

Prepare to teach the students with special needs you may have in your classroom using these suggestions and guidelines for accommodating and modifying your lessons to meet the needs of everyone. New teachers will find this resource particularly valuable. Includes examples of traits various types of special needs students may exhibit along with strategies to help your special needs students be successful.

Working with Children with Special Needs

It is inevitable that you will have the opportunity (and pleasure) of working with [special needs](#) students in your classroom. You may need to make [accommodations](#) for some and [modifications](#) for others. Providing for the needs of special education students will certainly be one of your greatest challenges as a professional educator. Consider these tips and strategies.

Jabberwocky

When working with special needs students, two terms you are sure to encounter are **accommodation** and **modification**. An accommodation is a device, material, or support process that will enable a student to accomplish a task more efficiently. Modification refers to changes to the instructional outcomes; a change or decrease in the course content or outcome.

Students with Learning Disabilities

[Learning disabled](#) students are those who demonstrate a significant discrepancy, which is not the result of some other handicap, between academic achievement and intellectual abilities in one or more of the areas of oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading comprehension, mathematical calculation, mathematics reasoning, or spelling.

Following is a list of some of the common indicators of learning-disabled students. These traits are usually not isolated ones; rather, they appear in varying degrees and amounts in most learning-disabled students. A learning disabled student ...

- Has poor auditory memory—both short-term and long-term.
- Has a low tolerance level and a high frustration level.
- Has weak or poor self-esteem.
- Is easily distractible.

- Finds it difficult, if not impossible, to stay on task for extended periods of time.
- Is spontaneous in expression; often cannot control emotions.
- Is easily confused.
- Is verbally demanding.
- Has some difficulty working with others in small or large group settings.
- Has difficulty in following complicated directions or remembering directions for extended periods of time.
- Has coordination problems with both large and small muscle groups.
- Has inflexibility of thought; is difficult to persuade otherwise.
- Has poor handwriting skills.
- Has a poor concept of time.

Teaching learning-disabled youngsters will present you with some unique and distinctive challenges. Not only will these students demand more of your full-time and patience; but so, too, will they require specialized instructional strategies in a structured environment that supports and enhances their learning potential. It is important to remember that learning-disabled students are not students who are incapacitated or unable to learn; rather, they need differentiated instruction tailored to their distinctive learning abilities. Use these appropriate strategies with learning-disabled students:

- Provide oral instruction for students with reading disabilities. Present tests and reading materials in an oral format so the assessment is not unduly influenced by lack of reading ability.
- Provide learning-disabled students with frequent progress checks. Let them know how well they are progressing toward an individual or class goal.
- Give immediate feedback to learning-disabled students. They need to see quickly the relationship between what was taught and what was learned.

- Make activities concise and short, whenever possible. Long, drawn-out projects are particularly frustrating for a learning-disabled child.
- Learning disabled youngsters have difficulty learning abstract terms and concepts. Whenever possible, provide them with concrete objects and events—items they can touch, hear, smell, etc.
- Learning-disabled students need and should get lots of specific praise. Instead of just saying, “You did well,” or “I like your work,” be sure you provide specific praising comments that link the activity directly with the recognition; for example, “I was particularly pleased by the way in which you organized the rock collection for Karin and Miranda.”
- When necessary, plan to repeat instructions or offer information in both written and verbal formats. Again, it is vitally necessary that learning-disabled children utilize as many of their sensory modalities as possible.
- Encourage cooperative learning activities (see [Teaching with Cooperative Learning](#)) when possible. Invite students of varying abilities to work together on a specific project or toward a common goal. Create an atmosphere in which a true “community of learners” is facilitated and enhanced.

It's Elementary

Offer learning-disabled children and students with developmental delays a multisensory approach to learning. Take advantage of all the senses in helping these students enjoy, appreciate, and learn.

For additional information on teaching learning-disabled students, contact the Learning Disabilities Association of America at 4156 Library Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15234; 412-341-1515; www.ldanatl.org.

Students Who Have Higher Ability

Students of high ability, often referred to as [gifted students](#), present a unique challenge to teachers. They are often the first ones done with an assignment or those who continually ask for more creative and interesting work. They need exciting activities and energizing projects that offer a creative curriculum within the framework of the regular classroom program.

Characteristics of Gifted Students

Gifted students exhibit several common characteristics, as outlined in the following list. As in the case of learning-disabled students, giftedness usually means a combination of factors in varying degrees and amounts. A gifted student ...

- Has a high level of curiosity.
- Has a well-developed imagination.
- Often gives uncommon responses to common queries.
- Can remember and retain a great deal of information.
- Can not only pose original solutions to common problems but can also pose original problems, too.
- Has the ability to concentrate on a problem or issue for extended periods of time.
- Is capable of comprehending complex concepts.
- Is well organized.
- Is excited about learning new facts and concepts.
- Is often an independent learner.

Teaching Gifted Students

If there's one constant about gifted students it's the fact that they're full of questions (and full of answers). They're also imbued with a sense of inquisitiveness. Providing for their instructional needs is not an easy task and will certainly extend you to the full limits of your own creativity and inventiveness. Keep some of these instructional strategies in mind:

- Allow gifted students to design and follow through on self-initiated projects. Have them pursue questions of their own choosing.
- Provide gifted students with lots of open-ended activities—activities for which there are no right or wrong answers or preconceived notions.
- Keep the emphasis on divergent thinking—helping gifted students focus on many possibilities rather than any set of predetermined answers.
- Provide opportunities for gifted youngsters to engage in active problem-solving. Be sure

the problems assigned are not those for which you have already established appropriate answers but rather those that will allow gifted students to arrive at their own conclusions.

- Encourage gifted students to take on leadership roles that enhance portions of the classroom program (Note: gifted students are often socially immature.)
- Provide numerous opportunities for gifted students to read extensively about subjects that interest them. Work closely with the school librarian and public librarian to select and provide trade books in keeping with students' interests.
- Provide numerous long-term and extended activities that allow gifted students the opportunity to engage in a learning project over an extended period of time.

To obtain additional information on teaching gifted students, contact the National Association for Gifted Children at 1707 L Street N.W., Suite 550, Washington, D.C. 20036; 202-785-4268; www.nagc.org.