

CHECKLIST FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

Taken from the book *Learning Disabilities A to Z* written by Smith and Strick

There are two types of learning disabilities: (1) Nonverbal Learning Disabilities (NLD) and (2) Language-based Learning Disabilities. Learning Disabilities share many symptoms with the autism spectrum disorders. In order to be considered a true learning disability, the symptom(s) must not be better accounted for by the person's primary diagnosis such as autism, PDD-NOS, or Asperger's Syndrome. Many students with learning disabilities have difficulty with social skills, sensory processing, and language processing.

Nonverbal Learning Disabilities are disorders that interfere with traditional learning and can sometimes mimic parts of the autism spectrum disorders. Some of these include: Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder, visual perception disabilities (such as reading or dyslexia, writing or dysgraphia, and mathematical or dyscalculia), and motor disabilities (fine or gross motor coordination). In their book *Learning Disabilities A to Z*, Smith and Strick created the below checklists for learning disabilities.

Visual Perception Disability Checklist

It is normal for children to display a few of the symptoms on this list. A learning disability may be responsible if many of these behaviors are present, and if they persist beyond the age where such errors are typical

Writing

- Dislikes and avoids writing
- Delays in learning to write
- Papers are messy and incomplete; many cross-outs and erasures
- Difficulty remembering shapes of letters and numbers
- Frequent letter and number reversals
- Uneven spacing between letters and words
- Omits letters from words and words from sentences
- Inaccurate copying
- Poor spelling (spells phonetically)
- Cannot spot errors in own work
- Difficulty preparing outlines and organizing written work

Reading

- Confuses similar-looking letters (*b* and *d*, *p* and *q*)
- Difficulty recognizing and remembering "sight" words (but can sound words out phonetically)
- Frequently loses place when reading
- Confuses similar-looking words (*bread* and *beard*)
- Reverses words (reads *was* for *saw*)
- Has trouble finding letters in words or words in sentences
- Poor memory for printed words (also number sequences, diagrams, illustrations, and so on)
- Poor comprehension of main ideas and themes

Math

- Poor alignment of problems results in computation errors, difficulty memorizing math facts, multiplication tables, formulas, and equations
- Trouble interpreting graphs, charts, and diagrams
- Difficulty with higher-level math concepts

Related Problems:

- Confuses left and right
- Difficulty estimating time, being on time
- Poor sense of direction; slow to learn his or her way around a new place
- Difficulty judging speed and distance (interferes with many games; can be a problem when driving a car)
- Has trouble “getting to the point”; becomes bogged down in details
- Does not pick up on other people’s moods and feelings (results in often saying the wrong things at the wrong time)
- Poor planning and organizational skills
- Often loses things; cannot spot objects “in plain sight”
- Distaste for puzzles, mazes, or other activities with a strong visual element
- Difficulty perceiving strategies for being successful in games (may not understand the goal)

Fine Motor:

At home:

- Appears awkward and clumsy; often drops things, spills things, knocks things over
- Has difficulty picking up and using small objects such as puzzle pieces or Legos
- Has trouble with buttons, hooks, and zippers when dressing; finds it very difficult to tie shoes
- Unsuccessful in games and activities that involve hand skills (cat’s cradle, piano lessons, basketball)
- Poor coloring ability; cannot keep within lines
- Art work looks immature for age (drawings from imagination are usually better than efforts at copying designs)
- Difficulty using scissors
- Awkward pencil grip (may hold pencil too loosely or too tightly)
- Delays in learning to write; writing is large and immature, letters and numbers are poorly formed
- May be delayed in learning to speak or have articulating problems

At school:

- Poor handwriting (sloppy, illegible, poor spacing, inconsistent letter size, no consistent style, strays from lines on paper)
- Papers are messy (torn and crumpled with many cross-outs, smudges, and incomplete erasures)
- Marked slowness, exceptional effort, and frustration noted during writing tasks
- Dislike and avoidance of writing or drawing
- Content/style of written assignments (poor primary focus is on aligned numerals)
- In severe cases, difficulty learning keyboard skills

Language Based Learning Disabilities effect either verbal output (meaning speech) or processing (meaning words are understood clearly but the meaning is lost). Many students with language based learning disabilities may have difficulty with language acquisition causing them to speak later in development or with delayed word retrieval. Most people have experienced word retrieval issues at one point or another – this occurs when you are trying to think of the item’s name or in the grocery store you just can’t remember what you’ve gone in for – but for people with word retrieval issues this is an everyday occurrence and, for some, occurs every time they speak.

Other students have difficulty with fluency, verbal memory (such as memorizing a string of verbal directions), or auditory processing, meaning the student understands each word that is being said to him/her, but s/he can’t interpret the meaning from a sentence. In their book Learning Disabilities A to Z, Smith and Strick also created the below checklists for Language Based learning disabilities.

Language Processing Disability Checklist

It is normal for children to display a few behaviors on this list. A persistent pattern of many of these symptoms, however, many indicate a learning disability.

Speech and Language Comprehension

- Delays in learning to speak
- Does not modulate tone of voice appropriately; speaks in monotone, or too loud
- Has problems naming objects or people
- Uses vague, imprecise language; has a small vocabulary
- Speech is slow or halting; uses verbal “stalling” mechanism (“uh,” “um,” “you know”)
- Uses poor grammar
- Frequently mispronounces words
- Confuses words with similar sounds (such as *frustrate* and *fluctuate*; may produce hybrids such as *flustrate*)
- Often uses hand gestures and body language to help convey message
- Avoids talking (especially in front of strangers, authority figures, or groups)
- Insensitive to rhymes
- Little interest in books or stories
- Does not respond appropriately to questions (replies “Monday” when asked “Where do you go to school?”)
- Frequently does not understand or remember instructions

Reading

- Significant delays in learning to read
- Difficulty naming letters
- Problems associating letters with sounds, discriminating between sounds in words, blending sounds into words
- Difficulty analyzing sound sequences; frequent sequencing errors (such as reading snug for sung)
- Guesses at unfamiliar words rather than using word analysis skills
- Reads very slowly; oral reading deteriorates within a few sentences (due to declining ability to retrieve sounds rapidly from memory)

- Comprehension for what has been read is consistently poor, or deteriorates when sentences become longer and more complex
- Poor retention of new vocabulary words
- Dislikes and avoids reading

Writing

- Written assignments are short or incomplete; often characterized by brief sentences, limited vocabulary
- Problems with grammar persist
- Bizarre spelling errors (not phonetic); students may be unable to decipher own spelling
- Ideas in written assignments are poorly organized, not logically presented
- Little theme development; students are more likely to write bare lists of points or events than provide details or develop ideas, characters, or plot
- On tests, consistently does better with multiple-choice questions than essays or filling in blanks

Math

- Slow response during math fact drills due to problems with number retrieval
- Difficulty with word problems due to poor language comprehension
- Problems with higher level math due to difficulties with analysis and logical reasoning

Related Problems

- “garbles” telephone messages; misunderstands what is heard on radio or TV
- difficulty with verbal reasoning; may understand all the words in the proverb “A rolling stone gathers no moss” but be unable to explain what it means; may find it hard to draw logical conclusions
- problems understanding puns and jokes; may not detect teasing
- difficulty making comparisons and classifying objects or ideas
- difficulty remembering information or producing facts or ideas on demand
- difficulty presenting a story or directions in logical order
- types of problems encountered learning English are likely to be repeated when studying a foreign language
- difficulty joining or maintaining conversations