

Assessing Learning Disabilities in ESL

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This information sharing article is a synthesis of information particularly useful for ESL teachers from my notes from the three workshops, their handouts and the book by Pat Hatt, "Special Needs Assessment Procedures". The information should be part of common knowledge, especially for any teacher or parent, whether or not you currently have a learner in your class that has inexplicable performance from what your instinct says they should be capable of.

The information is from a full-day symposia on Assessing Learning Disabilities sponsored by the Ottawa-Carleton Coalition for Literacy on November 23, 2001 at Heartwood House, 153 Chapel Street, Ottawa, Ontario. The morning presentation on informal assessments was by Pat Hatt, LD Training Co-ordinator for the province. The afternoon presentation, on formal educational assessments, was by Dr. Rena Borovay, a clinical psychologist in private practice. The third workshop on Learning Disabilities was presented as part of a January 19, 2002 Frontier College Volunteers in Literacy Conference held at Carleton University, Ottawa. The presenter was Paul Granville, an LD advocate who himself has Scotopic Sensitivity.

This article will give an overview of what Learning Disabilities are and how to discriminate Learning Disabilities from other issues that could be obstacles to learning ESL. It will also relate what Ms. Hatt's presentation described detail of 3 kinds of LD, auditory, visual and organization, and their indicating markers and strategies to use for them.

Does my Learner Have LD? Why Is My Learner Not Getting It?

The client has raised kids and has held many jobs. They attend and they say they want to learn. They are alert, have competencies to navigate the medical system and jobs, say they have been in school since they arrived in Canada, but can't read. It doesn't add up. Something doesn't fit. Even if this person moved often, had to work a lot, or missed school from sickness, if that could translate into never learning to read, all embassy and armed forces kids would be illiterate! So what is my learner's story?

Why is this Person Still Stumbling Over Words or Refusing to Read? Just need more practice? Lazy? Observe the learner read. Do they cock their head? Do their eyes water? Do they follow the line with their finger? Do their glasses live "at home"? Do they have energy for class discussion then become very tired as the reading or writing time comes? Do they become fatigued during reading exercises but alert when things are written on the board? Do they try to enlist others to help with writing? Avoid writing? Make bathroom calls or say they'll do free writing at home instead then forget? Do you think there is a pride issue at their not being as graceful as they want to be in English? If they have enough language to reply, ask the learner in a respectful way one-on-one over what they experience when reading. Do they say their eyes can't focus today or their new glasses are no good? Speaking of the text moving around? LD could be explanatory for any of these but any number of these observations in themselves could have other causes.

Other Causes

The first thing to always remember is that there are many reasons people have difficulty succeeding academically. School performance may be limited due to many things other than

Learning Disability. Regardless of the reason for the learner being out of step, there could be a lot of reasons. A quick label won't help anyone.

Part of the continuum of cultivating a trusting environment where the learner will reveal what types of learning have been successful or unsuccessful and interacting with their voice as it expresses, "This works well for me, this doesn't work for me" . Your position is then to use this information to find the best way of teaching so that the learner learns.

Part of your equipment for doing this included knowing what issues are affecting your learner's ability to absorb English and interact in class. If the learner appears to not be learning in the same way, it may be a matter of material, focus, match with their goals, lack of goals, conflict in philosophy of learning, or inappropriate assessment. It could also be in part a matter of stress, personality, medication, medical conditions or illicit drug use. Observe and subtly ask the learner after class if they have any glasses at home, working night shifts, or have any medical concerns that you should know about. These causes should be ruled out before Learning Disability is assumed.

Physical Impairment

It may be that hearing aids or a proper glasses prescription could enable a learner's to reach optimal performance. People who do have a physical impairment may be able to cover it well and not inform you of it. In this case, you may need to observe and ask the right questions yourself. Encourage the learners to go to regular check-ups.

Hearing Loss

One's own gradual hearing loss may be tricky to notice. It's possible that learners may not be aware of hearing loss themselves. Beyond the learner cupping an ear, watch for lip-reading, turning an ear towards you, cupping an ear, muffled or overly loud speech. If it has been long term, sounding out words and sound discrimination may be especially difficult.

Eye Problems

Eye issues may have the learner decide that the chair close to the board is "his" without indicating that they cannot see from another position. They may "copy" from another learner's notebook instead of admitting they can't see or ask that you read the board and rely on memory to retain instead. You can advise all learners that it is important to regularly get screened by an optometrist or audiologist. Corrective lenses or hearing aids may eliminate physically based perception problems.

