

What Are Learning Disabilities?

A learning disability can be described as a learning difference in the way a person takes in, understands, remembers, and/or expresses information. This translates into difficulties with reading, writing, and/or math. To qualify as having a learning disability at the community college level, one must exhibit at least average to above average intelligence. It isn't because they can't learn - they just learn differently. The signs of learning disabilities vary from person to person. Common signs that a person may have learning disabilities include the following:

Reading

- Confusion of similar words, difficulty using phonics, problems reading multi-syllable words
- Difficulty finding important points or main ideas
- Slow reading rate and/or difficulty adjusting speed to the nature of the reading task
- Difficulty with comprehension and retention of material that is read, but not with materials presented orally

Writing

- Difficulty with sentence structure, poor grammar, omitted words
- Frequent spelling errors, inconsistent spelling, letter reversals
- Difficulty copying from chalkboard
- Poorly formed handwriting -- might print instead of using script; writes with an inconsistent slant; have difficulty with certain letters; space words unevenly
- Compositions lacking organization and development of ideas

Listening

- Difficulty paying attention when spoken to
- Difficulty listening to a lecture and taking notes at the same time
- Easily distracted by background noise or visual stimulation
- Might appear to be hurried in one-to-one meetings
- Inconsistent concentration

Oral Language

- Difficulty expressing ideas orally which the student seems to understand
- Difficulty describing events or stories in proper sequence
- Difficulty with grammar
- Using a similar sounding word in place of the appropriate one

Math

- Difficulty memorizing basic facts
- Confusion or reversal of numbers, number sequences or symbols
- Difficulty copying problems, aligning columns
- Difficulty reading or comprehending word problems

Study Skills

- Problems with reasoning and abstract concepts
- Exhibits an inability to stick to simple schedules, repeatedly forgets things, loses or leaves possessions, and generally seems "personally disorganized"
- Difficulty following directions
- Poor organization and time management

Social Skills

- Difficulty "reading" facial expressions, body language
- Problems interpreting subtle messages, such as sarcasm or humor
- Seems disorganized in space: confuses up and down, right and left; gets lost in a building, is disoriented when familiar environment is rearranged
- Seems disoriented in time: is often late to class, unusually early for appointments or unable to finish assignments in the standard time period
- Displays excessive anxiety, anger, or depression because of the inability to cope with school or social situations

DRC welcomes questions and partnering with classroom faculty so we can support you in your efforts to accommodate a student with a disability. Individual consultations with our highly qualified DRC staff are most welcome and available to all Cañada College faculty and staff on any disability-related issue. We look forward to collaborating with you.

For additional information, please contact:

Jenna French, Learning Disabilities Specialist / DRC Counselor, (650) 306-3368,
frenchj@smccd.edu