

Q. What is a specific learning disability?

A. A specific learning disability is a broad term used to define impairments in areas such as reading, writing, spelling and mathematics which are not primarily attributable to hearing loss, impaired vision, emotional problems or below average ability. Specific learning disabilities can be divided up into three broad categories: developmental speech and language disorders, academic disorders (such as dyslexia) and other coordination disorders.

Q. What are some characteristics of specific learning disabilities?

- Delays in acquiring language and speech.
- Not understanding oral instructions and an inability to express oneself verbally.
- Poor coordination and uneven motor development.
- Poor pencil grip, awkward handwriting and difficulty with copying from a book or the blackboard.
- Problems with memory and routines.
- Not knowing where to begin a task or how to proceed.
- Confusion with directions, such as left and right.
- Confusion with letters and words that are alike (e.g., b/d, p/q), mixing up sounds of words, unable to match sounds with their letters.
- Difficulty in expressing ideas in writing. • Difficulty learning maths skills and doing maths calculations.
- Difficulty with spelling, organising thoughts on paper and learning second and third languages.

While some pupils with major problems in one area (e.g., reading, spelling and writing) may cope well in other areas (e.g., numeracy), overall attainment levels of pupils with a specific learning disability are generally below average.

Q. What can be done to help someone with a specific learning disability?

A. First and foremost, students with a specific learning disability need to be understood and recognised by teachers and parents if they are to succeed in school. Because of their difficulty, they require a programme tailored specifically to their needs to be drawn up by the class teacher in consultation with the learning support

teacher. Students with a specific learning disability need to develop strategies to help remediate and compensate for their difficulties. Techniques can be taught to assist the student in bypassing the problem and reducing the negative impact on learning. This can be accomplished by avoiding the difficulty if possible, changing the assignment expectations or using strategies to aid a particular aspect of the task. Students should be provided with additional structured practice or re-teaching of the skill/concept using specialised techniques that match their processing style and need.

Related Links

[Dyslexia Association of Ireland](#)

[Dyspraxia Association of Ireland](#)

[LD Online](#) (US)

[Report on the Task Force on Dyslexia](#) (PDF – 528KB)