Diabetes

Problems with seeing properly may also stem from a physical health problem such as diabetes. Look for signs of blood sugar instability -- extreme thirst, frequent bathroom visits, dizziness, color changes, confusion, excessive sleepiness, sudden sweating or trembling, or sudden double vision or headaches. Give your learners the information about diabetes especially if your clientele contains people in one of these high-risk groups: Native, Hispanic or African, especially, but not only, those over 40 years of age, those who are physically inactive and overweight.

Thought Habits of Self-Esteem and Cultural Backgrounds

Has a learner's sense of inability in school come from an LD or from believing they couldn't succeed? It may be a matter of chicken and egg. Progress in learning English may be hindered by lack of school experience, bad school experiences, taboo against distinguishing themselves as much better than their peers, learned helplessness, or an expectation that teachers make learners learn and students have no active role in learning. The learner may need to learn the autonomous

student model that rules in Canada. You may need to elaborate on explicit expectations and understand that they can't adapt overnight.

These learners have an extra learning curve to climb to gain an ability to accept their rights and take responsibility for themselves and their learning in the classroom. Look to find what a learner can do well and build on those successes.

Physical Trauma or Chemical Issues

Various physical or mental traumas can cause learning impediments. For example: head trauma, chemical imbalance, drug abuse history, current medication, psychiatric issues or emotional disturbance - any of which could affect attention. All of these conditions have distinct issues from the issues associated with Learning Disability. In these cases, casual chats about life histories might eventually turn up useful references to an accident or medication but asking directly would not tend to turn up these private details. Once you've identified a life history data point that could explain how the learner learns, you can explore what methods help people with that avenue of challenge.

Psychological Hurdles and Stress

People with intellectual developmental delay can usually be noticed immediately but other challenges may require more careful observation to discern. One of the reasons why assessment of any student is **ongoing**, not a one-time 20-minute thing, is the complexity of the elements that go into language performance. People respond to different degrees to the same stressors. A contributing factor to progress may stem from "noise in the head" from things like war trauma, ongoing abuse or other high stress in their family life due to teenagers, cash flow, or the depression curve of culture shock. Emotional reserves may not have much energy remaining to learn. Inquiry and referral to a L1 family or cultural services group may help the learner deal with these issues. Have on hand and distribute to the entire class phone numbers and addresses of immigrant services organizations offering family, personal, career counseling. As an educator, integrate proactively public service announcements to refer learners to look after their psychological and physical health so that any taboo they may feel can help be diminished and we all can get on to the business of learning as much, as well and as quickly as possible.

What if none of these conditions above apply or none are sufficient cause for the nagging feeling that something is "off" with this learner? Then, let us explore Learning Disability.

What is LD?

"Learning Disability" is "a true disability". The phrase itself is an umbrella term for dozens of different types (including the other umbrella term, dyslexia) but all of these have in common an element of anomaly compared to the person's success in life or other abilities.

Ms. Hatt stresses that LD is **not just a strong preference of learning styles, a dispreference, or natural ability or "not being good at something"**. LD is more than simply a different bent of mind or thinking different. The understanding of current cognitive science and education research is that LD is from a permanent biological structure of the central nervous system. It is a gap in neural wiring that is more substantial than neural plasticity can correct.

IQ and LD

Just as it is a myth that the blind have been given extra keen hearing to compensate, it is equally a myth that those with LD are "specially gifted" and have some extra abilities as compensation from God. People with LD are intelligent and have typical abilities to learn in spite of difficulties

in processing information. According to Dr. Rena Borovay, the intellectual pattern among people with LD is the same as people without LD. For example, just as 68% of any given population has the "average intelligence" that schools gear towards, 68% of people with LD have average intelligence. Formal testing for LD finds that they fall in line with their peer group, holding all else constant. 2.3% are in the genius-percentile. 13.6% are in the grey area of not brilliant, but more than average intelligence and 13.6% are in the bookending moderately lower than average intelligence.

Depending on who you ask, between 5% to 15% of the general population has a mild to severe form of LD but in literacy programs that proportion is skewed to 30% or more. While ESL Literacy repetition could aid those with LD, if the repetition is coming through the means that is a poor match with a particular learner, it can be an exercise in frustration. Those may drop off the register and become part of the statistically invisible. It is important for teachers and administrators to be aware of these alternative learning needs so that these people get on the track they need to be on to not become discouraged and never have their needs addressed.

