

Characteristics of Adults with Learning Disabilities

Reading Characteristics	What It Looks Like in an Adult
Does not read for pleasure.	Engages in leisure activities other than reading magazines or books; prefers more active pursuits. Doesn't read stories to his/her children.
Does not use reading to gather information.	Cannot easily use materials like newspapers and classified ads to obtain information.
Has problems identifying individual sounds in spoken words.	Does not attempt to sound out words in reading or does so incorrectly.
Often needs many repetitions to learn to recognize a new or unused word.	May encounter a newly learned word in a text and not recognize it when it appears later in that text.
Oral reading contains many errors, repetitions and pauses.	Reads slowly and laboriously, if attempts at all. May refuse to read orally.
Efforts in reading are so focused on word recognition that it detracts from reading comprehension.	Loses the meaning of text, but understands the same material when it is read aloud.
Has problems with comprehension that go beyond word recognition. May have limited language skills that affect comprehension.	Does not understand the text when it is read to him/her.
Has limited use of reading strategies. Is an inactive reader; not previewing text, monitoring comprehension, or summarizing what is read.	When prompted to do so, does not describe strategies used to assist with decoding and comprehension of text.
Rarely practices reading, which may compound reading difficulties. Lacks complex language and word knowledge.	Recognizes and uses few words, expressions, and sentence structures than peers.

Writing Characteristics	What It Looks Like in an Adult
Has difficulty communicating through writing.	Rarely writes letters or notes. Needs help completing forms such as job applications.
Written output is severely limited.	Struggles to produce a written product. Produces short sentences and text with limited vocabulary.
Writing is disorganized.	Omits critical parts or puts information in the wrong place. Writing lacks transition words.
Lacks a clear purpose for writing.	Does not communicate a clear message. Expresses thoughts that don't contribute to the main idea.
Does not use the appropriate text structures.	Uses sentences that contain errors in syntax or word choice. Fails to clearly indicate the referent of a pronoun.
Shows persistent problems in spelling.	Spells phonetically. Leaves out letters. Refrains from writing words that are difficult to spell.
Has difficulties with mechanics of written expression.	Omits or misuses sentence markers such as capitals and end punctuation, making it difficult for the reader to understand the text.
Handwriting is sloppy and difficult to read.	Has awkward writing grip or position. Letters, words, and lines are misaligned or not spaced appropriately.
Demonstrates difficulties in revising.	Is reluctant to proofread or does not catch errors. Focuses primarily on the mechanics of writing, not on style and content.

Listening Characteristics	What It Looks Like in an Adult
Has problems perceiving slight distinctions in words.	Misunderstands a message with a word mistaken for a similar word. Might say, "Pick of the grass," instead of, "Pick up the glass."
Has a limited vocabulary.	Recognizes and uses fewer words than peers when engaged in conversation or when gathering information by listening.
Finds abstract words or concepts difficult to understand.	Requests repetitions or more concrete explanations of ideas. Frequently asks for examples.
Has difficulty with nonliteral or figurative language such as metaphors, idioms, and sarcasm.	Does not understand jokes or comic strips.
Confuses the message in complex sentences.	Will eat lunch first if given the direction, "Eat lunch after you take this to the mail room."
Has difficulty with verbal memory.	Doesn't remember directions, phone numbers, jokes, stories, etc.
Has difficulty processing large amounts of spoken language.	Gets lost listening in classroom or large group presentations, complaining that people talk too fast.

