

## Comprehensive Documentation to Support Diagnosis

These guidelines help healthcare providers document a student's disability so the University of Alabama's Office of Disability Services (ODS) can determine accommodation eligibility.

- A qualified professional with considerable knowledge of the condition must provide documentation demonstrating how the disability significantly limits major life activities.
- Documentation must validate the need for accommodations based on the student's **current** functioning (i.e., age 13 or older or within the past 5 years) and its impact on their academic performance.
  - **Note:** An exhaustive list of test instruments is not necessary for permanent or stable conditions (i.e., cerebral palsy, diabetes). A statement from a qualified professional is sufficient if it confirms the functional impact of the disability is unchanging or permanent.
  - **Note:** A complete psychoeducational or neuropsychological assessment is recommended for cognitive conditions like ADHD, learning disabilities, and traumatic brain injuries. The assessment must include an individualized, standardized, and norm-appropriate battery demonstrating the functional limitations necessitating accommodation. For examples and additional information visit: <https://ods.ua.edu/register-with-ods/documentation/>
- Educational records or documentation from family members is considered supplemental.
- Documentation is confidential under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) but may be released to the student upon request.
- Avoid restating the student's self-report (i.e., "student reports" or "student endorses"). ODS requires objective evidence of substantial limitations.
- A single diagnostic encounter is typically insufficient to establish a non-observable disability or need for accommodations. ODS may request additional information.
- Information should be typed on letterhead with provider's signature and date. Incomplete or missing information will delay the eligibility review. ODS may request more details.

A disability is a mental or physical condition that substantially limits a major life activity compared to most people. Substantial means a notable, significant, meaningful limit/difference to how a student engages in the activity; the conditions necessary to engage in the activity; or the frequency or duration for which they can engage in the activity.

Major life activities include but are not limited to, caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, communicating, and the proper functioning of major bodily systems.

**Documentation should include:**

**I. Historical Information**

- a. Include the date of onset of the condition, the duration of your treatment of the student, and the date of the most recent visit. Provide a history of presenting symptoms.
- b. Include relevant developmental/educational/medical history, including a discussion of pre-existing or co-occurring disorders. Educational history may include previous standardized test scores, IEPs, 504 Plans, and/or a record of previously granted accommodations with evidence of their effectiveness.

**II. Diagnosis**

- a. Clearly state the diagnosis(es), including diagnostic codes from the most recent version of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM) or International Classification of Disease (ICD)
- b. List and describe the diagnostic criteria endorsed
- c. List the objective measures used to help substantiate the diagnosis
- d. Provide explanation or evidence that other possible explanations have been investigated and ruled out

**III. Evidence of Impairment**

- a. Detailed description of how the condition substantially limits the student's ability to perform major life activities, specifying which activities are impacted. Include details about the frequency, severity, and duration of symptoms. Avoid listing general symptoms associated with the condition; the information must be current and specific to the student's experience.
- b. Provide results from objective measures, including qualitative and quantitative interpretations to demonstrate how the student's limitations go beyond those typically experienced by the general population.
  - i. Clearly describe the substantial limitation(s) to learning caused by the condition and the degree to which it affects the student's academic performance.
- c. A positive response to medication alone does not confirm a diagnosis, nor does medication use alone either support or negate the need for accommodations. If the student is experiencing side effects, providing a list of prescribed medications and usage frequency may be helpful.

**IV. Recommendations (optional)**

- a. ODS does not require providers to recommend accommodations, as it is ODS' responsibility to determine reasonable and appropriate accommodations. If you choose to make recommendations, these will only be considered when accompanied by a rationale based on objective test results or clinical observations.

Once prepared, documentation may be provided to the student to submit with their ODS application. Alternatively, documentation may be provided to ODS in the following ways:

Email to: [ods@ua.edu](mailto:ods@ua.edu)

Fax to: 205-348-0804

Mail to: Office of Disability Services 1000 Houser Hall Box 870185 Tuscaloosa, AL 35487