

Learning Disabilities and the Florida GED PLUS Student

Unlike the jobs of twenty or thirty years ago, today's job market requires higher levels of education. Most jobs for the future require technical training or college degrees. Many students with learning disabilities incorrectly assume that college is just not for them. Often they lack an understanding of what the law requires of higher education institutions when it comes to services they must make available to students with disabilities. Just as with the GED Tests,

accommodations are available to students with disabilities at colleges. However, they must know what is available and how to access those services and accommodations.

This Technical Assistance paper has been designed to provide instructors with information they can use to help **Florida GED PLUS** students understand the types of assistance available to them if they have learning disabilities.

It's the Law!

Many students may be familiar with the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 1990. They may have received services through IDEA while in elementary or secondary school. However, IDEA does not apply to higher education. As a result, students need to understand two pieces of legislation that govern services for adults with disabilities.

Both the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 protect the civil rights of people with disabilities and require postsecondary institutions to provide accommodations to student with disabilities. However, it is important that students understand that unlike the K-12 program, these services are not automatically provided at the postsecondary level. It is the responsibility of the student to self-identify and provide appropriate documentation of his/her disability to

the postsecondary institution. Postsecondary institutions are not required to provide any accommodations unless the student self-identifies that he/she has a disability and needs specific services or accommodations.

When students begin the application process for postsecondary education, they move to an arena that requires them to be their own advocates. Students must understand and be able to articulate their academic needs to the college counselor. As adults, they are responsible for charting a course and seeking out the services that will enable them to meet their goals and be successful in college.

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It's Their Right

Under Section 504 and ADA, there are a variety of services and program available at no cost to students. However, each postsecondary institution has the option to select the specific accommodations or services that it provides as long as they are effective and meet the student's needs. These services may include providing:

- Extra time to complete exams.
- Alternative methods for taking exams, such as a private setting where the exam is individually proctored or having the exam read or dictated to the student.
- Modifications, substitutions, or waivers of courses in the major field of study or specific degree requirements on a case-by-case-basis. Students should be aware that the intent of these modification, substitutions, or waivers is to provide a level playing field for students and not to change or eliminate essential elements of the course or program.

Many colleges offer a wide array of programs specifically designed for students with learning disabilities. Students should talk with an advisor about what is available on campus. Students should also be aware that they may be charged a fee if the service they require goes above and beyond what is required under Section 504 and ADA.

Whatever accommodation or service required, it is the responsibility of the student to self-identify his/her disability and to provide all of the appropriate documentation to the college. Most colleges have a special office on campus that coordinates support services for students with disabilities. Students should contact that office as soon as possible to make sure all appropriate accommodations or services can be provided.

Preparing for the Challenge

Preparing for College, an article written by Liz Getzel from the National Center for Learning Disabilities, outlines a series of steps that students with disabilities should take as they move through the regular high school program and prepare for college. The following steps have been adapted from that article to better reflect the needs of students in the **Florida GED PLUS** program.

Students should:

- Obtain a copy of the Individualized Education Pro-

gram (IEP) from the last school attended.

- Review the information and recommendations included in the IEP to identify specific accommodations or services that would be helpful in the current education setting.
- Work with a counselor to identify local community agencies that may be able to provide specialized services.
- Talk with a counselor about college entrance requirements to help establish appropriate educational goals.
- Focus on improving basic skills to avoid the need for remediation programs.
- Identify a career goal and then look at a postsecondary institutions that reflect personal interest and ability.
- Visit postsecondary campuses and talk with the admissions counselors to determine what types of services would be available.
- Find out what documentation is required and then obtain copies of that documentation (make sure it is as current as possible).
- Work with a teacher or counselor to complete college applications, keeping in mind the timeline required and documentation needed.

Asking the Right Question

Students often miss out on support services because they just don't know the right questions to ask. The following questions were provided by the National Center for Learning Disabilities.

1. What specific documentation does your campus require to be eligible for services?
2. What types of support services are typically provided to students who have learning disabilities or some other type of disability, such as ADHD, ADD, vision-impaired, hearing-impaired, etc?
3. Is new documentation required on an annual basis to maintain eligibility for services?
4. Are there orientation classes available that address issues specific to students with disabilities?
5. What is the process for accessing these support services?
6. How are instructors notified of a student's disability?

For more information, visit the National Center for Learning Disabilities website at: <http://www.nclد.org>.

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Accommodations in the Florida GED Plus Program

Today, more and more adults with learning disabilities are enrolling adult education programs, including the **Florida GED PLUS** program. Since many of these students will need some type of accommodation, it is important that the **Florida GED PLUS** instructor be aware of changes he/she can make in the instructional program that will enhance the LD student's ability to be successful. The following information may be useful to the instructor in adapting instruction to assist students with learning disabilities:

Auditory Difficulties

Some students have difficulty processing oral information and as a result may not be able to grasp information provided through lecture or group discussion. For these students, the instructor may want to:

- Provide an outline before beginning lectures or group discussions so students can follow along more easily.
- Permit students to use a tape recorder so they can listen to the information as often as needed.
- Repeat and summarize various segments.
- Provide students with a handout that includes major points, models, etc.
- Paraphrase information using specific terms and concrete examples when dealing with abstract concepts.

