

Specific Learning Disability

What is a specific learning disability?

A specific learning disability is a neurological condition (that is, related to the the way your brain works). It is not related to intelligence: a person with a specific learning disability might have an average or high score on a formal intelligence assessment. A specific learning disability impacts on the way you learn and process information.

There are different forms of specific learning disability; these include dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia and dysgraphia. For information about **dyslexia** see the separate hand-out **Dyslexia**.

Dyscalculia

Dyscalculia refers to having a persistent difficulty in understanding numbers and maths concepts and symbols. You may have found it hard to learn basic numeracy skills, such as addition and multiplication. You may also find other number-related skills challenging such as telling the time and understanding quantity, prices and money. You may find it difficult to process written numbers (that is, to automatically link them with the idea of specific measures or quantity).

Dyspraxia

People with dyspraxia have difficulties planning and completing fine motor tasks. You may find it difficult to smoothly complete tasks such as writing, typing and manipulating lab instruments. Because speech involves coordinating fine movements, some people have difficulties with pronunciation or fine control of their speech volume or pitch. These difficulties with planning and executing movement can also lead to difficulties with following multi-step instructions and general planning and organisation activities. Some people also experience heightened sensory sensitivity in some areas such as touch, sound or light.

Dysgraphia

Dysgraphia is a processing difficulty that specifically affects handwriting. Handwriting requires a complex set of motor skills and information processing skills. You will find the act of writing difficult and perhaps tiring. You may have uneven and/or unclear handwriting and problems with spelling, grammar and putting your thoughts down on the page.

Suggestions for successful learning and study

Maths

- If you have difficulty with the maths content in your courses, make an appointment at Learning Services to see a Maths Learning Advisor to get assistance and learn useful strategies.

Writing

- Typing your work gives you access to a spell checker to help with your spelling.
- Read and Write Gold software (on Ara computers) has an informative and helpful spell checker. Ask at Disability Services for more information.
- Make an appointment at Learning Services to get help with skills such as planning and writing your assignment, essay and report writing and notetaking skills.
- If you find it hard to get started writing an assignment, use a strategy to start your thoughts flowing:
 - put all your first thoughts on the page by writing or typing: edit it later
 - draw a mind map or diagram to plan your response, or use mind mapping software
 - record what you want to say first, then use that audio to guide your writing
- Ask a friend, or use the read-aloud function on Read and Write Gold, to read your draft assignment back to you. This will help you identify errors that your mind skips over when you read silently.
- Develop good assignment editing strategies: use your marking schedule; develop a checklist; ask for assistance from Learning Services.
- When powerpoint hand-outs are available on Moodle, print these out before class: read through them before you go to class and use them to help you take effective notes in class.
- Talk to Disability Services about options and strategies if you find it difficult to take notes in your classes or if you find writing difficult for tests and exams.

Organisation and memory

- Find out what works for you, e.g. a study planner poster or the organiser on your phone, and use this to keep track of your assessment dates and study process. Disability Services may be able to provide some assistance with this.
- Learning Services can help you develop planning and study strategies. Learning Services can also assist you with developing effective learning and memory techniques.

Contact Disability Services

Phone: 940 8089

Email: disability@ara.ac.nz

For more information:

Study strategies:

http://services.unimelb.edu.au/disability/resources/towards_success/learning_disabilities

Information about specific learning difficulties: <http://www.brainhe.com/students/types/>