

# Comparison of Language Differences Versus Disabilities

| Learning Behavior Manifested                                           | Indicators of a Language Difference Due to Second Language Acquisition                                           | Indicators of a Possible Learning Disability (When Compared to Like Peers)                                                                                              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Oral Comprehension/Listening</b>                                    |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 1. Student does not respond to verbal directions                       | 1. Student lacks understanding of vocabulary in English but is demonstrates understanding in L1 (first language) | 1. Student consistently demonstrates confusion when given verbal directions in L1 and L2 (second language); <i>may be due to processing deficit or low cognition</i>    |
| 2. Student needs frequent repetition of oral directions and input      | 2. Student is able to understand verbal directions in L1 but not L2                                              | 2. Student often forgets directions or needs further explanation in L1 and L2 (at home and school); <i>may be due to an auditory memory difficulty or low cognition</i> |
| 3. Student delays responses to questions                               | 3. Student may be translating question in mind before responding in L2; gradual improvement seen over time       | 3. Student consistently takes a longer time period to respond in L1 and L2 and it does not change over time; <i>may be due to a processing speed deficit</i>            |
| <b>Speaking / Oral Fluency</b>                                         |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 1. Student lacks verbal fluency (e.g., pauses, hesitates, omits words) | 1. Student lacks vocabulary, sentence structure, and/or self-confidence                                          | 1. Speech is incomprehensible in L1 and L2; <i>may be due to hearing or speech impairment</i>                                                                           |
| 2. Student is unable to orally retell a story                          | 2. Student does not comprehend story due to a lack of understanding and background knowledge in English          | 2. Student has difficulty retelling a story or event in L1 and L2; <i>student may have memory or sequencing deficits</i>                                                |
| 3. Does not orally respond to questions or does not speak much         | 3. Lacks expressive language skills in English; it may the silent period in second language acquisition          | 3. Student speaks little in L1 or L2; <i>student may have a hearing impairment or processing deficit</i>                                                                |

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| Phonemic Awareness/Reading                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
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| 1. Student does not remember letters sounds from one day to the next                              | 1. Student will initially demonstrate difficulty remembering letter sounds in L2 since they differ from the letter sounds in L1, but with repeated practice over time will make progress | 1. Student doesn't remember letters sounds after initial and follow-up instruction (even if they are common between L1/L2 ); <i>may be due to due a visual/auditory memory deficit or low cognition</i>                                                                     |
| 2. Student is unable to blend letter sounds in order to decode words in reading                   | 2. The letter sound errors may relate to L1 (for example, L1 may not have long and short vowel sounds); with direct instruction, student will make progress over time                    | 2. Student makes letter substitutions when decoding not related to L1; student cannot remember vowel sounds; student may be able to decode sounds in isolation, but is unable to blend the sounds to decode whole word; <i>may be due to a processing or memory deficit</i> |
| 3. Student is unable to decode words correctly                                                    | 3. Sound not in L1, so unable to pronounce word once decoded                                                                                                                             | 3. Student consistently confuses letters/words that look alike; makes letter reversals, substitutions, etc. that are not related to L1; <i>may be processing or memory deficit</i>                                                                                          |
| Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 1. Student does not understand passage read, although may be able to read w/ fluency and accuracy | 1. Lacks understanding and background knowledge of topic in L2; is unable to use contextual clues to assist with meaning; improvement seen over time as L2 proficiency increases         | 1. Student doesn't remember or comprehend what was read in L1 or L2 (only applicable if student has received instruction in L1); this does not improve over time; <i>may be due to a memory or processing deficit</i>                                                       |
| 2. Does not understand key words/phrases; poor comprehension                                      | 2. Lacks understanding of vocabulary and meaning in English                                                                                                                              | 2. The student's difficulty with comprehension and vocabulary is seen in L1 and L2                                                                                                                                                                                          |

