

How College Students with LD Can Self-Advocate

What is self-advocacy?

Self-advocacy is the act of representing yourself and your interests by speaking up for yourself. It means explaining your learning disability to others, and telling them how you use your strengths and accommodations to succeed.

To be an effective self-advocate, you must:

- Know and act for yourself by first understanding your disability, strengths, and needs.
- Know what is best for you and tell your school's disability services office what you need to accommodate your learning disability.
- Know how to get what you need. You can first role-play giving a description of your needs with someone you feel comfortable with before you speak with others.

How does self-advocacy help you?

- You can get what you need to succeed in a postsecondary school by being respectfully assertive.
- You can make your own choices by knowing your strengths and weaknesses.



- You can learn to say "no" without feeling guilty.
- You can express disagreement respectfully, still listening to the other person, and speaking when it is your turn.

Understand your disability!

You must understand your disability before you can explain it to someone else. Here are some ideas for learning about your disability:

- Ask someone who understands diagnostic documentation to explain what the documentation says about your strengths and weaknesses.
- Be aware of any co-existing conditions – AD/HD, Anxiety Disorder, etc.
- Search online for information about your disability.
- Keep a folder or binder with all disability-related documentation and materials.

Meeting with Disability Services

You should meet with your school's disability services office before school begins to talk about what accommodations you need.

Know that just because you received an accommodation in K-12 does not mean you will automatically receive these

accommodations at postsecondary school. However, you should discuss why you need these accommodations. Be sure you know what worked and did not work for you in the past.

Take your binder with all of your disability-related information, including copies of your school IEPs if you have any, as well as the diagnostic documentation from your most current learning disabilities evaluation.

Remember throughout the process, you know your strengths and weaknesses better than anyone else. Don't rely on parents or others to make decisions about what you need for support for your learning disability in postsecondary school.

Know that as an adult with a disability, you are legally entitled to accommodations in postsecondary. Be familiar with the laws that protect you.

Take notes during the meeting, either written or with an audio recorder. Add your notes to your disability binder.

Following the meeting with Disability Services

After your requested accommodations have been approved by Disability Services, you should speak with your professors about your accommodations. You may want to rehearse with a friend or specialist first.



To speak effectively with your professors:

- Set up an appointment with each professor at least one week before you need any accommodations for instruction or testing. You may be able to Email or text your professors to set up an appointment. If not, call their office.
- Go see your professor during his or her office hours. Don't just try to catch him or her after or during class. Respect the professor's busy schedule.
- Take your disability binder in case the professor wants to see any documentation, including any documentation from Student Services that shows you have been approved for accommodations.
- Be assertive, but not aggressive.

Additional Resources

Rights and Responsibilities of College Students with LD,

<http://ldaamerica.org/rights-and-responsibilities-of-college-students-with-learning-disabilities-ld/>

LD and the Law – After High School,

<http://ldaamerica.org/learning-disabilities-and-the-law-after-high-school-an-overview-for-students-2/>

Self-Advocacy for College Students,

<http://www.ldonline.org/article/6142?theme=print>

Knowing Your Options: College, Independence, and Beyond, (VIDEO)

(<http://www.pacer.org/transition/video/to-pic.asp?se=Self-Advocacy>)

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