

Guidelines for Documenting a Psychological Disability

Students seeking support services from Accessibility Services on the basis of a previously diagnosed psychiatric disability must submit documentation that verifies their eligibility under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The documentation must describe a disabling condition, which is defined by the presence of significant limitations in one or more major life activities. Merely submitting evidence of a diagnosis is not sufficient to warrant academic accommodations.

Similarly, nonspecific diagnoses, such as "adjustment problems," "emotional difficulties," "mood disturbance," and/or "test difficulty/anxiety" in and of themselves do not constitute a disability.

The guidelines below are intended to allow Accessibility Services to determine eligibility for services and appropriate accommodations. Accessibility Services staff are available at (505) 277-3506 for consultation. A supplemental verification form is also included to provide guidance to the assessment process. A comprehensive report of any testing conducted (including test scores, if relevant) should be included with the verification form. A list of selected test instruments is provided.

1. A formal assessment of your current psychiatric and health status, and a formal diagnosis of a disabling condition must be provided by a licensed treatment provider (e.g., psychologist, neuropsychologist, psychiatrist, neuropsychiatrist, licensed counselor, psychologist, licensed social worker, and psychiatric nurse practitioner).
2. The assessment must be current. Accommodations are based on an assessment of the current nature and impact of your disability. Because psychiatric conditions may change over time, current evaluations are critical for providing reasonable accommodations. In general, this means that evaluations must have been completed within the last twelve (12) months prior to accommodation requests. In addition, depending on the nature of the disability, evaluations may need to be updated on a semester-by-semester or yearly basis.
3. The evaluation must be comprehensive. Evidence of significant limitations in the educational setting (e.g., on learning or social functioning) must be provided. Minimally, the evaluator must include:
 - A diagnostic interview, which includes relevant background in support of that diagnosis. A DSM-IV-TR or ICD-10 code must be provided. Evaluators are encouraged to cite the specific objective measures used to help substantiate the diagnosis.
 - The dates of evaluation and/or treatment, in order to establish a history of the condition, duration and severity of the disorder, and relevant developmental, historical, and familial data. The evaluation should include medical and medication history, including the individual's current medication regimen compliance, side effects, response to medication treatments, and description of the expected progression of the disability over time (i.e., permanent/chronic vs. short-term/temporary).
 - A description of current functional limitations in different settings with the understanding that a psychological disorder usually presents itself across a variety of settings other than just the academic domain and that its expression is often influenced by context-specific variables (e.g., school-based performance).
 - A description of the degree of impact of the diagnosed psychiatric disorder on a specific major life activity, as well as the degree of impact on the individual. A link must be established between the requested accommodations and the functional limitations that are pertinent to an academic setting. Psychoeducational, neuropsychological, or behavioral assessments are often necessary to support the need for accommodations.

4. All reports should be on letterhead, typed, dated, signed, and otherwise legible. The name, title, and professional credentials of the evaluator, including information about license and certification as well as area of specialization, employment, and state in which the individual practices must be clearly stated. Use of diagnostic terminology indicating a specific disability by someone whose training and experience are not in these fields is not acceptable. Evaluators should not be related to the individual being assessed. Diagnoses written on prescription pads and or parent's notes indicating a disability are not considered appropriate documentation.