

# **From LD to Degree: Effective Techniques for the Student with a Learning Disability**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to espouse and highlight some essential ingredients for a student with learning disabilities and differences to survive outside of the K-12 setting. Many students with LD move to colleges and universities throughout the United States, and perhaps even the world. As they earn undergraduate and even graduate degrees, they are clearly using many techniques of self-support to complement their areas of need. This article will focus on the key skills that an LD students needs to thrive and be successful to go on to earn advanced degrees and certifications in very challenging fields. The perspective put forth in this article is one of a firsthand encounter. I, (Josh) the author of this piece can attest first hand to the challenges of going on to college, graduate school then enrolling in a Doctorate program. It is the goal to provide students and teachers alike with a general sketch of how to prepare students for college.

## **From LD to Degree: Effective techniques for the Student with a Learning Disability**

The most critical part of long-term student success is teaching skills and techniques for learning that the student can implement on his or her own. Teachers, mentors and counselors must provide a student with unique learning needs with support and tools necessary to assist the student throughout his or her academic career. Some tools may include, but are certainly not limited to: teaching the use of a calendar book or an electronic organization device, if you were supporting someone with organizational issues. This electronic device could be a palm-pilot, a data phone (such as a blackberry with sync capability) or even just using a computer based calendar that provides reminders when necessary. It sounds simple but simply suggesting or providing such a device would be inadequate for the student. The teacher or mentor would need to come up with an organizational technique that works in each unique case, and help the student learn to use any one of these modalities.

There are so many tools that can be used to support the needs of unique learners, that this article would not in any way do such a discussion justice. However, the teacher or mentor must seek out and find tools the students can identify with and are comfortable with at that time. However, it is even more crucial for a teacher to teach a student how he or she learns, and what methodologies or pedagogies work the most effective for him or her. Students need to learn how to self-identify situations where learning will be challenging, and be able to select a tool or tools from their arsenal to use themselves without support.

As students go to college, there is less and less structured support in many cases. And thus the responsibility to advocate, communicate and organize is left up to the student. This shift in roles can take a toll on a student. When in college and being overwhelmed, it is often hard for one to understand what to do and how to do it, never mind how to learn and how the individual learns.

So, if it is important to identify tools and processes to help students help themselves, as well as teach students how they learn, how is this all done? The answer is not a simple one, where a simple prescription can be applied; however the things that have been successful over the journey of this author have been the following techniques:

- Take an interest in treatment and TEAM meetings.
- Ask questions and go over testing results with a qualified interpreter.
- Know what your specific test results mean by asking the interpreter or doing additional research.
- Understand your legal rights and accommodations guaranteed under the law.
- Ask for help when you are struggling...and when you find a technique that works—capitalize on it.
- Learn to understand your own processing ability and how research shows you to support it.

The above list is not all inclusive, but represents things that can be done even by a 15 or 16 year old. The responsibility to expose students to these things falls on the teacher or mentor. For once the students leave your case load or graduate from your school or program, they are going to have to help themselves. While most colleges and universities have programs for students with identified areas of need, the support is generally less than what was received in the K-12 system. Students need to know what to ask for and how to use it once they get it.

These methods spoken about are derived from the personal experience of the author, as a person with several learning disabilities, but also professional experience as a Special Education Teacher, holding a Masters Degree from a top-tier research university in Boston, MA, and holding a Professional Board Certification in Special Education. Each of these academic milestones required more and more self-advocacy and self-awareness of learning needs and styles. Then, going on to the current academic endeavor—earning an Ed.D., from the same top-tier university as the Masters Degree is an even larger and more current challenge; a challenge that no doubt will be met with unmatched diligence and success. But this success has been and will continue to be brought on by understanding one's own learning needs and effectively utilizing the appropriate tools to aid in learning. Mastery of this skill only comes with an understanding of the elements previously delineated as a base. Make no mistake, there is a lot more to a student's success in obtaining a college or university degree than what has been provided here, but this is a starting point that has proven effective several times over.

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