

GUIDE FOR SUPPORTING  
STUDENTS WITH

# LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

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*Inspiring excellence, transforming lives  
through quality, impact, and care.*



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While this is the largest category of students with disabilities, a learning difficulty (LD) is not a disease or illness, and is not acquired in adulthood or as a result of injury or disease. A LD can be understood as neurological differences in brain structure and function that affect the brain's ability to store, process or communicate information. Their aetiology is unclear, however genetics plays a part. A LD occurs across the lifespan of an individual. It is not due to any sensory impairment, intellectual impairment, psychiatric disabilities, cultural and instructional deprivation, or cultural differences.

A LD will be evident from childhood, and in many cases the cause of the learning difficulty may not be clear. In some cases, genetics, chromosomal abnormalities or environmental factors may be cited as the cause. The World Health Organization (WHO) has defined LD as "a state of arrested or incomplete development of mind".

It is also thought that a person should display three fundamental criteria before being diagnosed as having a LD. These are identified by three approaches, namely:



Assessing any intellectual impairment (IQ)



Assessing social dysfunction combined with IQ



Identifying of early onset according to criteria (Debenham, L. 2010)

A LD can further be defined as a diverse group of conditions that causes significant difficulties in perception, which could be auditory, visual and/or spatial. Of presumed neurological origin, it covers disorders that impair functions such as reading (dyslexia), writing (dysgraphia) and mathematical calculations (dyscalculia). They vary widely within each category in the patterns they exhibit. You most likely will not know if a person has a learning difficulty unless you are told. However, you may notice difficulties in the above-mentioned areas.



## HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO HELP YOU WHEN ASSISTING THOSE WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES:

A learning difficulty has certain implications on studies. Both reading and writing activities are influenced and the following accommodations will be necessary to make it possible for the student to perform optimally:

- Providing all class/lecture notes/handouts and study material/guides to CUADS, preferably electronically if not available as a hard copy, as soon as available for purposes of providing accessible study material to the student.
- The student will record lectures on a digital recorder.
- The student will receive a specified amount of minutes per hour of additional time during tests and examinations as per decisions of the Reasonable Accommodation Panel.
- PowerPoint presentations might also not be accessible during lectures and will have to be made available to CUADS, if applicable.
- Understand that learning difficulties may impact a person's reading, writing, math, memory and/or information processing.
- Being patient, respectful and willing to find alternative ways for learning, and realise that there is rarely visible evidence of learning difficulties.
- Listen carefully and work with the person to provide information in a way that will best suit their needs. Use multiple methods to deliver information.
- Minimise distractions (screen savers, background noises, etc.).
- Keep in mind that an unconventional response may be influenced by a processing difficulty which affects social interaction.
- If you are not sure what to do, ask: "Can I help?"
- Students who are believed to have a LD that has not been previously or reliably identified should be referred to CUADS to be referred to an educational psychologist, where the necessary assessments will be done to ensure that the student is supported as soon as the disability is identified.
- While a LD cannot be "cured", it can be circumvented through instructional intervention and compensatory strategies. In general, a variety of instructional modes enhance learning for LD students, as for others, by allowing them to master material that may be inaccessible in one particular form.



## IF YOU ARE A STUDENT WITH A LEARNING DIFFICULTY, CUADS CAN ASSIST:

Whatever the degree of impairment, students should be expected to participate fully in classroom activities, such as discussions and group work. CUADS can advise on a range of support services, strategies and resources to enable you to perform to your potential and participate in university life.

CUADS will liaise with academic staff so that the modification of materials, necessary accommodations, permission to record lectures, provision of lecture notes and reading/book lists are provided well in advance and any necessary psychological or social support is provided by Student Counselling and Development.

At CUADS, we will consult with you on the support you need, preferred methods of communication and accessing written information. In order to fully support you, you will need to come to CUADS and apply for the necessary reasonable accommodations/concession. We also advise the academic staff on ways to help enable you to fully access lectures, seminars and tutorials.

We can assist you with your requests for concessions/accommodations during tests and exams as well as help you in finding scribes, readers, note-takers or tutors. While CUADS helps to identify your individual support needs, we can also offer the following assistive devices and other technology:

- Computer laboratory.
- The conversion of documents into electronic format (booked well in advance).
- Magic software.
- Separate venue for tests and exams.
- Concessions.
- Reasonable accommodations.
- Advice regarding assistive technology, hardware and software.
- Access to study material in alternative formats.
- Liaison with academic staff.
- Equipment hire.

The aim of assistive technologies is to help level the playing field for students with a LD, not to give them an added advantage over other non-disabled students.

It is the responsibility of the student to provide CUADS with the required notes and textbooks that must be converted to an alternative format **within two weeks of the start of each new semester**. If you do not provide us with the material in advance, we will not be able to assist you in time.

## AS A STUDENT, IT WILL BE IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO:

- **Get organised.** Organise all of your materials, books, notebooks, etc.
- **Plan and budget time.** Make a plan that includes budgeting the amount of time needed for different subjects, break times and due dates for assignments.
- **Colour code.** Use a colour-coding system to organise material for each subject.
- **Record assignments.** Use an assignment notebook to record all homework and long-term projects.
- **Be methodical.** Organise all your books, notes, handouts, flashcards, studyguides, outlines, etc. before studying for a test or quiz.
- **Think small.** Remember to break up long-term assignments into small, manageable, working chunks in your daily homework schedule.
- **Know your best time of day.** Choose to study during the time of day or night when you are most alert.
- **Take breaks.** Take scheduled breaks during long homework assignments.
- **Double-check your work.** Make sure to check your assignments for errors before turning them in to your teacher.
- **Take advantage of resources.** Ask teachers, parents, classmates and tutors for extra help and clarification.
- **Work smartly.** This means prioritising and planning your work according to what needs to be done, what's most important, and how it needs to be done. Make sure to take it one task at a time and avoid multi-tasking.



## LOOK OUT FOR OUR OTHER TIP SHEETS ON TOPICS SUCH AS:

- Visual Impairments
- Hearing Impairments
- Physical Impairments
- Concessions Guide for UFS Students
- CUADS information leaflet
- Test and Exam Tips
- Neurodevelopmental Disorders



HELLO

## **KEEP IN TOUCH**

We aim to provide holistic support to UFS students with disabilities, and pride ourselves on being accessible to our students and other university stakeholders.

You can reach the Centre for Universal Access and Disability Support (CUADS) on any of the following platforms:



## **VISIT US ON YOUR CAMPUS**

- **Bloemfontein Campus (BFN):**  
Level 2, Sasol Library (next to the Johannes Stegmann Art Gallery)
- **South Campus (SC):**  
Room D125, Neville Alexander Library
- **QwaQwa Campus (QQ):**  
Room 16, Student Affairs Building



## **CALL US**

+27 51 401 3713 (BFN)  
+27 51 505 1355 (SC)  
+27 58 721 5189 (QQ)



## **SEND US AN EMAIL**

[cuads@ufs.ac.za](mailto:cuads@ufs.ac.za)



## **Facebook**

<https://web.facebook.com/Centre-for-Universal-Access-and-Disability-Support-UFS-1509109672744423/>



## **Instagram**

[https://instagram.com/cuads\\_ufs?utm\\_medium=copy\\_link](https://instagram.com/cuads_ufs?utm_medium=copy_link)



## **LinkedIn**

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/cuads-ufs>