Having LD

LD is a part of a person, not something a person is. LD is an independent discrete aspect of personhood as much as ear shape, intestine length, deafness, intellectual intelligence (IQ), emotional intelligence (EQ), height, skin color, sexual orientation, or foot structure are distinct aspects. You cannot correlate L.D. and intellectual capacity any more than you can correlate the other things listed with intelligence.

As with each of these you can not draw the information or understandings of the whole person from the one aspect. Like these, you have more than one aspect simultaneously. Dr. Borovay and Ms. Hatt both emphasize that having an LD (like having hair color X) does not preclude the person from also being brilliant, or having profoundly low intelligence or also being blind, also having cerebral palsy or whatever other human state you can think of.

LD and Being Successful

People with learning disability are in every field of society you can imagine – from arts, (James Oliver, the Naked Chef and Whoopi Goldberg, actress) to business, (Charles Schwab, brokerage and Bill Hewlett of HP computers) to sports (Greg Louganis, Olympic diver). Whatever challenges someone with LD may face, it is important to understand that a person with LD can be highly successful academically, socially and functionally. York University has published "Secrets of Success" (<http://www.yorku.ca/cdc/ldp/success/main.htm>) of several world caliber high achievers with LD. Jenny Burm describes her perceptions as someone with a visual LD as being able to be disoriented by some stimulus and needing to train oneself on triggers to keep on track. She points out many successful peers at her site on dyslexia (<http://www.iliانو.com/jenny/contents.htm>) It's estimated that about 8% of people have an LD, to one degree, fewer than the 1 in 7 who have or will have arthritis or the 1 in 3 will get some form of depression or cancer in their life.

Formal Testing for LD

Testing tries to rule out psychiatric and physical impediment problems and narrow in on what if any processing errors are occurring. All together, they measure intelligence, logic, verbal comprehension, attention, concentration, memory, perceptual organization, processing speed, sequencing, pseudo-word decoding, numerical operations, mathematical reasoning, spelling,

written expression, listening comprehension, visual memory, and auditory perception. The tests results are compared intra-test and inter-test to bring out disparities that may be telling.

The biggest problem for us as ESL teachers is that there is no way for us to send our lower or necessarily higher-level students for these tests and get accurate results. They are normed against "American culture" and graded on a curve from a large body of like-peer-group answers. Because of their different cultural background and verbal discrimination may give misleading results.

Some of the testing is "culture free" (such as Raven's Perceptual Test or another test containing questions like, "What happens when you heat water?") and "language-less" (such as the Rorschach technique of ink blots). Unfortunately for us, to Dr. Borovay's knowledge there are no standard other than English L1 battery of tests normed for any immigrant group or in any other L1 battery of tests for LD, even for French, available in Canada.

On the downside, the psychological tests that can determine LD through skill spread are not cheap and are not covered by OHIP. This cost, not covered by health care, runs between \$1200 and \$1700. The cost of the test covers an interview by a specialized psychologist, a measure of intelligence, measure of academic achievements, social/emotional, personality evaluations, and a profile of strengths and weaknesses in a feedback interview with written recommendations for remediation, medication or workplace equity accommodations. If the test shows clearly an LD is in place, it will set into action a funded route for the learner to get further aides to help his or her progress.

Informally Assessing

Because there is no definitive brain scan that you can take and know concretely that you have an LD, and because the battery of tests is very costly, and are possibly inaccurate for non-English L1 immigrants, the most pragmatic way to come to an understanding of whether a Learning Disability is informal assessment. See if LD seems to be at the base of a learner's problem by conferring with the learner and their families and peers whether there is a match of interpretation and observe keenly how the learner reads and speaks.

As with formal testing, in informal testing, we are trying to weed out background noise of test data and find a relevant cohesive pattern of telltale discrepancies. The next time you assess the English of you learner, observe them as you give them a reading. Watch how the learner answers comprehension questions. Watch if they know where in the story to look for the answers to reading comprehension questions. Along with other factors, if the learners don't check the text but tries to pull answers from memory, they may be relying on memorization instead of the struggle to visually scan so many words.

