

## 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 disability significantly limits major life activities.
- Documentation should provide information regarding the student's disability, current functioning (typically age 13 or older or within the past five years), and the impact of the condition on academic performance.
  - **Note:** Permanent or stable conditions (e.g., cerebral palsy, diabetes) do not require extensive testing. A statement from a qualified professional may be sufficient if it confirms the condition and its permanent functional impact.
  - **Note:** Psychoeducational or neuropsychological assessment may be helpful for ADHD, learning disabilities, and traumatic brain injuries. When provided, assessments should be individualized, standardized, norm-appropriate, and relevant to the accommodation request.
- Educational records, including IEPs, Section 504 Plans, and prior accommodation records, may provide valuable information regarding disability history, functional limitations, and previous accommodations. Additional information may be needed to evaluate specific accommodation requests.
- Documentation provided by a family member is considered supplemental due to dual-relationship and objectivity concerns, even when the family member is a qualified professional.
- Avoid simply repeating a student's self-report. Documentation should include objective evidence of substantial limitations when appropriate.
- While a diagnosis may be established through a single clinical encounter, additional information may be needed to understand the student's current functional limitations and evaluate accommodation requests.
- 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 or clinical observations used to help support 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 relevant objective findings, including qualitative and quantitative interpretations, that help explain the student's functional limitations.
  - 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 accommodation, as it is ODS' responsibility to determine reasonable and appropriate accommodation. If you choose to make recommendations, please include the clinical rationale supporting those recommendations.

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