

PLuS Perspectives

Information about College Students with LD

Supported by a grant from the US Office of Education grant # P333A050044

Meeting the Challenge:

Approximately 80-90% of adults with learning disabilities experience written language difficulties. Furthermore, writing problems are a major concern of students with LD and their instructors¹. College students with a learning disability in writing may experience difficulty with the mechanics of writing, such as spelling, but may also have trouble organizing written language into a logical sequence of thought.

Spelling and Writing Disabilities

Spelling can be difficult for students with LD because of problems with word decoding, poor phonemic awareness, or poor knowledge of letter-sound relationships. Spelling is affected by independent reading and exposure to text; Individuals with LD are rarely avid readers and the lack of exposure to printed words may adversely affect their ability to develop strong spelling skills².

But for college students with LD or ADHD poor spelling and writing are not signs of limited intelligence, poor motivation, or careless errors. Students can learn to use technology to eliminate spelling errors and can learn strategies to improve the quality and organization of papers.

¹ Li, H., & Hamel, C. (2003). http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/summary_0199-2727847_ITM

² Spear-Swerling, Louise (2005). <http://www.ldonline.org/article/5587>

Characteristics of Students with Writing and Spelling Problems:

Because of problems with oral language, memory, attention to detail, and metacognition students with LD and ADHD may exhibit:

- Frequent spelling errors
- Confusion of homonyms (their/there)
- Omission or transposition of letters
- Phonetic spelling
- Difficulty proofreading
- Limited written vocabulary
- Limited variety of sentence structure
- Limited development and/or organization
- Difficulty planning and following steps in long assignments
- Lack of attention to audience
- Grammar and punctuation errors

A Student's Perspective....

Journal writing, essays, proposals, outlines, etc....Before I begin any of them, I hesitate. Writing them, I frustrate. I would stare for hours at a blank piece of paper, pen in one hand and a pile of notes next to the other, ready to write the sentence that would open the flood gates in order to complete the paper. Days would pass... So what was so powerful was the process of writing the papers with you (his tutor) and seeing my ideas come out and take on shape that was much more manageable. The learning was a joint process rather than a passive donation of knowledge".

-Aaron Piziali, "Revolution", from *Learning Disabilities & Life Stories* (2001), 33-34.



PLuS Perspectives Continued

Technology to Help with Spelling and Writing Difficulties:

Word Prediction Software- Th software helps predict the word a student wants to use when writing. The person types the first letter (or first few letters) of a word, and the program offers a list of words beginning with that letter. Students can build their own dictionaries of frequently used words and dictionaries of technical vocabulary. The computer uses those dictionaries to predict words the student commonly uses.¹

Concept Mapping Software- Brainstorming/concept mapping and outlining programs allows students to input information in a “free form” graphic approach that can be organized later. The student creates a diagram of his or her ideas and the program creates an outline. The software offers a library of pictures and symbols to help students organize ideas and when the diagram is complete it is converted into an outline automatically.²

Reading Systems (screen readers)- Reading systems allow text on a screen to be read aloud through the computer’s sound card. Hearing the text may help the student catch writing errors such as problems with grammar, or words that have been left out, errors they might not have noticed by visually reading it. Listening to text may also help users determine if their writing makes sense, and if it really means what they are trying to say. Hearing one’s writing read out loud usually inspires better editing of content as well as fluency.³

Speech Recognition Software- Speech recognition systems helps students who may not have strong written language abilities by allowing the user to speak into a microphone instead of writing or typing. It entirely eliminates the act of spelling, as well as keyboarding or handwriting, allowing a student to focus entirely on sentence structure, rhetoric, and critical analysis.⁴

^{1,2,3,4} <http://www.sc.edu/scatp/ld.htm#wpred>

The Center for Writing-based Learning

The Writing Center at DePaul is open to help both faculty and students.

For Faculty –seminars and workshops to help faculty better prepare writing assignments.

For Students – assistance with organizing, editing, revising papers, reports, resumes and theses.

The Center offers face-to-face appointments, feedback by email, and IM/webcam appointments. The centers are located on both the Lincoln Park Campus and the Loop Campus.

DePaul University PLuS Program
2250 N. Sheffield Ave, SC 370
Chicago, IL 60614
Phone: (773) 325-1677
Fax: (773) 325-3720
www.studentaffairs.depaul.edu/plus/

Universal Design for Writing Assignments

Ideas from DePaul faculty members:

- ♦ Break big assignments into smaller pieces
- ♦ Provide examples of excellent, good, adequate, poor writing
- ♦ Provide practice through easy, un-graded writing assignments (e.g., reading journal) followed by more structured writing assignments
- ♦ Allow revisions and multiple drafts
- ♦ Provide feedback at multiple points (i.e., outlines and drafts)
- ♦ Allow for drafts that are graded; if the draft meets the requirements, it is not necessary to revise
- ♦ Provide alternatives to written assignments (e.g., oral reports and presentations, multimedia)
- ♦ Be clear and firm about assignment extensions

