can come together and congregate and have some kind of support.*

*I wish (there) was a little more collaborative with students—there’s not enough interaction (in campus services). I would like more of this. I feel that (some staff) does not care, is not invested, we’re just numbers, they’re just paper-pushing, no real advocacy or support. Other students say this, too.*

*I haven’t liked some of the attitudes, and air of classicism, and I have felt contempt, like I’m needy or don’t deserve to be here. Professors don’t care of value you. I would think at an institution of higher learning those with learning disabilities would get more support. We’re not here to ruin your life. It seems they care about the physical disabilities and the community associated with retardation. It’s a pain I can’t even explain. Do they even care about me? Maybe I need to be in a wheelchair so they can see me.”*

—male, 38, gay, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, visual perception disorder, auditory processing disorder, depression, anxiety, OCD



***“I am dyslexic. This affects my cognitive learning, and hurts short-term and long-term memory. I use a lot of sticky notes to remember things.***

***It is challenging. Without services I have to say I don’t think I would be able to survive. I’ve always had tutors in every class (except math, I’m good at that). In grade school, teachers passed me on (didn’t want to take time to help me, understand what I needed, they wanted me to take medication, or tried to put me in special education classes). I didn’t learn until much later. I had to memorize a lot.***

***When reading, I pick out the key words or phrases to get the main idea. If I really want to read it, I turn it upside down and read it that way. I learned that in the fourth grade. With textbooks here in college, it gets very tiring, but it’s possible. It looks like a coloring book when I’m done (because I’ve highlighted so much). I also read from audio books. Writing papers is a challenge. I can speak well, but ask me to say a definition and it takes a long time. I can write upside down, in cursive and in print.***

***I like working with the Tutoring Center, SSWD, (and the High Tech Center staff). I think without having assistance, I wouldn’t be here. I have a cousin with worse dyslexia, and know others, too, and they didn’t pass high school. And now they’re just angry.***

***Find more resources for students looking for help with writing. I want to make sure my writing for my project is done perfectly. I want it done right. Sometimes I pay my own money to hire a tutor off campus.***

***One thing I do like about instructors is that they like to do group activities, which I love. This helps me meet people I can study with, and helps me learn the material.***

***When I get out in the field, I want to know everything. I don’t want to be left behind. And I think I can say that for every student with a disability here.”***

—female, a learning disability and a mental disability, high anxiety,  
returning student, first in family to go to college

***“The workload is somewhat intensive, because they’re reading intensive. Need extra time to understand the subject and reading intensive material—we’re trying to memorize but need more time to go deeper and process, think, apply.***

***The Learning Disabilities Program has helped a lot, especially when it comes to getting accommodations for my classes. The transportation system has helped me get to classes on and off campus. I don’t have transportation, so I don’t have to walk.***

***My first semester I had someone who was a really good professor, but one who did not teach from a book. He taught from online articles (not a textbook) and that was confusing.”***

—26, female, learning disability, first generation student at Sac State

***“Very difficult, very difficult. I couldn’t have gotten through it without these services.***

***(What works for me is) complete quiet, note-takers, KURZWEIL, SSWD counselors, the person who runs it..., and my learning disabilities counselor....”***

—multiple disabilities

## **Students with Learning Disabilities**

According to the California State University Chancellor's Office:

Specific learning disabilities is a generic term that refers to the heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities. These disorders occur in persons of average to very superior intelligence and are presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, even though a learning disability may exist concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (e.g., sensory impairments) or environmental influences (e.g., cultural/language difficulties), it is not the direct result of these conditions or influences. (Coded Memo AAES 89-07 BP 89-08)

Learning disabilities is an umbrella term for the many types of difficulties in perceiving and processing visual or aural information or in expressing thoughts in written or spoken form. The common analogy used in explaining learning disabilities is that of a television or radio with interference to the sound or image; in a person with learning disabilities, information being received or relayed may become scrambled or lost as it travels between the ears or eyes and the brain. This may result in any number of different learning disabilities, some of which are described below.

