



The Worlds Leading Website on Learning Disabilities and ADHD

Glossary

The education field is so full of acronyms and specialized words that it can seem like an alphabet soup of confusion! Find out what AYP, IEP, 504, and many other abbreviations and words mean in this glossary of frequently used terms. To start, click on a letter below to jump to that section of the glossary. Click on "All" to refresh this page and see all of the terms and definitions listed here again.

academic English

The English language ability required for academic achievement in context-reduced situations, such as classroom lectures and textbook reading assignments. This is sometimes referred to as Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency (CALP).

accommodation

Techniques and materials that allow individuals with LD to complete school or work tasks with greater ease and effectiveness. Examples include spellcheckers, tape recorders, and expanded time for completing assignments.

accuracy

The ability to recognize words correctly.

adequate yearly progress (AYP)

An individual state's measure of yearly progress toward achieving state academic standards. "Adequate Yearly Progress" is the minimum level of improvement that states, school districts and schools must achieve each year.

affix

Part of word that is "fixed to" either the beginnings of words (prefixes) or the endings of words (suffixes). The word *disrespectful* has two affixes, a prefix (*dis-*) and a suffix (*-ful*).

age equivalent score

In a norm-referenced assessment, individual student's scores are reported relative to those of the norming population. This can be done in a variety of ways, but one way is to report the average age of people who received the same score as the individual child. Thus, an individual child's score is described as being the same as students that are younger, the same age, or older than that student (e.g. a 9 year old student may receive the same score that an average 13 year old student does, suggesting that this student is quite advanced).

alphabetic principle

The basic idea that written language is a code in which letters represent the sounds in spoken words.

alternative education placement (AEP)

An alternative classroom setting used to improve classroom behavior and address needs that cannot be met in a regular classroom setting.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

A federal law that gives civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities similar to those provided to individuals on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, and religion. It guarantees equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in public accommodations, employment, transportation, state and local government services, and telecommunications.

aphasia

see Developmental Aphasia

assistive technology

Equipment that enhances the ability of students and employees to be more efficient and successful.

Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Developmentally inappropriate behavior, including poor attention skills, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. A person can be predominantly inattentive (often referred to as ADD), predominantly hyperactive-impulsive, or a combination of these two.

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)

see ADHD

auditory discrimination

Ability to detect differences in sounds; may be gross ability, such as detecting the differences between the noises made by a cat and dog, or fine ability, such as detecting the differences made by the sounds of letters "m" and "n."

auditory figure-ground

Ability to attend to one sound against a background of sound (e.g., hearing the teacher's voice against classroom noise).

auditory memory

Ability to retain information which has been presented orally; may be short term memory, such as recalling information presented several seconds before; long term memory, such as recalling information presented more than a minute before; or sequential memory, such as recalling a series of information in proper order.

Auditory Processing Disorder (APD)

An inability to accurately process and interpret sound information. Students with APD often do not recognize subtle differences between sounds in words.

automaticity

Automaticity is a general term that refers to any skilled and complex behavior that can be performed rather easily with little attention, effort, or conscious awareness. These skills become automatic after extended periods of training. With practice and good instruction, students become automatic at word recognition, that is, retrieving words from memory, and are able to focus attention on constructing meaning from the text, rather than decoding.

base words

Words from which many other words are formed. For example, many words can be formed from the base word *migrate*: *migration*, *migrant*, *immigration*, *immigrant*, *migrating*, *migratory*.

Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)

A plan that includes positive strategies, program modifications, and supplementary aids and supports that address a student's disruptive behaviors and allows the child to be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE)

bilingual education

An educational program in which two languages are used to provide content matter instruction. Bilingual education programs vary in their length of time, and in the amount each language is used.

blend

A consonant sequence before or after a vowel within a syllable, such as *cl*, *br*, or *st*; it is the written language equivalent of consonant cluster.

Central Auditory Processing Disorder (CAPD)

A disorder that occurs when the ear and the brain do not coordinate fully. A CAPD is a physical hearing impairment, but one which does not show up as a hearing loss on routine screenings or an audiogram. Instead, it affects the hearing system beyond the ear, whose job it is to separate a meaningful message from non-essential background sound and deliver that information with good clarity to the intellectual centers of the brain (the central nervous system).

cognates

Words in different languages related to the same root, e.g. *education* (English) and *educación* (Spanish).

comprehension strategies

Techniques to teach reading comprehension, including summarization, prediction, and inferring word meanings from context.

comprehension strategy instruction

The explicit teaching of techniques that are particularly effective for comprehending text. The steps of explicit instruction include direct explanation, teacher modeling ("think aloud"), guided practice, and application. Some strategies include *direct explanation* (the teacher explains to students why the strategy helps comprehension and when to apply the strategy), *modeling* (the teacher models, or demonstrates, how to apply the strategy, usually by "thinking aloud" while reading the text that the students are using), *guided practice* (the teacher guides and assists students as they learn how and when to apply the strategy) and *application* (the teacher helps students practice the strategy until they can apply it independently).

