

# Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)

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## DISABILITY DOCUMENTATION

### Definition of Disability

An individual must demonstrate that his/her condition meets the definition of a disability under the **Rehabilitation Act, 1973** and/or the **Americans with Disability Act (ADA), 1990**. The ADA defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

**Substantially limits** under ADA refer to significant restrictions as to the **condition, manner, or duration** under which an individual can perform a particular major life activity as compared to most people.

**Whether a condition is substantially limiting** to support an accommodation request is a decision made by qualified professional(s) based upon multiple sources of information.

A clinical diagnosis is not synonymous with a disability. The specific symptoms that are present should be stated in the documentation. Evidence that these symptoms are associated with substantial impairment in a major life activity is required for provision of accommodations. A detailed description of current substantial limitation in the academic environment is essential to identify appropriate academic accommodations, auxiliary aids, and services. Specific requests for accommodations need to be linked to the student's current functional limitations, and the rationale for each recommendation clearly stated.

### General Documentation Guidelines

All institutions are required to have written policies and procedures for review of documentation submitted by students with disabilities. Decision-making for the provision of institutional-level accommodation is provided by the Office of Disability Services (ODS) or a designated office at an individual college or university.

Secondary education eligibility reports, Individualized Educational Plans, Summary of Progress reports, or previous provision of special education services may not be sufficient documentation for college-level accommodations.

Documentation should provide a diagnostic statement identifying the disability, describe the diagnostic criteria and methodology used to diagnose the condition, and detail the progression of the condition if its impact on the student's functioning is expected to change over time.

Documentation should provide an adequate representation of the student's current functional abilities. In most situations, documentation should be within three years of the student's application for services. Professional judgment, however, must be used in accepting older documentation of conditions that are permanent or non-varying, or in requiring more recent documentation for conditions for which the functional impact may change over time.

Documentation must include the names, signatures, titles, and license numbers of the appropriate evaluators, as well as the dates of testing and contact information. Evaluators must be licensed professionals whose training and licensure status is consistent with expertise in the disability for which they provide documentation.

## Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)

Brain injury can result from external trauma, such as a closed head or an object penetration injury, or internal trauma, such as a cerebral vascular accident or tumor. ABI can cause physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and vocational changes that can affect an individual for a short period of time or permanently. Depending on the location and extent of the injury, symptoms can vary widely. Understanding functional changes after an injury and resulting implications for education are more important than only knowing the cause or type of injury.

General documentation guidelines (see above)

- Documentation of date of occurrence/diagnosis and the nature of the neurological illness or traumatic event that resulted in brain injury.
- Depending upon the functional domains impacted by the injury, assessments of cognitive and academic deficits and strengths, psychosocial-emotional functioning, and/or motor/sensory abilities relevant to academic functioning may be essential components of documentation of the impact of an acquired brain injury for an individual student.
- Impairments following an acquired brain injury may change rapidly in the weeks and months after the injury, and a more stable picture of residual weaknesses may not be apparent for 1-2 years after an injury. More recent documentation may be necessary to adequately assess the student's current accommodation needs.
- Cognitive and academic processing weaknesses and strengths must be evident on multiple measures and not based on a single discrepant score:
  - Academic Achievement
  - Reading (decoding, fluency, and comprehension)
  - Mathematics (calculations, math fluency, applied reasoning) Written Language (spelling, fluency, written expression)
  - Cognitive processing skills
  - Attention
  - Executive Functions
  - Fluency/Automaticity
  - Memory/Learning
  - Oral Language
  - Phonological/Orthographic Processing
  - Visual-Motor
  - Visual-Perceptual/Visual-Spatial