### ***Common Types of Learning Disabilities and Associated Disorders***

#### ***Dyslexia***

Difficulties with reading printed material. There are many different manifestations of dyslexia for different individuals. For example, "DYSLEXIA" may read DY513X14 or the word "cat" may have about 40 possible dyslexic variations, once you consider different combinations of each of the letters in reverse, transposed, upside down, and so on. Now imagine the time, focus, and effort it would take to read slides or the board in class, a chapter in a textbook, or a question and the answer options given on a multiple choice test. Dyslexia is one of the most wide-spread of all learning disabilities.

#### ***Dysgraphia***

Difficulties in the physical act of writing or the ability to express oneself in writing. Different people will have different types of problems with writing. In example of what this may be like for some, try writing with your non-dominant hand easily and legibly, or try looking in a mirror at the paper while you write something on it but have your hand covered so you can't see your hand as you try to write. Now imagine how much that could adversely impact your ability to fully learn and practice with ease and accuracy all of the rules and protocols for proper writing in education from childhood on up to college level. Dysgraphia is also a common learning disability.

#### ***Dyscalculia***

Difficulties with math reasoning and calculations. Every person will experience different areas of challenge. Reversing numbers so that the number 123 becomes 321 or 213, or reversing signs so that "+" becomes "x" or "-" becomes "=" are common examples given. Now imagine how frustrating it might be to try and work through one math problem, one unit in a course, one semester, and then multiple math courses required for your college degree.

### ***Visual Processing Disorder***

Difficulties in accurately processing and interpreting seen information. Different people will experience this differently. In addition to some of the examples given prior, other examples would include not being able to easily distinguish a word, sentence, picture, or image from its background or differentiate between various things shown, or trouble remembering visual information. Now imagine how hard it would be to capture information in a lecture slide show or a documentary shown in class.

### ***Auditory Processing Disorder***

Difficulties in accurately processing and interpreting sound information. There are many manifestations of this disorder. For example, the word “dog” may become “God,” or the phrase “take a test” could be heard as “break for rest.” It might be hard to distinguish important sounds in a noisy room (e.g., the instructor’s voice in an active classroom) or remember what was said to you. Now imagine how difficult it would be to follow along correctly directions given for a task or class activity, understand clearly and fully a lecture, or converse with ease in daily life.

It should also be noted that an estimated one-third of people with learning disabilities or higher will also have Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.

### ***Common Characteristics of College Students with Learning Disabilities***

One or more of the above learning disabilities and associated disorders can converge in various ways, unique to each student, which may potentially impact different abilities to different degrees in the following ways:

#### ***Reading***

Slow reading rate, confusion with similar words or new vocabulary, difficulty in identifying important points or pronouncing words correctly, lower comprehension and retention. When reading, words might be missed, transposed, or misread. Sometimes the words might dance around or slide off the paper.

#### ***Writing***

Slow writing rate, poor penmanship and lack of neatness, inability to correctly copy from the board or slides, trouble putting thoughts into writing, poor organization of points and paper structure, mistakes in spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation.

#### ***Math***

Incomplete mastery of basic math tables and rules, difficulty recalling formulas for mathematical operations or comprehending word problems, problems sequencing the proper mathematical steps to take (steps may be missed, reversed, or repeated), and reverses numbers, confuses operational symbols, copies problems incorrectly from one line to the next or misaligns columns of numbers in calculations.

#### ***Speaking and Listening***

Harder to concentrate on and comprehend spoken words, express ideas which seem to be understood, speak with grammatically correct English, or follow spoken directions.

### ***Academic Skills***

Difficulties in understanding abstract concepts, comparing and contrasting, reasoning and problem solving, analyzing data or information, drawing inferences, making generalizations, and coming to conclusions.

### ***Study Skills***

Time management difficulties, slow to start and complete tasks, trouble with short- and/or long-term memory of material presented in reading or lecture, difficulty following written or spoken directions, inefficient use of library resources.

