

Step 1: Eliminating Factors other than SLD that could impact academic performance

When assessing for indicators of a Specific Learning Disability the first step in the process is to eliminate other factors that may be impacting the student's ability to learn, i.e. we are exploring in the first instance to rule out Specific Learning Disabilities. The questions the disability practitioner asks at this stage will assist them to determine whether further exploration of SLD is required. It is also important to note that a person with an SLD may also experience a co-existing difficulty such as English as a second language, hearing or vision impairment, poor mental health – explore these areas with this in mind.

Questions to ask	Notes
<p>Did you have extended absences in the early years of schooling (when foundation literacy skills are taught and developed – If so did you receive catch up tutoring?</p> <p>YES missed school and did not feel they caught up (indicator of gaps in learning, explore further This may not be a specific learning disability).</p>	
<p>Did you experience poor health / illness and do or have you taken medication that may have impacted learning?</p> <p>YES (Explore further, was learning impacted after illness or since medication? This may not be a specific learning disability).</p>	
<p>Were you consistently exposed to social and environmental factors that could impact learning, for example: poor diet, inadequate sleep, stressful home environment, anxiety?</p> <p>YES (Explore further – consider childhood experiences –coping with trauma or stress as a child can detract from academic learning - This may not be a specific learning disability).</p>	

<p>Have you had eye sight and hearing tested?</p> <p>NO (Adults can generally provide enough detail to rule out vision or hearing as a primary factor in learning difficulties – however where there is some uncertainty recommending a vision and hearing assessment may be of benefit).</p>	
<p>Have you been involved in any serious accident that may have impacted your learning?</p> <p>YES (Explore further, did ability to learn change after the accident? The learning difficulties may be related to an acquired brain injury).</p>	
<p>Have you been diagnosed with a medical or mental health condition or other disability (Other than Specific Learning Disability) that impacts your learning?</p> <p>YES (Explore further. Note that particular medications can impact concentration, comprehension and memory – explore for onset of learning difficulties with a diagnosis other than SLD).</p>	
<p>Is English your first language? If not – are the learning difficulties apparent in your first language?</p> <p>YES (If learning difficulties have been consistent across languages further exploration for SLD is required).</p>	

Have you always experienced academic difficulties? Did you feel that you were behind your peers in primary and secondary schooling?

YES (indicator of SLD – explore further to understand areas in learning impacted by the learning difficulty. [Go to Step 2: Screening for indicators of an SLD](#)).