Learning Disorders
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In general, learning disorders affect how a person understands, remembers, and responds to new information. Students with learning disorders may have problems:

- Listening or paying attention
- Speaking
- Reading or writing
- Doing math

Many people with learning disorders have a normal IQ overall but have lowered performance in one specific area.

Common Types of Learning Disabilities

Reading disability (Dyslexia is a common one): Difficulty processing language – problems reading, writing, spelling, and speaking. They tend to mix up letters or words.

How to help:
Break reading down into smaller sections. Read the headings so students get an idea of what they are going to read before they read it. Have the student explain to you what they have read to check their comprehension of the material.

Math disability or dyscalculia:
Difficulty with math, doing math problems, understanding time, and using money.

How to help:
Don’t overload them with material. Students with dyscalculia can only take in so much information at a time and it may take them longer than other students for the material to “click” with them and for them to understand it. You may want to meet with them a few days after covering a concept to check if they retained the material. Make learning meaningful by relating the math problem to the whole task at hand. Students with dyscalculia often make mistakes when doing math problems simply because they do not keep the numbers straight. Use graph paper to make it easier to line up the numbers correctly.

Writing disability or dysgraphia:
Problems with writing, including handwriting, spelling, and organizing ideas.

How to help:
When writing, encourage students to outline their thoughts and get the main ideas down before trying to focus on the details of spelling and grammar. Teach the writing process → brainstorming first, drafting, editing, and proofreading. It may also be easier for students with dysgraphia to use graph paper as well when doing math.
Other Disorders That Can Affect Learning

ADD/ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder):
Difficulty concentrating, focusing, following directions, remembering information, organizing tasks, and completing work. They may also be chronically late, procrastinate, and impulse control problems, i.e., interrupting.

How to help:
Have the tutoring session in a quiet area with minimal distractions. Help them with scheduling and prioritizing tasks. Ask questions frequently to maintain their attention. Have the student explain the concepts back to you to make sure they are paying attention and comprehending the material.

Asperger’s Syndrome – autism spectrum disorder:
Difficulty reading social cues and recognizing other people’s feelings. Strange movements and mannerisms. Lack of eye contact. May have poor communication skills, obsessive, and repetitive routines, dislike physical contact, and be overly direct and honest.

How to help:
Try to find similar interests or another way to relate and connect with the student since forming social relationships may be hard for this student. Conduct structured tutoring sessions – tell the student what you’re going to do first, next, and so on. Be patient and respectful. Make sure to give the student enough personal space. Find a quiet area as these students can often be bothered and overwhelmed by too much stimuli in the environment.

Overall tips:
Highlight key points and concepts, use mnemonics devices, create outlines with the student, break bigger concepts into smaller concepts, pause between ideas to allow time for processing the information, review material over and over, and check for comprehension often. Some students might not tell you they aren’t getting something unless you ask.

Realize that not all students with a learning disorder will tell you they have one. It is acceptable to ask your students about their strengths and weaknesses. A student will most often know if they learn better through visual representation of material, auditory, or hands on. This info can help you design tutoring sessions that will best help the student.

Most importantly remember to be patient and encouraging. It’s your job as a tutor to find the best way your student learns. You may have to change your usual tutoring style to meet the needs of specific students.