### ***Social Skills***

Some of these students may have trouble picking up on others' nonverbal cues or following interactional norms due to their perceptual disabilities. For example, a person with visual perceptual problems who has trouble discriminating between the letters "b" and "d" or "g" and "q" may also be unable to detect the difference between a joking wink and a glance or facial expression meant to show approval or skepticism. People with auditory processing problems might not notice the difference between sincere and sarcastic comments or other tones of voice to indicate such things as a question asked or need for leave-taking.

## ***Potential Consequences of Learning Disabilities to the Student***

This is a condition that can affect many significant areas of a person's life and sense of self:

### ***Education***

—What and how they learn, how they feel about the act of learning, what their college experience is like. At a minimum, they will likely find college harder than their peers, given the extra steps they need to take to learn the same material and do the same assignments. At a maximum, they may have a real fear or anxiety when they step in a classroom, or even dislike when it comes to formal education. This may run counter to their natural love and tremendous drive to learn in other ways and venues in life.

### ***College Logistics***

—How well they understand and complete student forms such as financial aid applications, add or drop classes, take the requisite steps to graduation, etc. Doing things incorrectly or not at all due to the learning disabilities can cause further stress in the life of a college student, as well as delay in time-to-degree.

### ***Daily Living***

—How efficiently they may function in terms of everyday activities, such as following orders at work or reading instructions for chores at home such as cooking, cleaning, or home-repair. Doing the bills, following the news, going online, and so on may be harder. The word "learning" in the term suggests that the problems only fall in the academic context when the reality is that learning disabilities can permeate just about every aspect of one's life.

### ***Socialization***

—How comfortable and proficient they are at meeting, talking, and working with other people. Because some learning disabilities may impact speech and/or social skills, these students may have experienced awkwardness in peer relations at school, as well as possible exclusion or bullying growing up, and this can carry anxiety and scars as they move into campus life in their postsecondary education.

### ***Self-Esteem***

—How they see and feel about themselves. Some may feel a sense of deficiency or lack of achievement in comparison to their peers, despite the fact that they have been officially diagnosed with a learning disability and likely work harder to learn than most. Many are diagnosed later in life, and this may come after a long and painful history of accusations of being lazy, unmotivated, unfocused, or stupid.

### ***What is Known about Learning Disabilities***

*Learning disabilities are real.*

Not a myth, nor an excuse, but significant, documented difficulties with learning such as those described previously.

*Learning disabilities do not equate with intellectual deficit.*

While their brains work in ways that cause challenges to perceiving and processing information, their capacity to learn is not diminished and their IQs are not lower. By definition, people with average intelligence to even those gifted may have learning disabilities. Some people with the greatest minds and talents in our nation's history are believed to have had or were officially diagnosed with learning disabilities, including: Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, and Albert Einstein.

### ***What is Not Known about Learning Disabilities***

*There is no known cause.*

Neurological origin is presumed, with research focused on genetics and pre- and post-natal environmental factors. Please note that learning disabilities are not caused by vision or hearing limitations, inadequate teaching or educational opportunities, lack of parental involvement or care-giving, poor nutrition or vaccinations, cultural background or limited English-speaking ability, autism or emotional disturbances. Income level also is not a cause, although there is higher incidence associated with poverty, due to likely risks to prenatal and early development, such as poor nutrition.

*There is no known cure, nor medication.*

Learning disabilities don't go away with age, either. There are, however, strategies that a student can develop to learn more effectively and accommodations that the student may qualify for on a campus such as ours. Depending on the student's individual needs based on diagnosis, Services to Students with Disabilities (SSWD) accommodations may include: notetakers, tape recorders, course materials in accessible formats that allow both reading of the material while hearing it read aloud, voice recognition software that types what is said, software that helps to outline/mind map, extended exam time, and quiet test rooms.

## *How Many Have Learning Disabilities*

In contrast to data on children with documented disabilities required for school, reliable and consistent numbers on adults with learning disabilities are harder to obtain.