connected instruction

A way of teaching systematically in which the teacher continually shows and discusses with the students the relationship between what has been learned, what is being learned, and what will be learned.

context clues

Sources of information outside of words that readers may use to predict the identities and meanings of unknown words. Context clues may be drawn from the immediate sentence containing the word, from text already read, from pictures accompanying the text, or from definitions, restatements, examples, or descriptions in the text.

continuous assessment

An element of responsive instruction in which the teacher regularly monitors student performance to determine how closely it matches the instructional goal.

cooperative learning

A teaching model involving students working together as partners or in small groups on clearly defined tasks. It has been used successfully to teach comprehension strategies in content-area subjects.

curriculum-based assessment

A type of informal assessment in which the procedures directly assess student performance in learning-targeted content in order to make decisions about how to better address a student's instructional needs.

decoding

The ability to translate a word from print to speech, usually by employing knowledge of sound-symbol correspondences. It is also the act of deciphering a new word by sounding it out.

Developmental Aphasia

A severe language disorder that is presumed to be due to brain injury rather than because of a developmental delay in the normal acquisition of language.

developmental spelling

The use of letter-sound relationship information to attempt to write words (also called *invented spelling*)

direct instruction

An instructional approach to academic subjects that emphasizes the use of carefully sequenced steps that include demonstration, modeling, guided practice, and independent application.

direct vocabulary learning

Explicit instruction in both the meanings of individual words and word-learning strategies. Direct vocabulary instruction aids reading comprehension.

dyscalculia

A severe difficulty in understanding and using symbols or functions needed for success in mathematics.

dysgraphia

A severe difficulty in producing handwriting that is legible and written at an age-appropriate speed.

dyslexia

A language-based disability that affects both oral and written language. It may also be referred to as reading disability, reading difference, or reading disorder.

dysnomia

A marked difficulty in remembering names or recalling words needed for oral or written language.

dyspraxia

A severe difficulty in performing drawing, writing, buttoning, and other tasks requiring fine motor skill, or in sequencing the necessary movements.

emergent literacy

The view that literacy learning begins at birth and is encouraged through participation with adults in meaningful reading and writing activities.

English as a Second Language (ESL)

English learned in an environment where it is the predominant language of communication.

English Language Learner (ELL)

Students whose first language is not English and who are in the process of learning English.

exceptional students education (ESE)

Refers to special education services to students who qualify.

experimental writing

Efforts by young children to experiment with writing by creating pretend and real letters and by organizing scribbles and marks on paper.

expressive language

The aspect of spoken language that includes speaking and the aspect of written language that includes composing or writing.

Family Educational Right to Privacy Act (FERPA)

A federal law that protects the privacy of student education records.

fluency

The ability to read a text accurately, quickly, and with proper expression and comprehension. Because fluent readers do not have to concentrate on decoding words, they can focus their attention on what the text means.

formal assessment

The process of gathering information using standardized, published tests or instruments in conjunction with specific administration and interpretation procedures, and used to make general instructional decisions.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

A requirement of IDEA; all disabled children must receive special education services and related services at no cost.

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)

A problem-solving process for addressing student problem behavior that uses techniques to identify what triggers a given behavior(s) and to select interventions that directly address them.

grade equivalent scores

In a norm-referenced assessment, individual student's scores are reported relative to those of the norming population. This can be done in a variety of ways, but one way is to report the average grade of students who received the same score as the individual child. Thus, an individual child's score is described as being the same as students that are in higher, the same, or lower grades than that student (e.g. a student in 2nd grade may earn the same score that an average fourth grade student does, suggesting that this student is quite advanced).

grapheme

A letter or letter combination that spells a single phoneme. In English, a grapheme may be one, two, three, or four letters, such as *e*, *ei*, *igh*, or *eigh*.

graphic organizers

Text, diagram or other pictorial device that summarizes and illustrates interrelationships among concepts in a text. Graphic organizers are often known as maps, webs, graphs, charts, frames, or clusters.

independent educational evaluation (IEE)

An evaluation conducted by a qualified examiner, who is not employed by the school district at the public's expense.

independent school district (ISD)

ISD is a common acronym for Independent School District.

indirect vocabulary learning

Vocabulary learning that occurs when students hear or see words used in many different contexts – for example, through conversations with adults, being read to, and reading extensively on their own.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

A plan outlining special education and related services specifically designed to meet the unique educational needs of a student with a disability.

