



Q & A on the Screening Technical Assistance Paper

1. **Question:** *I have heard the terms 'screening' and 'diagnosis' used synonymously. Are they the same?*

Answer: No, they are most definitely not the same. Screening results, by themselves, cannot determine the presence of learning disabilities. The results from screening are used by program staff and the learner to decide whether the learner should be referred for further testing with a diagnostic battery that would determine if there is a learning disability. Screening for learning disabilities answers the question, "Should this person be referred for further testing to determine if he/she has a learning disability?" Diagnostic testing, on the other hand, must be conducted by a qualified professional, such as a psychologist, clinician, or educational diagnostician, who is licensed to administer psycho-educational batteries. The diagnostic testing answers the question, "Does this person have a learning disability?"

2. **Question:** *We don't currently have an LD screening policy in place. What do I need to know about this to convince my administrator that this would be a very useful process and would eventually help my students?*

Answer: Some of the most positive aspects of screening instruments are that they have most or all of the following qualities:

- Helpful in determining the need for further testing
- Inexpensive
- Quick to administer, score and easy to interpret
- Appropriate for large numbers of persons and may be administered in group setting
- Able to provide assessment in several areas, such as language, motor or social skills
- Does not require extensive staff training

3. **Question:** *What are the most important points to consider before making the decision to administer an LD screening tool?*

Answer: The following points should be considered before making the decision to administer an LD screening tool:

- Does the learner have difficulty in learning new material?
- Does the learner exhibit some of the characteristics commonly thought to be those of a person with LD?
- Have several interventions been attempted resulting in little or no progress within a reasonable period of time?
- Can the staff of the program be trained to administer a screening device in a relatively short period of time?
- Will the staff be trained to discuss the results and explain the pros and cons of a legal diagnosis of a learning disability?

4. Question: Is there a simple, easy-to-use LD screening tool that is in the public domain and free to use?

Answer: Yes. The Learning Needs Screening Tool (Washington 13) uses open-ended questions to collect information on the types of educational experience obtained, job experience, and aspirations for the future. It includes thirteen 'yes' or 'no' questions designed to identify potential learning disabilities and an additional set of medical/health-related questions for more background information. The scoring is very easy. There is a high correlation between the results of this tool and the diagnosis of learning disabilities.

5. Question: How much documentation is required before the screening process can begin?

Answer: There is no requirement for documentation from the learner other than a signed consent for screening. However, to rule out the possibility of a physical problem that may be contributing to or causing the learning difficulties, it is recommended that a vision or hearing screening be provided. Vision and hearing components are often included in screening instruments.

6. Question: Is there any training requirement needed to administer an LD screening tool?

Answer: A majority of the screening instruments identified in the *Technical Assistance Paper: Screening for Learning Disabilities in Adult Education Programs* are relatively easy to administer without extensive training. Directions for administration and scoring of questionnaires like the Washington Learning Needs Screening and Empire State Screening are included as part the screening instrument. The Adult Learning Disability Screening (ALDS) includes a test administration and scoring manual for all five components of the screening that is purchased from the publisher. Training takes less than two hours. Students may take the on-line component independently.

A screening and vision screening is recommended to accompany any LD screening. These components can be purchased separately from PowerPath or from a contracted vendor on the local level.

7. Question: When should the screening for a learning disability take place?

Answer: Screening may be administered at any time during the instructional cycle if the practitioner or the learner identifies the need. Teachers that are knowledgeable about characteristics that define LD are especially helpful in noticing deficits that undiagnosed students may display in class. Generally, if a learner is consistently struggling with learning the basics of reading, writing, math, communication, social and work skills and reports negative past learning experiences, then a screening tool should be administered to determine the need for further testing.

8. Question: How long should it take to administer an LD screening tool?

Answer: This will vary depending on the selected screening device. Screenings can take anywhere from 10 to 90 minutes to administer and an additional 15 minutes to review results with the learner.

9. Question: Who should review the documentation after the LD screening session?

Answer: Preferably the individual administering the screening tool should review the results with the learner.

10. Question: What is the follow-up for the program provider?

Answer: The program provider shall discuss the results of the LD screening process with the adult learner and be able to recommend resources for diagnostic testing should the outcome of the screening suggest the need for further testing. Such resources may include:

- The Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Community mental health agencies
- University-affiliated assessment centers and hospitals, counseling or study-skills centers, and
- Educational therapists, LD specialists, or psychologists in private practice

11. Question: Should the parent or caregiver be a part of the screening process?

Answer: Learners 18 years of age and older are legally considered adults and do not require parents or caregivers to be a part of this process. Those learners who are 17 years of age and younger may need the consent of parents or caregivers in accordance with local policy.

12. Question: Who else should be included as part of the screening process?

Answer: To protect student confidentiality, only those persons directly involved in the learner's educational attainment and social competence should be included in the screening process.

13. Question: What kinds of information will the screening provide for the student and the teacher working with the student?

Answer: Although screening tools differ they usually provide information on demographics, medical/physical conditions, family histories of learning problems, and learning problems encountered by the learner in elementary, middle and high school settings.

14. Question: What should a teacher do with information gathered after an LD screening tool has been administered?

Answer: If the outcome of the screening suggests the need for further testing, then resources should be recommended for diagnostic testing. If the learner does not choose to proceed further, then the informal screening should be used as a source of information for identifying methods and materials that will help meet the learner's needs.

15. Question: What information will be helpful to include in the referral for diagnostic testing?

Answer: Results from one of the recommended LD screenings or one identified by your program should be included along with results from a current standardized testing instrument (e.g., TABE), if available. Additional information provided by the referring agency may include classroom observations of the learner's difficulties that have persisted in spite of instructional best strategies.