The National Center for Learning Disabilities uses U.S. Census data: 1.7% of the population reports having a learning disability, with the highest number reported by 2.7% of adults ages 18 to 24 years. Experts on the topic often estimate the number to be between 4% to 6%, however, with some organizations going still higher for specific learning disabilities.

## *Students with Learning Disabilities*

### *Nationally*

In the National College Health Assessment by the American College Health Association (Spring 2020), 3.3% of college students reported a learning disability.

According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities, when it comes to adults with learning disabilities who come to college, slightly over two-thirds enroll in some type of postsecondary education within eight years of leaving high school, on par with the general population. After that, however, the numbers drop for those with learning disabilities:

21% attend a four-year institution (rather than a two-year college or vocational, business, or technical school), compared to 40% of the general population.

41% complete college, compared to 52% of the general population—with even lower rates for those at a four-year institution at 34% compared to 51% of the general population.

### *Here at Sacramento State*

On campus, there are 152 students with learning disability a primary disability, 17.8% of students with disabilities, according to the Fall 2020 Census.

Please note that these are only the students who have been diagnosed and are receiving accommodations through SSWD. The number is likely much larger, given some students with learning disabilities may not seek official accommodations. The National Center for Learning Disabilities reports that while 24% of students with learning disabilities let their postsecondary school know that they had a disability, 7% did not even though they still knew they had a learning disability, and 69% did not inform their college because they thought they no longer had the learning disability (which would be untrue, because people don't "grow out of learning disabilities"). The reasons for disclosure include: "Wanting to establish an identity independent of disability, shame or fear of being perceived as lazy or unintelligent, underestimating how important accommodations are to their academic success, and not know what kinds of disability services are available in college or not having the paperwork needed to access them."

It must also be noted that there are also likely more students who may well have learning disabilities that are not, as yet, diagnosed and, therefore, who may struggle academically without realizing why.

[For further information regarding learning disabilities, please see:  
The National Center for Learning Disabilities, [The State of Learning Disabilities](https://www.ncld.org/the-state-of-learning-disabilities-understanding-the-1-in-5)  
<https://www.ncld.org/the-state-of-learning-disabilities-understanding-the-1-in-5>]

## What We Can Do

Students with learning disabilities come to academia at a disadvantage. In addition to the accommodations required for students with disabilities, there are other things we can do to help students maximize learning and success. Below you will find suggestions helpful to students with learning disabilities diagnosed or undiagnosed, and for most students in our classroom.

### *First Things First:*

Be ready to provide your textbook selection and syllabus (including course calendar with reading due dates), and any other course materials as possible, well before the course start date for conversion of the print to alternative media, in keeping with the Higher Education Opportunity Act. Some students may need print materials converted into formats that make the material accessible to them, and the conversion process may be lengthy. Others will want to get started on the reading and assignments well ahead of time, given their learning challenges.

Understand that students might feel uncomfortable presenting their instructor with an academic accommodations form. This may be due to a sense of embarrassment or shame, or the feeling that they might be perceived as someone “trying to get out of doing the work” or mentally deficient, particularly as learning disabilities may seem alien to academia. Especially at the start of the semester, when they don’t know you at all, students may feel reluctant to approach you. A statement in your syllabus inviting students to do so and a few quick words that first day of the semester announcing that you want every student to learn as much as possible in your class and want to do whatever you can to make that happen could be just the encouragement needed.

Guard against misperceptions as you get to know students throughout the semester. Students with or without accommodations made known to you may act in ways that faculty or staff may misinterpret. Some students may take no notes for good reason: because they listen better when not writing at the same time, because they have writing difficulties, and so on. Some students may be very reluctant to participate in class discussion, ask questions in class, or come to your office hour when they are struggling due to their learning disabilities in the realm of speaking or listening. Some students may appear inattentive in class (when they actually do not understand); may seem to be careless in their writing or last-minute in their assignment completion (when they worked longer and harder than most of their classmates); look as if they are unwilling to follow directions (when they simply had difficulties in hearing or reading the instructions); or give the impression that they don’t listen when repeated errors in select areas are made (when their learning disabilities may mean that performance improvement takes a little longer).