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| Writing                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
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| 1. Errors made with punctuation/capitalization                                                                    | 1. The error patterns seen are consistent with the punctuation and capitalization rules for L1; student's work tends to improve with appropriate instruction in English                                  | 1. Student consistently makes capitalization and punctuation errors even after instruction or is inconsistent; <i>may be due to deficits in organization, memory or processing</i>                                               |
| Handwriting                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 1. Student is unable to copy words correctly                                                                      | 1. Lack of experience with writing the English alphabet                                                                                                                                                  | 1. Student demonstrates difficulty copying visual material (including shapes, letters, etc.); <i>may be due to a visual/motor or visual memory deficit</i>                                                                       |
| 2. Student has difficulty writing grammatically correct sentences                                                 | 2. Student's syntax is reflective of writing patterns in L1; typical error patterns seen in second language learners (verb tense, use of adverbs or adjectives); improves over time                      | 2. The student makes more random errors such as words omissions, missing punctuation; grammar errors are not correct in L1 or L2; <i>may be due to a processing or memory deficit</i>                                            |
| 3. Student has difficulty generating a paragraph or writing essays but is able to express his or her ideas orally | 3. Student is not yet proficient in writing English even though they may have developed verbal skills; student makes progress over time and error patterns are similar to other second language learners | 3. The student seems to have difficulty paying attention or remembering previously learned information; the student may seem to have motor difficulties and avoids writing; <i>student may have attention or memory deficits</i> |
| Spelling                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 1. Student misspells words                                                                                        | 1. Student will "borrow" sounds from L1; progress seen over time as L2 proficiency increases                                                                                                             | 1. Student makes errors such as writing the correct beginning sound of words and then random letters or correct beginning or ending sounds; <i>may be due to a visual memory or processing deficit</i>                           |
| 2. Student spells words incorrectly; letters are sequenced incorrectly                                            | 2. Writing of words is reflective of English fluency level or cultural thought patterns; words may align to letter sounds or patterns of L1 (sight words may be spelled phonetically based on L1)        | 2. The student makes letter sequencing errors such as letter reversals that are not consistent with L1 spelling patterns; <i>may be due to a processing deficit</i>                                                              |
| Mathematics                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 1. Student manifests difficulty learning math facts and/or math operations                                        | 1. Student lacks comprehension of oral instruction in English; student shows marked improvement with visual input or instructions in L1                                                                  | 1. Student has difficulty memorizing math facts from one day to the next and requires manipulatives or devices to complete math problems; <i>may have visual memory or processing deficits</i>                                   |

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| 3. Student has difficulty completing multiple-step math computations                              | 2. Student lacks comprehension of oral instruction in English; student shows marked improvement with visual input or instructions in L1                                     | 2. Student forgets the steps required to complete problems from one day to the next even with visual input; student reverses or forgets steps; <i>may be due to a processing or memory deficit</i> |
| 3. Student is unable to complete word problems                                                    | 3. Student does not understand mathematical terms in L2 due to English reading proficiency; student shows marked improvement in L1 or with visuals                          | 3. Student does not understand how to process the problem or identify key terms in L1 or L2; <i>may be a processing deficit/reading disability</i>                                                 |
| <b>Behavior</b>                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 1. Student appears inattentive and/or easily distracted                                           | 1. Student does not understand instructions in English due to level of proficiency                                                                                          | 1. Student is inattentive across environments even when language is comprehensible; <i>may have attention deficits</i>                                                                             |
| 2. Student appears unmotivated and/or angry; may manifest internalizing or externalizing behavior | 2. Student does not understand instruction due to limited English and does not feel successful; student has anger or low self-esteem related to second language acquisition | 2. Student does not understand instruction in L1 or L2 and across contexts; <i>may be frustrated due to a possible learning disability</i>                                                         |
| 3. Student does not turn in homework                                                              | 3. Student may not understand directions or how to complete the homework due to lack of English proficiency; student may not have access to homework support at home        | 3. Student seems unable to complete homework consistently even when offered time and assistance with homework during school; <i>may be due to a memory or processing deficit</i>                   |