Speaking Characteristics	What It Looks Like in an Adult
Mispronounces words.	Adds, substitutes, or rearranges sounds in words, as in <i>phemomenon</i> for <i>phenomenon</i> or <i>Pacific</i> for <i>specific</i> .
Uses wrong word, usually with similar sounds.	Uses a similar-sounding word, like <i>generic</i> instead of <i>genetic</i> .
Confuses the morphology, or structure, of words.	Uses the wrong form of a word, such as calling the <i>Declaration of Independence</i> the <i>Declaring of Independence</i> .
Has a limited vocabulary.	Uses the same words over and over in giving information and explaining ideas. Has difficulty in conveying ideas.
Makes grammatical errors.	Omits or uses grammatical markers incorrectly, such as tense, number, possession, and negation.
Speaks with a limited repertoire of phrase and sentence structure.	Uses mostly simple sentence construction. Overuses <i>and</i> to connect thoughts.
Has difficulty organizing what to say.	Has problems giving directions or explaining a recipe; talks around the topic (circumlocutes), but doesn't get to the point.
Has trouble maintaining a topic.	Interjects irrelevant information into story. Starts out discussing one thing and then goes off in another direction without making the connection.
Has difficulty with word retrieval.	Can't call forth a known word when it is needed and may use fillers, such as " <i>ummm</i> ," and " <i>You know</i> ." May substitute a word related in meaning or sound, as in <i>boat</i> for <i>submarine</i> or <i>selfish</i> for <i>bashful</i> .
Has trouble with the pragmatic or social use of language.	Does not follow rules of conversation like turn taking. Does not switch styles of speaking when addressing different people.

Mathematics Characteristics	What It Looks Like in an Adult
Doesn't remember and/or retrieve math facts.	Uses a calculator or counts on fingers for answers to simple problems; e.g., 2×5 .
Doesn't use visual imagery effectively.	Can't do math in his/her head and writes down even simple problems. Has difficulty making change.
Has visual-spatial deficits.	Confuses math symbols. Misreads numbers. Doesn't interpret graphs or tables accurately. Has trouble maintaining a checkbook.
Becomes confused with math operations, especially multi-step processes.	Leaves out steps in math problem solving and does them in the wrong order. Can't do long division except with a calculator. Has trouble budgeting.
Has difficulties in language processing that affect the ability to do math problem solving.	Doesn't translate real-life problems into the appropriate mathematical processes. Avoids employment situations that involve this set of skills.

Thinking Characteristics	What It Looks Like in an Adult
Has problems with abstract reasoning.	Asks to see ideas on paper. Prefers hands-on ways of learning new ideas.
Shows marked rigidity in thinking.	Resists new ideas or ways of doing things and may have difficulty adjusting to changes on the job.
Thinking is random as opposed to orderly, either in logic or chronology.	May have good ideas that seem disjointed, unrelated, or out of sequence.
Has difficulty synthesizing ideas.	Pays too much attention to detail and misses the big picture or idea when encountering specific situations at home or at work.
Makes impulsive decisions and judgments.	"Shoots from the hip" when arriving at conclusions or decisions. Doesn't use a structured approach to weigh options.
Has difficulty generating strategies to acquire/use information and solve problems.	Approaches situations without a game plan, acting without a guiding set of principles.

“Other Difficulties” Characteristics	What It Looks Like in an Adult
Has problems with attention, which may be accompanied by hyperactivity, distractibility, or passivity.	Doesn't focus on a task for an appropriate length of time. Can't seem to get things done. Does better with short tasks.
Displays poor organization skills.	Doesn't know where to begin tasks or how to proceed. Doesn't work within time limits, failing to meet deadlines. Workspace and personal space are messy.
Has eye-hand coordination problems.	Omits or substitutes elements when copying information from one place to another, as in invoices or schedules.
Demonstrates poor fine motor control, usually accompanied by poor handwriting.	Avoids jobs requiring manipulation of small items. Becomes frustrated when putting together toys for children.
Lacks social perception.	Stands too close to people when conversing. Doesn't perceive situations accurately. May laugh when something serious is happening or slap an unreceptive boss on the back in an attempt to be friendly.
Has problems establishing social relationships. Problems may be related to spoken language disorders.	Does not seem to know how to act and what to say to people in specific social situations and may withdraw from socializing.
Lacks “executive functions” including self-motivation, self-reliance, self-advocacy, and goal-setting.	Demonstrates over reliance on others for assistance or fails to ask for help when appropriate. Blames external factors on lack of success. Doesn't set personal goals and work deliberately to achieve them. Expresses helplessness.