### *For Course Reading:*

Schedule reading in increments, rather than a lot of material at any one time. Remember that students with learning disabilities may take much longer to work their way through the material, and that some may get headaches, nausea, or exhaustion with too much reading.

Help students to understand how the information is organized in the course textbook and highlight key study features (e.g., chapter summaries, glossaries, indexes, supplementary materials helpful to learning).

Remind students to complete the reading before coming into a class in order to prime their minds to help them to better understand and remember the information presented in class that corresponds with their textbook.

### ***In Class Lessons:***

Break down the semester course plan into manageable units in terms of material presented, and then still further into shorter units of explanation with time for processing before the next segment in each class. This helps students to keep pace and not be overwhelmed with too much information at any one time. Remember that students with learning disabilities usually will have to work much harder than their peers in terms of time and energy.

Provide lecture outlines, notes, or slides ahead of time, if possible, for the student to read in preparation for the lesson.

Start each lecture with a preview of the key material to be covered for that day and then summarize the main points of the lesson at the end.

Present all key terms and concepts visually on the board, slides, or hand-outs, and be sure to use large enough font size.

Define key terms and concepts clearly and more than once. It doesn't hurt to announce the fact that you are giving the definition either, with explicit cues such as, "here's the definition."

Don't go through slides with written content too quickly. Give students time to see and record the information. The same goes with information presented on the board (don't erase too quickly).

Speak directly to students (not at the board or slides) and use natural gestures and expressions to further convey meaning, all especially helpful for students with auditory processing difficulties.

Understand that tape recording lectures and/or the use of student notetakers can be the one key difference between learning the material and failing a class for students with certain learning disabilities.

Gauge how well they are learning in different ways: Offer frequent opportunities for questions. Look for nonverbal signs of confusion indicating that a student has become lost. Try classroom assessment techniques, short and informal (ungraded) in-class writings done by students to help you assess how well they are understanding the material and what they are confused about [e.g., the "One Minute Paper" ("What did you find most important in today's learning and why?") and "The Muddiest Point" ("What questions do you have regarding the material we discussed?")].



Offer multi-modal ways of learning in order to appeal to auditory learners (through lecture and class discussion), visual learners (through slides, hand-outs, objects, models, demonstrations, clips, etc.), and kinesthetic learners (through “hands on” learning activities, group exercises, role-play, simulations, and so on). Students typically learn and retain most when as many senses are used as possible. Ideally, in a given lesson you would want students to be able to *see, hear, say, and do* something in relation to the lesson at hand. This allows students with learning disabilities related to one of these areas the opportunity to learn through the other means.

Give clear written and spoken directions for in-class work (individual, pair, or group exercises), and then double-check to make sure that students are on track and not uncertain about what to do.

Remember that being asked to read aloud in class may be terrifying for students with print disabilities and that students with learning disabilities that impact speaking may be reluctant to contribute in class discussion.

### ***With Assignments:***

Structure the semester course calendar in a way that is well-paced, so that students have sufficient time to complete each assignment, without an overload due in any one period.

Offer a variety of assignments and forms of assessment when possible, such as papers, presentations, tests, group projects, and hands-on work, so that students are not graded solely on the one or few methods of evaluation least suited to their disability.

Give freedom in topic choice, if possible. This can help with comfort level (they will likely have some knowledge of a topic they have chosen), motivation (they will probably pick something of interest to them), and learning (they can focus on learning the new skills or information that the assignment was designed to accomplish).

Craft larger, longer-term assignments using scaffolding when you can, so that smaller steps (assignment given in chunks, with separate due dates, if possible) lead to bigger steps in end-assignment completion. This can be a great way to help students achieve a lot in terms of course objectives and end tasks, while also decreasing anxiety (taking it one step at a time) and room for error (the instructor can see if the students are on track with the bigger assignment).

