

Documentation of a Disability

The dimensions of good documentation discussed below are based on guidelines from the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD). This best practice approach for defining complete documentation establishes the individual as a person with a disability and provides a rationale for reasonable accommodations.

These guidelines will enhance consistency throughout the UA system by providing students, prospective students, parents and professionals the information they need to assist students in establishing eligibility for services and receiving appropriate accommodations.

Typically, documentation should be provided on letterhead signed by a healthcare provider or counselor. While other forms of documentation may be considered, a one line letter or a verification of a diagnosis written on a prescription pad are not adequate documentation to support requests for accommodation.

1. Who can provide documentation?

The best quality documentation is provided by a licensed or otherwise properly qualified professional who has no personal relationship with the individual being evaluated. The professional should be qualified to make the diagnosis (e.g., an orthopedic limitation might be documented by a physician, but not licensed psychologist).

2. What should be included in the documentation?

Quality documentation includes a diagnosis and provides information on how it impacts the student and their ability to access courses, course materials and demonstrate their knowledge of the material.

While the Disability Services office is not obligated to approve recommendations made by outside entities, those determined to be reasonable and relevant to the programs, services, and benefits offered by the university may be considered.

3. Can I use my IEP or 504 plan from high school as documentation?

An individualized education program (IEP) or Section 504 plan may help identify services that have been effective for the student. However, this is generally not sufficient documentation because of the differences between postsecondary education and high school education. What the student may

need to meet the new demands of postsecondary education may be different from what worked for them in high school. Also, in some cases, the nature of a disability may change.

If the IEP or 504 plan includes a specific diagnosis or testing results on an adult scale from a school psychologist, clinical or educational psychologist, neuropsychologist, or other qualified professional who made the diagnosis, then it may meet the documentation requirements.

4. What other information would be helpful to be included in the documentation?

Additional details provide useful information for both establishing a disability and identifying possible accommodations. Examples include:

- description of how the disabling condition(s) impacts the student;
- information on expected changes in the functional impact of the disability over time and context;
- whether and how a major life activity is substantially limited by providing a clear sense of the severity, frequency and pervasiveness of the condition(s);
- past and current accommodations, services and/or medications;
- information on past medications (including side effects from current medications or services that may impact physical, perceptual, behavioral or cognitive performance);
- past and current auxiliary aids and assistive devices; and/or
- past and current support services and accommodations.

5. How recent does the documentation need to be?

While recent documentation (within three to five years) is recommended in most circumstances, older documentation may be accepted when conditions are permanent or non-varying. Likewise, changing conditions and/or changes in how the condition impacts the individual brought on by growth and development may warrant more frequent updates in order to provide an accurate picture.

6. What if I need an evaluation or testing to document my disability?

Neither the student's high school nor postsecondary school is required to conduct or pay for a new evaluation to document a student's disability and need for an academic adjustment. The student may, therefore, have to pay or find funding to pay an appropriate professional for an evaluation. If the student is eligible for services through their state vocational rehabilitation agency, they may qualify for an evaluation at no cost to the student. State vocational rehabilitation agencies can be located at <http://rsa.ed.gov>.

Please note: Screening tests, such as Slingerland and Scotopic Sensitivity screenings, are not accepted by DSS as documentation of a learning disability. While these screening tools may indicate a person has some learning difficulties and needs further testing, screening tests are not considered documentation of a learning disability.

If students with a disability are not sure that their documentation meets the above requirements, please contact Disability Services to request a review of the documentation. The staff will review the information provided and let the student know what else may be needed.

For more information, visit:

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html>

<https://www.ahead.org/professional-resources/accommodations/documentation>