Individualized Transition Plan (ITP)

A plan developed by the IEP team to help accomplish the student's goals for the transition from high school into adulthood.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004)

The law that guarantees all children with disabilities access to a free and appropriate public education.

informal assessment

The process of collecting information to make specific instructional decisions, using procedures largely designed by teachers and based on the current instructional situation.

Intelligence Quotient (IQ)

A measure of someone's intelligence as indicated by an intelligence test, where an average score is 100. An IQ score is the ratio of a person's mental age to his chronological age multiplied by 100.

language learning disability (LLD)

A disorder that may affect the comprehension and use of spoken or written language as well as nonverbal language, such as eye contact and tone of speech, in both adults and children.

learning disability (LD)

A disorder that affects people's ability to either interpret what they see and hear or to link information from different parts of the brain. It may also be referred to as a learning disorder or a learning difference.

least restrictive environment (LRE)

A learning plan that provides the most possible time in the regular classroom setting.

limited English proficient (LEP)

The term used by the federal government, most states, and local school districts to identify those students who have insufficient English to succeed in English-only classrooms. Increasingly, English language learner (ELL) or English learner (EL) are used in place of LEP.

listening comprehension

Understanding speech. Listening comprehension, as with reading comprehension, can be described in "levels" – lower levels of listening comprehension would include understanding only the facts explicitly stated in a spoken passage that has very simple syntax and uncomplicated vocabulary. Advanced levels of listening comprehension would include implicit understanding and drawing inferences from spoken passages that feature more complicated syntax and more advanced vocabulary.

literacy

Reading, writing, and the creative and analytical acts involved in producing and comprehending texts.

local education agency (LEA)

A public board of education or other public authority within a state that maintains administrative control of public elementary or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district or other political subdivision of a state.

morpheme

The smallest meaningful unit of language. A morpheme can be one syllable (*book*) or more than one syllable (*seventeen*). It can be a whole word or a part of a word such as a prefix or suffix. For example, the word *ungrateful* contains three morphemes: *un*, *grate*, and *ful*.

morphology

The study of how the aspects of language structure are related to the ways words are formed from prefixes, roots, and suffixes (e.g., *mis-spell-ing*), and how words are related to each other.

morphophonology

Using a word's letter patterns to help determine, in part, the meaning and pronunciation of a word. For example, the morpheme *vis* in words such as *vision* and *visible* is from the Latin root word that means *to see*; and the *ay* in *stay* is pronounced the same in the words *gray* and *play*.

Multiple Intelligences

A theory that suggests that the traditional notion of intelligence, based on IQ testing, is far too limited. Instead, it proposes eight different intelligences to account for a broader range of human potential in children and adults. These intelligences are: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist.

multisensory structured language education

An educational approach that uses visual, auditory, and kinesthetic-tactile cues simultaneously to enhance memory and learning. Links are consistently made between the visual (what we see), auditory (what we hear), and kinesthetic-tactile (what we feel) pathways in learning to read and spell.

naming speed

The rate at which a child can recite "overlearned" stimuli such as letters and single-digit numbers.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The act contains President George W. Bush's four basic education reform principles: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods based on scientifically-based research.

Nonverbal Learning Disability

A neurological disorder which originates in the right hemisphere of the brain. Reception of nonverbal or performance-based information governed by this hemisphere is impaired in varying degrees, causing problems with visual-spatial, intuitive, organizational, evaluative, and holistic processing functions.

norm-referenced assessment

A type of assessment that compares an individual child's score against the scores of other children who have previously taken the same assessment. With a norm-referenced assessment, the child's raw score can be converted into a comparative score such as a percentile rank or a stanine.

occupational therapy (OT)

A rehabilitative service to people with mental, physical, emotional, or developmental impairments. Services can include helping a student with pencil grip, physical exercises that may be used to increase strength and dexterity, or exercises to improve hand-eye coordination.

Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)

An office of the U.S. Department of Education whose goal is to improve results for children with disabilities (ages birth through 21) by providing leadership and financial support to assist states and local districts.

onset

The initial consonant sound(s) in a monosyllabic word. This unit is smaller than a syllable but may be larger than a phoneme (the onset of *bag* is *b-*; of *swim* is *sw-*).

orthographic knowledge

The understanding that the sounds in a language are represented by written or printed symbols.

