Tip Sheet

Accommodations for Older Students and Adults

Students with Specific Learning Disorders such as Dyslexia are eligible to apply for certain accommodations at high school, university, and TAFE. Such accommodations allow the student with an SLD to demonstrate his/her abilities more accurately and need not compromise academic standards.

- Specific Learning Disorders are enduring conditions and result in the significant under-representation of students at upper secondary and tertiary studies level.

- Students with Specific Learning Disorders typically spend three to five times longer than non-learning disabled students when completing set tasks. Accordingly, extra time will be needed to ensure that a task has been processed and completed, especially if it involves a writing activity. The student may also require extra time to read and to process the information read within the learning environment and assignments.

Teaching Strategies

- Teaching students using dual-coding techniques is recommended. Dual-coding involves the concurrent encoding of visual and verbal information. This improves retention and recall, as the learner creates multiple retrieval routes to the same information.

- Use a variety of teaching styles and methods, incorporating as many mediums as possible including visuals (e.g. flashcards, demonstrations, pictures), hands-on materials (e.g. counters, blocks, clay), and verbal explanations

- Build on prior learning in a systematic and sequential way.

- Break up learning tasks into smaller steps and provide clear instructions for each step.

- Repeat and revise key skills until they are over-learned. This can be done through ensuring key statements/ concepts/instructions are highlighted and repeated in the same way.

- Provide definitions of words specific to the topic prior to teaching. Experiential learning, such as hands-on activities or computer-assisted learning, will assist the student to assimilate the information in a meaningful way.

- Present material in a range of formats e.g., diagrams, charts, handouts, audio recordings, videos.

- Distribute comprehensive unit/subject outlines with details about content covered and assessment tasks.

- Allow audio-recording of classes or lectures.

- If possible, select texts that are available electronically. Alternatively, these may need to be audio-recorded or transcribed for the student.

- Provide copies of notes and other instructive material that may be missed due to processing and writing difficulties. Providing summaries of chapters of books is also useful to support students' note-taking skills.

- Highlight key words or information in text.

- Allow the use of aids and equipment such as dictionaries, word processors (with spell check programs), handheld spell checkers and scribes.

- Ensure students do not have to rely too heavily on reading in order to acquire information.

- Provide students with the opportunity to talk through the material as this will aid and enhance their understanding. This can be done at a whole-class level or through structured group activities.

- Create an environment where students feel comfortable to discuss their learning difficulties with you.

- Encourage students who show indicators of having learning difficulties to consult with the appropriate Student Services, Learning Support, or Disability Services team.

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Tip Sheet

Accommodations for Older Students and Adults (continued)

Assessing Student Learning

- Allow alternative assignment formats e.g. oral reports, demonstrations, recorded on video or audio tape.

- Allow assignments written in 'dot point' rather than essay format for students who have difficulties with the sequencing and structure of written expression.

- Conduct a class review session before the assessment.

- Time extensions for written assignments should be permitted.

- Allow work to be completed on an in-depth study of a few texts rather than a broad study of many.

- Encourage students to use a proof-reader before submitting written assignments.

- Give separate marks for content and structure.

- Keep students informed about their level of achievement and refer to support services if necessary.

- Provide practice exam questions that demonstrate the format of questions and examination papers so students can prepare information better and practice answering questions within the time allowed.

- Provide students with examples of "good answers". If they know what they are aiming at, they will have to devote less time and mental energy to shaping and structuring information in the actual test or exam.

- Structured frameworks can help a student understand what is required in tasks such as essay writing. This involves breaking the assignment down into achievable parts. If possible, it is useful to set out a timeline for a project with deadlines for each part. This means that the teacher can regularly check on progress, and the project does not seem overwhelming to the student because it is broken down into manageable chunks.

- Allow extra time. This will depend on the severity of the learning disability. An extra 10-minutes reading or writing time per hour is common.

- Allow for alternative presentation of exams, such as large print, or electronic format (on computer).

- Students with working memory difficulties may require the test to be changed from multiple choice to essay question format.

- A reader and/or a scribe could be useful for students with a reading, processing and/or working memory problem.

- For students with Dyslexia or other language deficits, allow the student to:

  - Take lists of commonly used words into the exam.

  - Use a computer to access Spell Check, Dictionary and Thesaurus, and other assistive technologies.

- Don't penalise for handwriting, grammar and spelling when a word processor is not available.

- Also allow alternative test/exam formats e.g. oral question and answers tests, slide presentations, photographic essays, handmade models.

- Consider timetable changes.

- Split exam papers (due to extra time and/or fatigue)

- Allow rest days between exams.

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