

Documentation Guidelines for Psychological, Neurological, or Mental Health Condition

To receive accommodations or adjustments (alternative circumstances) for equal access and opportunity in a university setting students must arrange clinical documentation that sufficiently describes a disability situation. The purpose of documentation is to provide information that allows effective decisions about the need to arrange adjustments and/or accommodations. There should be adequate informational statements on all of the following topics:

1. The author's credentials are indicated, and verify qualification to make the diagnosis. Practitioners with a Master's degree should obtain the co-signature of a doctor.
2. The amount of relevant clinical information is sufficient (i.e., it adequately describes the student's situation as an adult).
3. A summary of significant clinical information: assignment of a specific diagnosis; a historical synopsis of the conditions developmental milestones; description of current symptoms, indicating their frequency, magnitude, duration; description of any compounding coexisting conditions, with discussion of how they may compound effects of the primary diagnosis. A multi-axial assessment using formats described in the DSM-IV-TR is encouraged.
4. Summarization of how the diagnosed condition significantly limits the student's functioning in major areas of life.
5. Explanation of how the diagnosed condition will substantially limit the student's functioning in relation to things students need to do for college. For academic adjustments it would be things such as: listening to lectures, writing notes, reading, taking tests, completing assignments, participating in class, etc.. For accommodation related to living in a residential hall it could be things like sharing a relatively small living space with a roommate in an apartment like setting with gender specific hallway bathrooms.
6. A description of how the limiting effect should be expected to change over time.
7. A recommendation of the reasonable academic adjustments and/or facility accommodations that are necessary to offset the limitations for equal access and opportunity.

Concise statements may be sufficient if they adequately address their respective topics. Please keep in mind that a diagnosis is not equivalent to a disability; a disability is the way a diagnosed condition limits a person's functioning. It's important to describe the limiting influences. Documentation that's primarily paperwork copied directly out of a medical file rarely meets these guidelines (i.e., doesn't discuss limitations in a college setting). Similarly, documentation doesn't meet all the guidelines when it simply recommends how a student should be accommodated (i.e., doesn't adequately describe current clinical factors or explain how they'll limit the student). The idea is that documentation must provide adequate information to allow good decisions about why adjustments or accommodations will be necessary. Thus, the best form of documentation is probably the summary of a recent evaluation with a concise letter written specifically for this purpose.