How to Do An Informal Assessment

To do any assessment well, remember the same skills that you would use to be a good conversationalist or to make a good impression in an interview. You want them to be relaxed to see what they can do and how they prefer to do things with language. Cultivate body language to put a person at ease, be willing to listen and actively listen to get information out of people indirectly. Living with Learning Disabilities can have an ongoing impact on friendship, school, work, self-esteem and daily life. If they don't have a school background, ask about family, their past jobs and what their career goals are. Make your questions concrete first and move to open ended questions later. When you chat with the person look for indicators in family responsibility, work history, or work they didn't like. People gravitate towards what they are good at. For example people who have trouble with processing sound tend not to like very social jobs and

people who have trouble processing visual data may excel in organization or management but not in something like a clothing store where one needs to remember a constant stream of client faces.

As you do the informal day-to-day assessment or in an intake or promotion interview, use the guide below to know what to watch for.

How does LD express itself?

Learning Disabilities affects the way a person takes in, remembers, understands or expresses information! **To date researchers have named and qualified over 60 types of Learning Disabilities.** Because there are so many types of LD and levels of severity, how LD expresses itself varies quite widely. Clinically, there are 3 levels of LD impairment: Mild, Moderate and Severe. If you have a mild form of LD, you may have compensated naturally for the gaps in your abilities and usually function without a problem or without noticing anything out of order, just like someone who is slightly deaf may do lip reading and doesn't notice that they aren't hearing "properly". With a moderate form, you may eventually know that the way you perceive is not how others perceive but you can cope and function using countermeasures such as "forgetting your glasses", depending on friends and family, or avoiding any opportunity that would require you to use certain skills. It takes a special situation for the mild or moderate LD to be evident. A newcomer with LD may have learned in a school system that was very compatible with their type of processing or they may have organized their life so that their abilities are more of a distraction than an obstacle. But coming into an ESL classroom, they are called on to take in information in ways their brain does not accommodate. A severe form naturally is a greater level of impairment of one aspect of processing, disproportional to other abilities. Whereas for someone with a mild visual LD, their eyesight may make "checkmarks" like normal eyes do when falling asleep, and they may have trouble skipping words, someone with moderate level may get headaches from text swimming around and the text may look distorted with the black and white making rivers that clumps words in awkward ways, and someone with severe visual LD may perceive a block of text as just that, a block of black with a white margin, something somewhat abstract and certainly indecipherable. Remember, this is not due to eyes but the brain processing.

How do you know what the learner is perceiving?

- It may come out in questions they ask that only ask for clarification of instructions that come through one medium. (i.e. if the instructions are oral, they don't understand but if they are typed on the page, they consistently understand).
- A learner with LD may express a marked difference between oral and silent reading. Their reading style may be jerky, choppy, or slow and deliberate, completely unlike their ability to write.
- A person with LD may be disorganized and need to have reminder notes in key places to keep in mind all the life-skill tasks that others take for granted remembering.

You may think to yourself, well, that's me on a bad day. The difference with LD is that there are no "normal days" for one sub-set of skills. For example, anyone may forget a face but someone with visual LD may never recognize anyone by face, ever. **The person with LD is functional, but one aspect is disproportional in achievement or failure.** Although their capacity to do some tasks may swing better or worse, independently of how they try to don't try, but capacity stays *within a lower than proportional range compared to other skills*. Yet the person with LD doesn't seem strange. It is a largely invisible disability. Many people with LD have naturally developed compensating strategies to deal with the processing problems.

In the ESL classroom, our goal is to find our "client's special way" and to help them develop smooth, wider, more flexible strategies for accessing information in the ways they are good at. When solid, diverse, coping skills and strategies are in place people with LD are as successful as anyone else.

The trick for us is to partner ourselves with our learners and, as with anyone, learn how your learner learns best and what the learner wants to accomplish.

Approaches for Identifying and Accommodating Differences in How Learners Process Information

There are many kinds and combinations of LD as they interfere with acquiring good literacy skills and strategies for these three types of Learning Disabilities. Below is a rough and ready guide to the telltale signs of having 3 common kinds of processing problems (visual, auditory and organizational) Look for a syndrome-like cluster of tell-tale behaviors. After each of the forms of LD looked at below in turn, there will be strategies to use that may help the learner if you're identification is right.

People with Visual LD

People with Visual Processing problems respond normally to auditory stimuli and are able to speak well but have trouble with written language with its word choice and syntax sometimes so unpredictable from oral speech.

