

Important Definitions of Learning Disabilities

The following definitions are important for several reasons. The United States Office of Education's definition is the basis for determining learning disabilities among school age children. The Learning Disabilities Association of America's definitions reflect the views of one of the largest advocacy groups for learning disabilities (LD) in the country. The Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities' definition was acceptable to federal agencies on the committee, except for the US Department of Education. The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities' more recent LD definition was acceptable to most advocacy and professional organizations. And finally, Rehabilitation Services Administration's definition is one of few attempts to formulate a definition that focuses on work.

The 1977 U.S. Office of Education

The term "specific learning disability" means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological process involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include children who have learning disabilities that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps or mental retardation, or emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. (United States Office of Education (1977). Definition and criteria for defining students as learning disabled. Federal Register 42:250, p.65083. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.)

The Learning Disabilities Association of America

Specific Learning Disabilities is a chronic condition of presumed neurological origin which selectively interferes with the development integration, and/or demonstration of verbal and/or nonverbal abilities. Specific Learning Disabilities exist as a distinct handicapping condition and varies in its manifestations and in degree of severity. Throughout life, the condition can affect self-esteem, education, vocation, socialization, and/or daily living activities. (Association for Children with Learning Disabilities. (1986) ACLD Description: Specific Learning Disabilities. ACLD *Newsbriefs*. Sept/Oct (166), 15. Note: The Association for Children with Learning Disabilities is now the Learning Disabilities Association of America.)

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The Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities is a generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities, or of social skills. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual and presumed to be due to central nervous dysfunction. Even though, a learning disability may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (e.g. sensory impairment, mental retardation, social and emotional disturbance), with socio-environmental influences (e.g., cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction, psychogenic factors), and especially attention deficit disorder, all of which may cause learning problems, a learning disability is not due the direct result of those conditions or influences. (Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities (1987). Learning disabilities a report to the U.S. Congress. Bethesda, MD National Institutes of Health, p. 222.)

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span. Problems in self-regulatory behavior, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not by themselves constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (for example, sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance) or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction), they are not the result of those conditions or influences. (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. (1988). *Collective perspectives on issues affecting learning disabilities: Position Papers and statements*. Austin, TX: PRO-ED.)

Rehabilitation Services Administration

A specific learning disability is disorder one or more of the central nervous system processes involved in perceiving, understanding, and/or using concepts through verbal (spoken or written) language or nonverbal means. This disorder manifests itself with a deficit in one or more of the following areas: attention, reasoning, processing, memory, communication, reading, writing, spelling, calculation, coordination, social competence, and emotional maturity. (Rehabilitation Services Administration. (1985. January 14). *Program policy directive*. Washington. DC U.S. Office Special Education and Rehabilitation Services.)