Be clear in assignment requirements and grading criteria. Clear assignment descriptions and rubrics give all students a foundation for success, but especially those with learning disabilities. Give assignment directions both in writing and out loud, and welcome questions to clarify expectations when there is confusion or misinterpretation. Try to prevent student mistakes by sharing samples of exemplary work done by past students and giving students a “heads up” regarding common mistakes made on the assignment in the past.

Allow students the opportunity to have you review a rough draft of their work prior to the due date or arrange for peer review opportunities in your course; you might also consider building rough drafts into an assignment process/grade, when possible. This helps the student to stay on track with due dates and assignment requirements and gain confidence in the work they have done, and may prevent failure to do the assignment correctly or at all.

### ***With Grading of Written Work:***

Remember that some learning disabilities may impact the ability to physically write or to put thoughts effectively into written expression. In in-class written work or short essay questions on exams, the handwriting may appear sloppy and/or overly large, and the work is often shorter because it takes longer for the student. The organization of thought may be choppy, vocabulary use limited, the sentences more likely to include incomplete or run-on ones, and more errors made in spelling and punctuation. This may also be seen in formal papers, as well, even with spell-checkers and assistance with writing in campus services. Grading content separately from written mechanics as much as possible is helpful for these students.

Remember, also, that some students may have disabilities that impact their ability to follow assignment directions and requirements properly. They may go off-topic, misunderstand assignment parameters, miss requirements, and so on, in some cases doing more than expected but still not delivering what was asked.

Allow an assignment “re-do,” when possible. It’s a good way to help a student salvage a grade, as well as increase learning.

Give helpful, corrective feedback by being clear on exactly what the student could improve upon and how specifically they might do so. Many times students don’t understand what mistakes they made on an assignment and are hesitant to ask the instructor, and the result may be that they continue to make the same mistakes in that class and their other classes, too.

Give positive, encouraging feedback. Compliment strengths shown to help students to capitalize upon these skills in future coursework and gain greater confidence in their academic abilities. We oftentimes forget just how much a compliment to a student can mean, and for students with learning disabilities, your praise can be that sometimes badly needed reassurance that they are capable, that they do belong here in academia.

### ***In Fieldwork:***

Discuss in advance all aspects of performing the fieldwork or experiencing the field trip in order to anticipate where the student might encounter barriers; implement accommodations and/or make adjustments as needed.

***With Tests:***

Provide study guidelines for exams well in advance, and provide sample study questions that demonstrate both the format and the content of the questions that will be asked, if possible. Explain what constitutes a good answer to a test question and why.

Offer adequate opportunity for students to ask questions about the exam, including an instructor review of the material, if possible.

Encourage the use of student study groups by highlighting the benefits and, if possible, allowing a little class time to form the groups and get them started reviewing for the test.

Understand that students with learning disabilities really do benefit greatly from extended time for exams and/or a quiet room to take the test—this can be the difference between an A or F for some.

Have any exam accommodations in place for the student: For the on-ground examination, make tests available for the student in the Testing Center at least five business days before the scheduled exam date for conversion to accessible formats for students with print-related disabilities.

[Testing Center Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/testing-center/) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/testing-center/>

Remember that online exams might require creation of extended time for the student, as well. Instructions for how to do so may be found on Canvas.

Permit the use of simple calculators, scratch paper, and spelling dictionaries during exams, when possible.

You might also consider allowing students to turn in exams via electronic mail or disk, which may be helpful to some.

Allow students to demonstrate mastery of course material using alternative testing methods better suited to their strengths, if possible. For example, rather than the usual multiple choice format that could hinder students with print disabilities or written essay format that isn't ideal for students with learning disabilities that impact writing, an oral exam or audio/video recorded exam might be appreciated. Conversely, if the exam is an oral one, but the student's learning disability impacts their listening or speaking ability, then a written format might be the best way for the student to show all that was learned.

