

# Working with Students with Learning Disabilities

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## **Understanding learning disabilities**

Learning disability is an umbrella term for a number of specific conditions that might cause students to have trouble processing information. A learning disability is not a function of intelligence. Common kinds of learning disabilities include dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, and processing speed disorders. Dyslexia, a condition in which students have difficulty in perceiving and processing written material, is perhaps the most common learning disability, but learning disabilities can span a wide range of difficulties impacting a student's visual perception, auditory perception, spatial perception, motor coordination, memorization, and/or information retrieval.

Students who have difficulty reading might benefit from alternative-format texts and other course materials. Students can arrange for acquisition of such materials through the Academic Resource Center. In addition, a student with a learning disability may need to record lectures.

Students who have learning disabilities often need special consideration in testing. Oral examinations, extended-time, and distraction-free locations may be appropriate.

Learning disabilities are considered hidden or invisible disabilities in that they are not immediately apparent to the eye. If you have a question about whether or not a student has a learning disorder that requires accommodation, please consult with the Director of Academic Resources. Although most learning disabilities are recognized when children are quite young, occasionally a student might come to Whitman without knowing he or she has a learning disorder.

## **Ways of helping students with learning disabilities:**

- Some learning disabilities hamper a student's ability to write clearly or accurately. Sometimes these problems may be eliminated if students are allowed to use a laptop computer to produce in-class work. Oral assignments are another option.
- Write technical terms and important points on the board during your lectures. This gives the student with a learning disability an opportunity to both see and hear important information.
- Provide clear, precise written information about course requirements (i.e., syllabi and out-of-class assignments). Be prepared to go over these orally with the student.
- Consider allowing students to use calculators, dictionaries, and laptops in class to produce work that is more accurate.

## **Special resources for students who have learning disabilities:**

If you suspect a student in one of your classes may have an undiagnosed learning disability, please contact the staff in the Academic Resource Center. The Director of Disability Support Services will refer students who need diagnostic testing to a local practitioner.