Visual Difficulties

Some students may be very slow and deliberate readers which may impair their comprehension especially if they are reading large amounts of information. For these students, the instructor may want to:

- Provide a list of required reading material in advance so students can begin their reading earlier.
- Access texts on tape from Recording for the Blind or another reading/taping service.
- Provide students with chapter outlines or study guides that identify key points in the text.
- Read aloud material that is provided on the board or on an overhead.
- Have someone tape record the information that is provided on handouts.

Memory Difficulties

Students who have difficulty with memory processing may experience problems in following complicated directions. For these student, the instructor may want to:

- Keep oral instruction logical and concise. Reinforce

them with a brief cue word.

- Repeat or re-word complicated directions.
- Encourage students to take notes or to tape record lectures or group discussions so they can refer back to the information at a later date.

Writing Processing

Students with learning disabilities may have difficulty organizing their written material or may have problems with spelling. For these students, the instructor may want to:

- Encourage students to use a dictionary and/or thesaurus, even during a test.
- Allow students to complete writing assignments on the computer and use the spell-checking program.

Test-Taking Problems

Many students with learning disabilities have difficulty taking tests. The important thing in assessment is being able to evaluate whether or not the student really understands the content that is being assessed. For these students, the instructor may want to:

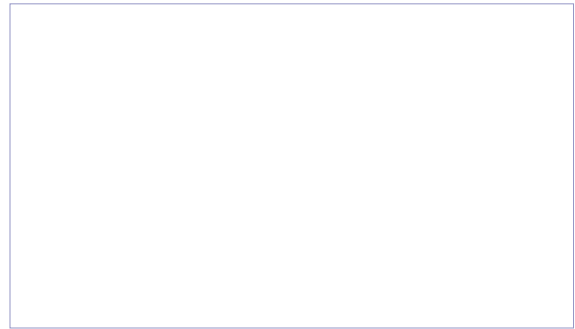
- Allow students to take tests in a quiet room with a proctor.
- Provide an appropriate amount of extended time based on the severity of the disability. (Use the documentation provided by a student as a guide in determining how much extended time is needed.)
- Provide an alternative answer sheet rather than bubble-forms which may prove difficult for students with visual perception problems.
- Allow the use of a dictionary, when possible, for students who have difficulty spelling.
- Provide alternative or supplementary assignments to more effectively evaluate content mastery.
- Provide graph paper or grid paper for students who have difficulty lining up math problems.
- Enlarge answer sheets and even the exams if students have difficulty with small print.
- Allow students to tape record answers to test questions if writing is difficult.
- Provide seating at the front of the class if it will help the student from becoming distracted by those who are sitting around him/her.

Remember, providing accommodations for students in the **Florida GED PLUS** classroom does not require the instructor to compromise academic standards, but rather to enable students to learn the material and to be evaluated in an appropriate manner.

Adapted from CODI: Cornucopia of Disability Information supported by the Western New York Region TRAIID Center at the Center for Assistive Technology, University of Buffalo.

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GED Testing Accommodations

Students should be encouraged to apply for accommodations as soon as possible. Forms may be obtained from the local GED Chief Examiner who can also answer any questions students may have. Students are responsible for obtaining all required documentation, as well as having the forms completed by a certifying official.

The range of accommodations available to students is determined by their individual needs as evidenced by the documentation that is provided. The following is a list of accommodations that are provided based on documented need.

- Audiocassette edition (with large-print reference copy)
- Large print edition
- Use of a scribe
- Extended time
- Use of a calculator
- Supervised frequent breaks
- Use of a private room for testing

There are also accommodations which do not require approval by the GED Testing Service. Students who wish to take advantage of these accommodations must inform the GED Chief Examiner when they register for the GED Tests. This will ensure that appropriate materials are available. These accommodations include:

- Colored transparent overlays
- Clear transparent overlays and highlighter

- Earplugs
- Temporary adhesive (e.g., Post-It notes, flags) with spatial directions
- Large print test
- Magnifying glass
- Straight edge (plain and unmarked)
- One test per day
- Large print test

Additional Resources

LD Resources—a collection of more than 900 resources for individuals with learning disabilities.
<http://www.ldresources.org/index.php>

LD Online—the world's leading web site on learning disabilities and ADHD.
<http://www.ldonline.org>

Teaching LD—resources and information for teachers who work with students with learning disabilities.
<http://www.teachingld.org/>

Disability Resources—a well-organized site that contains information and links to numerous sites devoted to assisting students with disabilities.
<http://www.disabilityresources.org/>

Internet Special Education Resources (ISER)—a nationwide directory of professionals, organizations, and schools that serve the learning disabled and special education communities.
<http://www.iser.com/>