Clues:

The brain of someone with Visual LD won't glide and skim text. They may need to "catch" a few initial letters to anchor the word and recognize it, or misguess a logical semantic item for the slot. (For example, given "Every morning, Mr. Smith walks his Dalmatian", the person with visual LD might substitute "dog"). A person with visual LD may make a social event of their mail, depending on others to interpret the text that swims and is "blurry" no matter what prescription they get for their glasses.

The person with Visual LD characteristically:

- Can easily sound out words
- Can easily blend words
- Can easily substitute letters
- Can work with word families and rhyming words
- Can orally tell you the spelling but not write it
- Are very verbal and will chat and may distract the tutor from written work
- Write with a spelling based on sounds
- Have trouble with little common words but can sound out long big words
- Have trouble with irregular sounds (ough, eigh)
- Use their finger to keep track of their place while reading
- Get lost easily and use their finger naturally to find their spot
- Read by context guessing logical words that don't look like the word on the page
- Find it difficult to recognize words they "know"
- Have trouble with oral reading and stumble and hesitate
- Read words and syllables backwards ("was" for "saw")
- Complain of tired eyes or rub their eyes a lot because of the difficulty to "bring into focus" the page
- Comment on getting a headache after a short time reading

Squint and peers close to see the print
Peer at the work on their desk from an angle
Move their eyes frequently from the page to glance around
Close one eye while reading or writing
May skip words, leave off endings, repeat words, re-read lines, substitute, delete or transpose letters in oral reading

Strategies if The Learner Has Problems Processing Visual Information:

If the learner has problems processing visual information, the key is to maximize the use of other senses and ways of accessing the page. Don't have them read aloud if it makes them uncomfortable. The goal is to maximize strengths. Therefore, use sound as much as possible. A phonics-based reading program is useful for acquiring literacy.

Here are some spelling strategies:

Teach word families with the emphasis on sounds
Use sounds to remember words for spelling such as pronouncing in your head the "c" in scissors or "k" in knife.
Use spelling tricks to scaffold new spellings such as The WEDding is NExt WEDNEsday.
KeeP the receiPt after you receive it. PrejudICE isn't nICE
Teach vowel rules "when two vowels go out walking, the first one does the talking"
Teach irregular sound combinations such as "tion" and "ing"
Use as for music lines like Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge
Use short poems because the rhyme and rhythm help people predict the sounds and words

Another key aspect is to narrow down how much visual text they have to deal with. Good readers don't read every word. They know how much they can safely skip without losing important data – is it a few letters, a few words, sentences, pages or paragraphs? For someone with visual LD this is not an automatic thing.

Strategies to Teach:

Break the word-by-word reading pattern. Use closure exercises to help with prediction.
Teach pre-reading skills to show them what to look for when reading
Teach word search skills to find answers quickly
Teach skimming skills to get the gist of what a paragraph is about
Teach scanning – looking for important information where it usually can be found in the first and last paragraph.
Teach metacognitive skills to help them interact with the text and make it meaningful.

People with Auditory LD

Learners with Auditory processing problems respond normally to visual stimuli. They are able to recognize known words well but have trouble with interacting in speech.

Clues:

Telltale signs that may come out of a chat include the learner reporting that family say they never talk or never remember what they've been told. A person with moderate Auditory LD may feel or appear socially awkward and isolated because of difficulty in understanding social cues and aural tones but be perfectly competent with written material and maintain jobs and family life. They may choose to work alone with visual data. They are more likely to give short abrupt answers.

The person with auditory LD characteristically:

Can easily remember words they know
Are good at guessing words that look alike but the word suggested but don't necessarily make sense in context (attraction for attractive, stove for story, gentle for generous)
Recognize sight words and know the meaning
Have trouble with big words
Report having trouble with pronunciation
Have difficulty blending sounds well
May talk louder than peers
May often ask for someone to repeat themselves
May often turn an ear towards you when you are speaking
Recognize sight words from rote learning but can't decode unknown words
May know sounds but mix them up when sounding out words
Are baffled by rhyming clues. For example, the word is "ring" and you give clues or it sounds like "king" and no meaningful relationship is recognized between the words. Rhyme and phonetic syllables are not meaningful units.
Substituting letters in word families is difficult
Do spellings based on known words
Speaking is difficult for this learner

Strategies if A Learner Has Problems Processing Auditory Information

If a learner has problems processing auditory information, don't have them read aloud until they know the vocabulary well.

