



Specific Learning Disability in Written Expression



Brought to you as a public service by the Pediatric Neuropsychology Special Interest Group of the AACN

What is a Specific Learning Disability in Written Expression?

When a child has been given good opportunities to learn to write, but hasn't been able to keep up, he or she may have a Specific Learning Disability in Written Expression (sometimes called "Writing Disability" or "dysgraphia"). Although they don't always go together, writing disabilities often accompany reading disabilities. This sheet lists resources for writing disabilities. Please also see our *General Learning Disabilities* resource sheet for broader information, or the *Specific Learning Disability in Reading* for information on reading.

Where can I find help?

Children in the US who have a learning disability (LD) have the right to special educational assistance through the public school system because of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). You can find out more about IDEA through the [US Department of Education \(http://idea.ed.gov/\)](http://idea.ed.gov/) or an advocacy site like [WrightsLaw \(www.wrightslaw.com/\)](http://www.wrightslaw.com/). Usually the best starting place is for parents to write a formal letter to their child's school principal requesting an evaluation by an LD specialist. By law the school then has 100 days to respond. IDEA is a federal law, but it can be interpreted differently in each state. Sometimes, an independent evaluator from outside of the school is needed. In those cases, it can be helpful to contact an independent psychologist in the community who works with children. At the bottom of the next page is a link to locate a board-certified clinical neuropsychologist. Even if that psychologist does not specialize in working with kids who have a Writing Disability, they can direct you to the appropriate resources.

How does an LD specialist help a child?

Most specialists focus on evaluating children and providing recommendations to teachers and other school staff. The evaluations help to clarify whether an LD is present and guide interventions. What happens during the evaluations can vary, but typically children are given one-on-one tests to better understand their strengths and weaknesses. Here are some tests that measure writing skills:

- Oral Written and Language Scales – Second Edition
- Test of Written Language – Fourth Edition
- Bateria III Woodcock-Muñoz Pruebas de Aprovechamiento (Spanish)
- Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement – Second Edition
- Wechsler Individual Achievement Test – Third Edition
- Woodcock Johnson Tests of Achievement – Third Edition

Some specialists provide tutoring or other interventions themselves. This can be a good thing, if they do high-quality work and don't have ulterior motives. Be cautious about specialists who both conduct evaluations and sell specific treatment "packages", because their recommendations for treatment may be motivated by money, rather than a child's needs.

Where can I find resources online?

Resource	Link
School Psychology Program at Michigan State University Resource for a number of LDs that lists research-based classroom interventions.	https://www.msu.edu/course/cep/886/Writing/home.htm
Intervention Central Lists research-based school-wide interventions for writing difficulties.	http://www.jimwrightonline.com/php/interventionista/interventionista_intv_list.php?prob_type=writing
Johns Hopkins University School for Education Has a very readable article on evidence-based writing interventions.	http://education.jhu.edu/newhorizons/Better/articles/Winter2011.html
Public Broadcast System (PBS) Lists parent-friendly resources, including information on assistive technologies.	http://www.pbs.org/parents/strugglingtolearn/resources_writing.html
Student activities, games, and tools to help with spelling	www.wordcentral.com www.spellingcity.com www.gamequarium.com/spelling www.funbrain.com/spellroo www.kidspell.com

What kinds of interventions and products are available?

Specialists can disagree about which program is ideal for a given child, but there are programs that are grounded better in science than others. Here are some research grounded interventions that parents or schools can buy:

- **Kurzweil** (www.kurzweiledu.com)
- **Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping** (Sopris West)
- **Read, Write, & Type** (www.readwritetype.com)
- **Scholastic Spelling** (Scholastic)
- **Sitton Spelling** (Educators Publishing Service)
- **Spellbound and the Spell of Words** (Educators Publishing Service)
- **Spellography** (Sopris West)
- **Spelling Mastery** (SRA McGraw Hill)
- **Spelling with Morphographs** (SRA McGraw Hill)
- **Spellwell** (Educators Publishing Service)

What are some good articles and books for professionals?

It is impossible to list everything, but here is a good starting list. Also, please see our General LD sheet for more.