Orton-Gillingham

A multisensory approach to remediating dyslexia created by Dr. Samuel Orton, a neuropsychiatrist and pathologist, and Anna Gillingham, an educator and psychologist.

other health impairments (OHI)

A category of special education services for students with limited strength, vitality or alertness, due to chronic or acute health problems (such as asthma, ADHD, diabetes, or a heart condition).

pervasive developmental disorder (PDD)

The category of special education services for students with delays or deviance in their social/language/motor and/or cognitive development.

phoneme

The smallest unit of speech that serves to distinguish one utterance from another in a language.

phonemic awareness

The ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds in spoken words. An example of how beginning readers show us they have phonemic awareness is combining or blending the separate sounds of a word to say the word (*/c/ /a/ /t/ – cat.*)

phonics

A form of instruction to cultivate the understanding and use of the alphabetic principle; that there is a predictable relationship between phonemes (the sounds in spoken language) and graphemes, the letters that represent those sounds in written language, and that this information can be used to read or decode words.

phonological awareness

A range of understandings related to the sounds of words and word parts, including identifying and manipulating larger parts of spoken language such as words, syllables, and onset and rime. It also includes phonemic awareness as well as other aspects of spoken language such as rhyming and syllabication.

physical therapy (PT)

Instructional support and treatment of physical disabilities, under a doctor's prescription, that helps a person improve the use of bones, muscles, joints and nerves.

print awareness

Basic knowledge about print and how it is typically organized on a page. For example, print conveys meaning, print is read left to right, and words are separated by spaces.

reading disability

Another term for dyslexia, sometimes referred to as reading disorder or reading difference.

receptive language

The aspect of spoken language that includes listening, and the aspect of written language that includes reading.

Response to Intervention (RTI)

Under IDEA 2004, school districts can use this model (also called the Three-Tiered Model) as an alternative to the discrepancy model to determine whether a student has a learning disability.

responsive instruction

A way of making teaching decisions in which a student's reaction to instruction directly shapes how future instruction is provided.

rime

The vowel and all that follows it in a monosyllabic word (the rime of *bag* is *-ag*; of *swim* is *-im*).

root word

Words from other languages that are the origin of many English words. About 60 percent of all English words have Latin or Greek origins.

scaffolding

A way of teaching in which the teacher provides support in the form of modeling, prompts, direct explanations, and targeted questions – offering a teacher-guided approach at first. As students begin to acquire mastery of targeted objectives, direct supports are reduced and the learning becomes more student-guided.

self-advocacy

The development of specific skills and understandings that enable children and adults to explain their specific learning disabilities to others and cope positively with the attitudes of peers, parents, teachers, and employers.

self-monitoring

The mental act of knowing when one does and does not understand what one is reading.

semantic organizers

Graphic organizers that look somewhat like a spider web where lines connect a central concept to a variety of related ideas and events.

sight words

Words that a reader recognizes without having to sound them out. Some sight words are "irregular," or have letter-sound relationships that are uncommon. Some examples of sight words are *you*, *are*, *have* and *said*.

social English

Often referred to as "playground English" or "survival English", this is the basic language ability required for face-to-face communication, often accompanied by gestures and relying on context to aid understanding. Social English is much more easily and quickly acquired than academic English, but is not sufficient to meet the cognitive and linguistic demands of an academic classroom. Also referred to as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS).

special education (SPED)

Services offered to children who possess one or more of the following disabilities: specific learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, mental retardation, emotional disturbance, multiple disabilities, hearing impairments, orthopedic impairments, visual impairments, autism, combined deafness and blindness, traumatic brain injury, and other health impairments.

specific learning disability (SLD)

The official term used in federal legislation to refer to difficulty in certain areas of learning, rather than in all areas of learning. Synonymous with learning disabilities.

speech impaired (SI)

A category of special education services for students who have difficulty with speech sounds in their native language.

Speech Language Pathologist (SLP)

An expert who can help children and adolescents who have language disorders to understand and give directions, ask and answer questions, convey ideas, and improve the language skills that lead to better academic performance. An SLP can also counsel individuals and families to understand and deal with speech and language disorders.

supplemental services

Services offered to students from low-income families who are attending schools that have been identified as in need of improvement for two consecutive years. Parents can choose the appropriate services (tutoring, academic assistance, etc.) from a list of approved providers, which are paid for by the school district.

syllabication

The act of breaking words into syllables.

syllable

A part of a word that contains a vowel or, in spoken language, a vowel sound (*e-vent*, *news-pa-per*).

text comprehension

The reason for reading: understanding what is read by reading actively (making sense from text) and with purpose (for learning, understanding, or enjoyment).

transition

Commonly used to refer to the change from secondary school to postsecondary programs, work, and independent living typical of young adults. Also used to describe other periods of major change such as from early childhood to school or from more specialized to mainstreamed settings.

vocabulary

Word knowledge. *Listening vocabulary* refers to the words a person knows when hearing them in oral speech. *Speaking vocabulary* refers to the words we use when we speak. *Reading vocabulary* refers to the words a person knows when seeing them in print. *Writing vocabulary* refers to the words we use in writing.

word attack An aspect of reading instruction that includes intentional strategies for learning to decode, sight read, and recognize written words.