Use the sight words approach of flash cards with personalized/meaningful vocabulary
Have them write out words and stories because the act of writing helps imprint the words for them.
Use a spelling list approach to spelling.
Note the shape of difficult to remember words
Use pictures to remember words. For example, look has two eyes in the middle of the word, luck has a horseshoe in the middle, scissors has the looped handle of scissors in the double s.
Use charts and diagrams for rules and reminders, for example Pro and Con sheets

Semantics of sounds is weak. Strategies to help this sticky area are:

Use close exercises to help them see how they can predict unknown words through context clues.
Letter combinations by sound aren't semantically significant so that pre- in any place in the word doesn't get associated with any constant. Therefore, teach them structures rules for prefix, suffix, root words, plurals, etc.
Teach pre-reading questions so they know what to expect. Likewise use learner-created stories rather than prepared text
Pre-teach new words before having them read a passage.
Teach word search skills to find answers so that they can quickly move through a text skipping over non-pertinent information.

People With Organizational LD

It takes time for this learner to understand the question, its purpose, to process the possibilities, to retrieve the answer, formulate the form of the answer and finally respond. All the steps need organizing effort.

Clues:

They have trouble understanding the meaning of questions and framing comprehensive replies.

If a Person has Organizational LD, the learner is slow but exacting and correct eventually. Unfortunately for people with this LD our society highly values speed and a snappy response.

A person with Organization LD characteristically:

- Find the mechanics of reading and writing easy
- May need to understand each component completely or else gets hung for an answer
- Take longer to understand and respond to your questions but the quality of the answer is good
- Have trouble giving clear, concise answers to simple questions
- May have trouble grasping the scope of questions
- Complain of trouble focusing
- Need rewording of question, but answer is correct
- Have trouble with attendance and follow through.

Strategies if A Learner Has Problems Organizing Information.

If a learner has problems organizing information you need to find out what successful strategies they already use to retrieve memories. A person with organizational LD *may* lack executive control, lack metacognitive insight (i.e. they can understand each element but not the meaning or social significance of the whole utterance or its relation to another utterance and knowing this about themselves, may try to make connections that aren't intended). This person may also lack abilities to co-ordinate strategies such as time management, note taking, and comprehend the organizational structure of a textbook. People with organization learning disability may have difficulty with assigning weight to different information.

The principles to keep in mind in this case would be good policy with any communication. Learners with Organizational LD need Plain English.

Text that can cause challenges include:

- Large blocks of text
- complex impersonal text
- complex syntax
- verbiage
- passive voice
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The clutter of some “Realia text” that you may bring to class may be an obstacle to these learners.

Make the text you use in class:

- be direct
- be simple (bulleted information not long prose)\
- be personalized
- have eye catching relevant headings
- have a logical order.

Verbal Strategies:

Because these learners may not be able to intuit the structure that is obvious to you, elaborate on it verbally so you are both seeing the same thing.

- Explicitly say, disregard this part of the page. Or, “Let’s focus here because it really important.”
- In this type of L.D., help them understand why things happen and help them relate to new information and see how it is “like” information they already have.

- You may suggest color aids such as all the grammar notes being one color of sheet, all readings another color, all pronunciation a third, for example.
- Suggesting a learner use a highlighter to help them focus on certain parts of a text and find it again can help some. (This is a principle that can be applied to any type of learner at any level.)

Explicitly teach the way information is structured:

Use a glossary at the end of a book to find a page in a book where it talks about a particular issue

Match the same word in the question as in the text

Use questions and knowledge they have to explain how to use an index.

Questions usually go in the same order as the text did

Logical places to search for a specific word for an answer

Pre-reading questions for the general picture and also looking for the frame of who, what, when, where, why, how

Use memory tricks for spelling to see the patterns:

Business – You take the "bus" to work. Don't forget the "sin" in business. \$\$ you want to end up with a lot of money after business.

Words that end in "ce" are nouns, words that end in "se" are verbs such as advice/advise

Those without school-based skills require similar strategies because of their difficulties in forming a frame of reference for what answer is expected. They also have no difficulty with phonics or remembering words but exceptions to spelling rules may cause difficulty. (Remember however that a person can have more than one kind of LD concurrently.)

Explain what reading is like:

Decoding uses sounds, sight and context clues.

You must make information you read link up to information you have to make it meaningful.

There are patterns that writer's use. For example, the most important information is in the first and last paragraphs.

