

Ways That College Students Can Help Themselves

General Strategies

1. Many students with LD come to college and do not anticipate needing any accommodations or support services. However, if you have been previously diagnosed as having a learning disability, secure a copy of the most recent evaluation or Individualized Education Plan (IEP). You will need to provide this documentation or be reevaluated in order to be eligible for services.
2. Learn about Section 504. Find out what accommodations and support services your college provides, and, should you need them, where to find them.
3. Increase your understanding of the nature of learning disabilities in general and specifically the type and severity of your own learning disability by discussing your test results with an LD specialist.
4. Rehearse your explanation of the above information with your LD specialist or a friend so that you can explain fully to faculty the reason for requesting an accommodation such as extended time on an examination.
5. If you require classroom accommodations of some kind, schedule an appointment with your instructor early in the semester.
6. If you need to tape record lectures, ask permission of the instructor before doing so as a courtesy to the instructor. Be sure to explain why you need this modification and how you will use the tape to enhance your learning.
7. Take notes simultaneously while tape recording. Indicate questions in the margin when material is unclear. If your tape recorder has a counter, begin it at zero in the beginning of the lecture, and note the counter number in the margin next to your question.
8. Listen to tape, rewrite notes, and highlight key concepts, as soon after class as possible. Compare your notes with a study partners
9. Apply the following principles of effective learning when you study. They will increase your chances of success. Included are:
 - a. Complete the reading assignments prior to class. Associating the lecture with the readings is a lot easier than listening to the lecture "cold." In addition, you will be better prepared to ask the instructor for clarification and/or elaboration and to participate in class discussion, should the opportunity arise. Most instructors value the active participation of students who come to class prepared.
 - b. Attend all classes. Other students can get by missing an occasional class, but for you, hearing the lecture may be a critical factor in learning new material.

c. Preview new material and review the previous lecture before each class.

d. Sit toward the front of the class so you can hear and see well and be more easily recognized if you have a question or want to participate in the discussion.

e. If you tape record in class, carefully label every tape (for example, Side 1, Intro to Psychology, 2/8/97) before you insert it into the recorder. Set the counter to zero and if you are unsure of a concept during the lecture, jot down the counter number in the margin of your notes for easy review and clarification later.

f. Review tapes and/or notes as soon after the lecture as possible. Compare your notes with a study partner's note. Copy notes over, if necessary. Highlight and summarize the main points. Keep a glossary of important terms, lists of key concepts, major events, contributors and their theories, or formulas.

10. Keep a master calendar. Make sure it's large enough to enter assignments, exams, social events, and important appointments. Use other calendars for specific tasks, e.g., a wall calendar for long-range assignments.

11. Work backwards from due date on long-range assignments and build in extra time. Go over this time line with your instructor and ask for feedback on your progress periodically.

12. Make sure you have understood the assignment correctly and completely before plunging in or soon after you have started by scheduling an appointment with your instructor early. Don't wait till you have finished the assignment to find out you have not fulfilled the requirements.

13. Often, the hardest part of getting your work done on time and keeping up with the workload is getting started on a new assignment. Start by making a commitment of 30 minutes and then lengthen the studying periods gradually.

14. Because most college students with LD have trouble recognizing and correcting spelling errors in their handwriting, it is important to use a word processor with a spell checker and grammar check to identify misspelled words and incorrect grammar. However, proper nouns and homonym errors may not be identified. Use the grammar check to identify inappropriate prepositions and word choices, errors of punctuation, or poor sentence structure. If your instructor agrees to the plan, request a writing tutor, friend, roommate, or relative proofread your paper and assist you in error identification and correction as a final step. (See Appendix VI for listing of adaptive technology that students with LD have found useful.)

15. Reach out for assistance early, if needed. Schedule an appointment with your instructor when you begin to get confused or flounder. Do not wait until you are already in danger of failing the course. Speak to the coordinator of the Office for Disabled Student Services and/or your advisor and find out what help is available.

16. Be aware of Drop-Add and Pass-Fail options and deadlines to adjust your schedule. Use them to your advantage to enhance success.

17. Work with others to inform and sensitize the student body, faculty, administration, and staff about

learning disabilities. Organize public lectures, student panels, films, and videos. Write articles for the student newspaper on your campus.

18. Become a student member of and/or provide input to policy making university committees.

19. Find out if there is a support group for students with learning disabilities on your campus and become an active member in this group. At such group meetings you will find out your problems are not unique and you are not alone in your struggles. In addition to the comfort that provides, you will learn studying and test taking strategies and about instructors whose teaching style will be most compatible with your learning style.

20. Call the International Dyslexia Association (formerly The Orton Dyslexia Society) at 412/296-0232 and find out how your student support group for those with learning disabilities (or if you do not presently have one, how you could start a student group) could become affiliated with a national network of student support groups. Request information about how you could become part of this network and ask them to send you copies of the past issues of "2.3 Point," the college affiliate newsletter. Official student organizations on campus receive financial support from the student government. Find out how your group could be recognized as an official student organization and qualify for funding.

21. Provide peer counseling and support to other students with learning disabilities on an individual basis or through a support group on campus.