Go over exams with students who performed poorly, ideally as early into the semester as possible. This can show them exactly what you are looking for (and not looking for) in test responses, as well as to demystify the test-experience for a student, when you take the time to break things down for them in this way. You may also help the student to identify types of frequent mistakes made and then together brainstorm strategies for

preventing these in the future. Make sure they leave knowing that tests are simply one measure of a student's learning, and not always an entirely accurate one at that.

### ***With Presentations:***

Keep in mind that giving a presentation can be nerve-wracking for just about any student, but may be especially agonizing for the one with learning disabilities related to speech production or retention.

Offer the following helpful advice for students with speech difficulties who will be presenting to the class:

Timed presentations will likely present a problem because any speech difficulties related to the learning disability often slow the speaker down, so try to make sure the student has a narrow topic selection and manageable number of main points.

Practicing the speech multiple times (8-10 rehearsals) will also help the student to get a sense of timing, and will help their delivery to come out more smoothly.

Visual aids that contain the key points or terms of the presentation will help greatly in the audience following along (e.g., handouts or slides with an outline of the main points or key terms of the presentation).

Understand that, alternatively, the opportunity to give a video-taped presentation or a one-on-one speech in person to you might be appreciated.

### ***Last But Not Least:***

Be proactive and “check in” with your students, especially when they might appear to be struggling, but they don't come to you for help. This one gesture can make a world of difference in terms of passing a class or failing it.

Pick them up if they fall. Students may really struggle in your class and fail an assignment, exam, or the class itself. The sense of shame or futility may be a real roadblock to moving forward in their other classes and/or in the next semester. When a student stumbles academically, a few quick words or, better yet, sitting down and having that talk to try to mitigate the effects of a low or failing grade can mean so much. You can help the student to realize that sometimes the most valuable learning comes from mistakes made or that academic ability is much like a muscle that needs to be exercised and, over time, will grow and strengthen. This may set their mind at ease and give them badly needed encouragement. Sharing your own stumbles in school or problems in learning can also show the student that even someone who works at a college can struggle academically and still get back on track, still be an intelligent person, still belong in academia.

Direct students to the services they may need.

Some students may have been deemed eligible for accommodations through SSWD for their disabilities, but are choosing not to ask for them in the classroom. In such cases, it may be helpful to remind the student that the challenges of learning disabilities may be considerable in the college learning environment, and there is good reason that, by law, accommodations are in place for those eligible—to level the playing field for those whose brains work differently to pursue their higher education.

Other students may have diagnosed learning disabilities, but have not sought accommodations through SSWD, and still others may be struggling academically due to undiagnosed learning disabilities. In these situations, refer the student to SSWD.

Further information regarding SSWD services and steps to take to apply for accommodations may be found on the following page of this document, “Campus Resources.”

SSWD also offers assistance and guidance regarding learning disabilities that might be interfering with a student’s academic work but have not yet been recognized as such. Students and faculty with questions may contact or come by the office for further information. If no assessment report or documentation is available for a learning disability or ADHD, an LD Specialist can meet with students for an informational appointment to discuss their academic experience and options before students proceed with an assessment. Students with other disabilities that may impact learning should consider submitting other documentation for review and discussion of possible accommodations.

(For further information regarding learning disabilities, please see:  
[SSWD Learning Disabilities Handbook for Students/Faculty \(PDF\)](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/_internal/_documents/learning-disabilities-handbook-for-students-faculty.pdf),  
[https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/\\_internal/\\_documents/learning-disabilities-handbook-for-students-faculty.pdf](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/_internal/_documents/learning-disabilities-handbook-for-students-faculty.pdf))

(With appreciation to all who work with students with disabilities on our campus,  
including Services to Students with Disabilities, for assistance.)