There are several different ways to read a) for general information such as newspapers b) for enjoyment such as a novel, c) for specific information such as a manual

The sentence structures and choice of vocabulary are in different registers for speaking and writing and between different kinds of writing.

How do you know your assessment is right? Most importantly, the proof is in the pudding. Test out whether strategies for compensating make a big difference in the rate of learning. **The strategies for someone with an LD are no different than what you would normally use in your classroom with any learner but with someone with LD, not using a particular useful best strategy makes a much bigger difference.** In cases where LD is present, some of these common teaching methods fantastically fail with these learners because of how their brains sort the significance of incoming information.

What You Can Do With What You Know

The key to dealing with learners with LD is to first identify when it is or is not a genuine LD. By getting to know the person's history, you can go one step further and determine what kind of LD you are dealing with. You can then help this person work around this LD by adopting strategies

that have helped other people with the same type of LD. But, before you decide or disclose that there may be an LD at work, are 5 fundamentals that must be understood.

1) LD is hard to diagnose, particularly in ESL when factors of cultural difference in testing, culture shock, different exposure to English forms (writing or speaking), non-Roman alphabet background, war trauma and unseen settlement stress may be interfering with their performance. Since they are adults, they probably have been deftly, comfortably, compensating to work around their gaps. They may not wish to “address” the issue and that is their autonomous right.

2) Be an educator. Before you decide to reveal your "discovery" to the learner in question, remember to consider the value the learner may place on this information and your role as an educator. You need for them to understand that such a tag is not a death sentence or closing of options. The label of "Learning Disability" still carries a pejorative weight.

You and the learner need to look at things from the perspective of all the competencies and successes the person has had with the way their brain has always worked and make the emphasis on what things you can try that may work or may not work well for that person. It should be explored in the spirit of an investigation not condemnation. Do not label them and send them on their way.

3) Be Positive. Explore abilities. As with anyone, rather than telling the person that there is something wrong with them, enable them to succeed through suggesting alternative strategies. It will be much more helpful and motivating to experiment with the learning strategies that are the most effective for that individual. Rather than saying to them "I think you have learning disability X", tell them "I believe you would learn very well by doing Y. Shall we try that?"

4) Work from their strengths not their weaknesses. This is a mantra in L.D. The person with LD has a processing problem that can be worked around. They do have other processing powers that are completely normal but the gaps they have can not be "grown back to normal" by practice any more than science or study can grow a leg for someone born without one.

5) Accept them as they are and partner with them to reach their goals. If they are at a point of readiness to learn, the learner may still insist on using ineffective but comfortable strategies. Both teacher and learner may insist on trying to work on what they recognize they have difficulty with, for example, reading fluently aloud. The role of teacher and learner is to learn and if that means trying a new alternatives, that needs to be encouraged.

For Further Information:

Patt Hatt has written "*Special Needs Assessment Procedures*" (SNAP). It is on how to recognize LD and other challenges and adapt your assessment accordingly. For your copy of the 44-page coil-bound booklet write to Rita Paonessa at the Toronto District School Board Phone (416) 395-6571 or Fax (416) 395-5173. The cost is covered by the National Literacy Secretariat Grant.

The Learning Disability Association of Ottawa Carleton has also written "*Destination Literacy: Identifying and Teaching Adults with Learning Disabilities.*" They can be contacted at (613) 567-5864 or www.ncf.ca/ldao-c

A book on accommodating LD in your classroom is available from www.wallbooks.com
Learning Strategies for Adults: Compensations for Learning Disabilities by Sandra C. Crux
Published in 1991. \$16.95 (Cdn), \$12.95 (US)

[The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada](#) has further resources [on signs of LD](#), books on LD in employment, advocacy and help for all levels of school. Get them online or from their national office at 323 Chapel St., Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7Z2 (613) 238-5721 (613) 235-5391 information@ldac-taac.ca

Another useful resource for learners is available from the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario. It is called “Invisible No Longer: A Self-Advocacy Workbook”. It may take months to go through the questionnaire-styled text to determine a learner’s strengths, weaknesses, past learning patterns and present learning difficulties before the learner can make the step of a future learning plan.

<http://www.iliano.com/jenny/contents.htm> about the experience of Dyslexia in particular and role models who have it and techniques to use with it.

Successful People with Learning Disabilities and AD/HD with an extensive list of successful people with LD is available at <http://www.schwablearning.org>