22. Join professional organizations as a student member advocating for rights of adults with learning disabilities and other persons with disabilities (e.g., Learning Disabilities Association, The Association of Higher Education and Disabilities [AHEAD], and the International Dyslexia Association). See Appendix VII for further information.)

Memory Strategies

1. Learning is synonymous with reviewing and for you, reviewing frequently and regularly throughout the semester is essential.

2. Color code, enlarge, underline, and highlight your notes to strengthen your visual memory of the material.

3. Copy your notes over, if for you, the act of writing facilitates memorizing.

4. Read aloud (tape recording while reading) if hearing with or without seeing words helps you remember what you've read.

5. Tape record lectures and listen to them while driving, exercising, eating, grocery shopping, etc.

6. Rehearse material to be mastered either orally or in writing. Write out concepts in full. Read your notes silently or aloud whichever works best for you. Paraphrase or explain concepts to a friend.

7. Review frequently and commit material to memory using strategies that aid recall such as listing,

categorizing, drawing, imaging, revisualizing, alphabetizing, devising acronyms, and associations.

Test-taking Strategies

- 1.** Find out what examination format your professor will use (e.g., long answer essay questions, multiple choice, short answer essay questions). Ask your professor for "practice" exams or find out if old exams are available. Take as many as you can and check your answers against the answer key, with a tutor, study partner, or graduate assistant.
- 2.** If no prior exams or questions are provided, and if essay-type exams will be given, try to anticipate the questions that will be asked on the exam. Write out your answers to the anticipated questions.
- 3.** Be sure to go into exams rested and not having just consumed a large amount of sugar or caffeine; complex carbohydrates and some protein will provide the best source of energy over an extended period of time.
- 4.** If you have memorized specific formula, dates, names, or terminology for an exam, before you begin working on the exam, write down all that you have committed to memory and use, as needed, later in the exam.
- 5.** Read test directions carefully, underlining the verb that describes what you are to do: describe, compare, summarize, and list. Then follow the directions precisely.
- 6.** Begin by answering the easiest questions first. Circle the hard ones and come back to them after you have answered the easy ones.
- 7.** Pace yourself. Even if you have extended time, it is not unlimited.
- 8.** If you come to a question you don't understand, paraphrase it for the proctor in order to get confirmation that you have understood what the question meant.

Self-Confidence Building Strategies

Building self-confidence is not an easy task. Many people benefit from the assistance of a counselor, psychologist, or therapist on a one-to-one basis or in a support group. You should explore such options in the Counseling Center on campus. In addition, the following strategies may prove helpful:

- 1.** After preparing as well as you could, tell yourself as you go into an exam or to make a presentation, you will succeed and you are well prepared, rather than you are going to fail;
- 2.** Identify a realistic goal and work toward it. When you succeed in accomplishing it, identify the strategies that you developed that contributed to your success. Building self-confidence is a step-by-step process in which you meet increasingly difficult challenges and take credit as you accomplish each one.

- 3.** If you don't achieve your goal on the first attempt, sit down with a family member, friend, teacher, or counselor and analyze and refine your strategies. Identify new strategies and intermediate goals that will prepare you better to achieve your final goal. Tell yourself, "Next time I know I'll do better."
- 4.** Develop a time line to accomplish each goal, building in extra time for the unexpected. Remember there is no point rushing toward failure. Take a long range perspective on your life, rather than focusing on just one semester.
- 5.** Keep a list of your past successes and accomplishments and read this list over frequently.
- 6.** Take credit for your achievements and work well done. Accept compliments with a simple "thank you". A compliment is like a gift. When you reject a compliment, you are rejecting not only the compliment but also the person giving it. How would you feel if you brought a Lift for someone and it was rejected? If your performance did not meet your expectations, you can critique it at a later time with your teacher, coach, counselor, or friend.
- 7.** Identify your strengths and keep expanding the list of what you do well. Your learning disability gave you some special talents as well as difficulties. Identify your talents, develop them, and enjoy them.
- 8.** Keep disappointments in perspective; a "D" on one quiz does not mean you will fail the course; a "D" in one course does not mean you will be dismissed from college.
- 9.** If you do poorly on a paper or exam, find out why rather than condemning yourself or rejecting the good along with the ineffective strategies that you may have used. Chalk it up to experience. Mistakes are often the best teachers. By analyzing what went wrong, you will be better able to avoid such mistakes in the future.
- 10.** Look at your friends. What do you admire and respect in them? Because they also chose you as a friend, you share in their attributes and have other qualities that they admire and respect as well.
- 11.** Dress for success. If you are not sure of the appropriate dress code for a specific occasion, setting, or social event, check ahead of time with a knowledgeable person.
- 12.** Smile. People who smile send a message to others that they are comfortable with themselves and are self-confident. Smiling is contagious. You will find people around you will reflect your facial expression, be much more pleasant, and have confidence in you when you smile.
- 13.** Look at those who have expressed confidence in you, provided you with opportunities, and given you responsibilities. These people know you well, have observed your past performance, and have confidence in your abilities and potential to succeed. As you accept new challenges, keep them and their confidence in you clearly in mind.

From www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/postsecondary/vogel_tips.html

From, "College Students with Learning Disabilities: A Handbook for College Students with LD, Faculty and Staff, Administrators, and Disability Support Service Providers." by Dr. Susan Vogel.