## Campus Resources

### ***Services for Students with Disabilities (SSWD)—***

Offers a wide range of support services to ensure students with disabilities have equal access and opportunity to pursue their educational goals. Application instructions are provided on the website for students with mobility or other physical disabilities, blindness/visual impairment, psychological disorders/cognitive disabilities, learning disabilities, and ADD/ADHD, and students who are deaf/hard of hearing. Services and accommodations for students may include, but are not limited to: specialized educational materials, adaptive equipment, adaptive computer training and use, note-taker services, testing accommodations, consultation with faculty for students with special academic needs, library assistance, disability management advising/counseling, on-campus housing accommodation, and graduate and professional program assistance and information referrals. Students with questions and faculty with inquiries or wanting to make a referral are welcome to contact or come by the office for more information.

Location: Lassen Hall 1008

Phone: (916) 278-6955

[SSWD Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/>

### ***Assistive Technology Lab (ATL)—***

Provides technological services to students with disabilities referred by SSWD counselors/specialists, including: a lab with alternative access to computers for students with disabilities to work on coursework and a training room for students to receive instruction on the adaptive technology appropriate to the student's disability (such as screen magnification and reading, scan/read programs). The ATL also provides consultation and assistance to faculty to convert course textbooks, syllabi, exams, class web content, slides, and handouts into alternative formatted instructional materials for students (such as Braille).

Phone: (916) 278-7915

ATL Computer Lab: Academic Information Resource Center 2011

ATL Training Lab: Academic Information Resource Center 2010

### ***Maryjane Rees Language, Speech and Hearing Center—***

Offers speech, language and hearing services for people with communication challenges and/or cognitive disorders, including but not limited to: hearing loss, reading disorders, speech sound disorders, stuttering, cleft palate, voice disorders, and conditions associated with stroke, brain injury, concussion, progressive disorders, and other neurological impairment. Services are free to all, and those interested may get further information on the website, call, or stop by.

Location: Folsom Hall (7667 Folsom Blvd.) Room 2203 Phone: (916) 278-6601

[Center Website](https://www.csus.edu/college/health-human-services/community-services/language-speech-hearing-center.html) <https://www.csus.edu/college/health-human-services/community-services/language-speech-hearing-center.html>

***TRiO Student Support Services Program (through SSWD)—***

Provides to students with disabilities, who meet TRiO eligibility requirements and are in need of academic support to better stay and succeed in college, services that include: supplemental instruction, tutoring, adaptive equipment, readers, note-takers, proctors and test arrangements, specialized instruction materials, individualized counseling, transition coaching, assistance with graduate school admission, and more.

Location: Lassen Hall 1008

Phone: (916) 278-6955

[TRiO Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/student-resources.html) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/student-resources.html>

***Counseling (Student Health and Counseling Services)—***

Helps students to cope with such things as stress, academic difficulties, cultural adjustment, relationship issues, anxiety, depression, bereavement, post-traumatic symptoms, questioning sexuality and coming out, eating disorders, addiction and alcohol abuse. The privacy and confidentiality of all who use Counseling Services is maintained fully within the bounds of law and professional ethics.

Location of Counseling Services: The WELL, Second Floor

Phone: (916) 278-6461

Location of Urgent Care Clinic: The WELL, First Floor

[Counseling Services Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-life/health-counseling/counseling/) <https://www.csus.edu/student-life/health-counseling/counseling/>

*Students in an immediate crisis* should contact 911 or the Suicide Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Students with urgent concerns who would like to see someone right away may walk in to receive counseling at the Urgent Care Clinic (WELL, First Floor) any time during its hours of operation or call to speak with the After Hours Nurse at: (916) 278-6461.

Students who want to receive counseling or explore if counseling is right for them may schedule an appointment by calling or coming in Counseling Services, or going online through the Patient Portal. This typically begins with a consultation appointment, where the student can talk about their concerns and receive support and feedback. Many students find that they feel better and their needs are met in just one session. Students who want to continue counseling may choose individual counseling in follow-up single session appointments (to meet their needs in the moment) or short-term individual therapy (more than one session with the same mental health clinician). Students may also join group therapy (with five to ten other students).