Chilosi, A et al. (2009). Reading and Spelling Disabilities in Children with and Without a History of Early Language Delay: A Neuropsychological and Linguistic Study. <i>Child Neuropsychology</i> , 15, 582-604.
Cunningham, A E, & Stanovich, K E (1991) Tracking the unique effects of print exposure in children: Associations with vocabulary, general knowledge, and spelling. <i>Journal of Educational Psychology</i> , 83, 264-274.
Furnes, B (2010). Predicting reading and spelling difficulties in transparent and opaque orthographies: a comparison between Scandinavian and US/Australian children. <i>Dyslexia (10769242)</i> , 16, 119-142.
Graham, S & Harris, KR (2005). <i>Writing Better: Effective Strategies for Teaching Students with Learning Difficulties</i> . Baltimore: Brooks Publishing.
Graham, S, Harris, KR, & Larsen, L (2001). Prevention and Intervention of Writing Difficulties for Students with Learning Disabilities. <i>Learning Disabilities: Research & Practice</i> , 16, 74-84. (available online at: http://www.ldonline.org/article/6213/)
Hooper, S et al (2011). Concurrent and longitudinal neuropsychological contributors to written language expression in 1 st & 2 nd grade students. <i>Reading & Writing</i> , 24, 221-52.
Ise, E et al. (2010). Spelling deficits in dyslexia: evaluation of an orthographic spelling training. <i>Annals of Dyslexia</i> , 60, 18-39.
Kiuru, N et al (2011) Students with reading and spelling disabilities: Peer groups and educational attainment in secondary education. <i>Jn Of Learning Disabilities</i> , 44, 556-559.
Lindstrom, JH (2007). Determining appropriate accommodations for postsecondary students with reading and written expression disorders. <i>Learning Disabilities Research and Practice</i> , 22, 229-236.
Mayes, SD & Calhoun, SL (2007). Challenging the assumptions about the frequency and coexistence of learning disability types. <i>School Psychology International</i> , 28, 437-48.
McCurdy, M et al. (2008). Examining the effects of a comprehensive writing program on the writing performance of middle school students with learning disabilities in written expression. <i>School Psychology Quarterly</i> , 23 (4), 571-586.
Renschmidt, HA (1999). The influence of different diagnostic approaches on familial aggregation of spelling disability. <i>European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry</i> , 8S013.
Semrud-Clikeman, M & Harder, L (2011). Neuropsychological correlates of written expression in college students with ADHD. <i>Journal of Attention Disorders</i> , 15, 215-223.
Troia, GA (Ed.) (2010). <i>Instruction and Assessment for Struggling Writers: Evidence-Based Practices</i> . New York: Guilford Press.
Wakely, MB et al. (2006). Subtypes of written expression in elementary school children. <i>Developmental Neuropsychology</i> , 29, 125-129.

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Additional Information:

What is board certification in clinical neuropsychology?

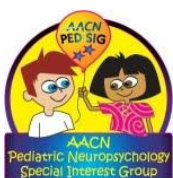
Believe it or not, most states allow licensed psychologists to call themselves neuropsychologists without showing they have any special training on how to care for people who have neurological or neurodevelopmental disorders. Clinicians who are board-certified in clinical neuropsychology have proven, through a rigorous evaluation, that they are fully competent. That evaluation is conducted by the largest certification group in psychology, [the American Board of Professional Psychology \(ABPP; http://www.abpp.org\)](http://www.abpp.org), and its subspecialty board, The American Board of Clinical Neuropsychology. The goal of ABPP is to protect the public by examining and certifying psychologists who demonstrate competence in approved specialty areas.

How do I find a board-certified clinical neuropsychologist?

These are listed by name and by location on the web site of the [American Academy of Clinical Neuropsychology \(AACN; http://theaacn.org\)](http://theaacn.org). Once you find a neuropsychologist near you, click on their name for more information, including the kinds of people they work with and how to contact them.

What is pediatric neuropsychology?

[Click here \(http://www.div40.org/resources.htm\)](http://www.div40.org/resources.htm) to download a pamphlet that explains what makes pediatric neuropsychology unique, and what to expect from an evaluation by a pediatric neuropsychologist.



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