

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Student Characteristics: *student skills*

The student characteristics associated with student skills and their implications or instruction are task specific. In other words, to know whether a student is a skilled writer or speaker, you must evaluate their writing or speaking within the context of a specific lesson, e.g. give an assignment that involves writing or speaking and assess the student's performance. Therefore, observations about student skills will vary widely according to the students' grade level and the content area, as well as the individual ability level of the student. Student skill levels are typically observed during lessons in which students are actively engaged.

Because of the wide variation of skills that may be observed in a classroom, it is difficult to give very specific information related to your particular setting. However, below is a chart of potential learning difficulties and some suggested adaptations for addressing them. This list is not intended to be complete. It is only intended to give you an idea of some of the types of behaviors you might identify during a lesson and some of the implications this could have for instruction.

Adaptations for Varying Types of Learning Difficulties

Verbal Difficulties

Characteristics

Does not enjoy discussions, oral presentations, or reading aloud
Has difficulty explaining him or herself clearly or coherently
Displays poor speech-articulation, fluency, expressiveness
Unable to vocalize thoughts rapidly
Uses slang or colloquial terms instead of more precise words
Spoken vocabulary that is much weaker than written vocabulary
Reluctant to volunteer ideas or respond verbally to question
Remarks that are often irrelevant, confusing, or inaccurate
Uncomfortable speaking in a group
Has difficulty recalling a word she wants to use
Uses grammatically incorrect sentences

Possible Adaptations

Give students a little extra time to respond.
If students have difficulty, give them a hint to help them along.
Limit the length of students' oral presentations.
Sometimes permit students to use all-student response cards in small groups instead of giving verbal responses.
Ask specific, structured questions. This will permit the students to use the elements of the question to organize their answers. For example "can you tell me one way that comets and meteors are alike?" instead of "compare comets and meteors."
Arrange small discussion groups and paired talking activities that permit students to practice verbal skills in a smaller, more comfortable setting.
Permit students to tape oral presentations instead of doing them live in class.

Allow students to do projects in lieu of oral reports occasionally, such as demonstrations or displays that demonstrate their understanding of new skills or knowledge.
Encourage use of notes, letters, messages, and journals as an alternative to verbal expression.

Auditory Perception Difficulties

Characteristics

Has trouble distinguishing fine differences between sounds and words (such as d-t and pin-pen)
Loses interest or concentration during lectures
Has difficulty following a series of oral directions
Cannot accurately record notes from oral presentations
Displays poor receptive vocabulary
Repeats what is told before acting or responding
Often repeats the same question
Asks questions about oral directions and facts previously given
May watch the speaker's face intently or lean forward toward the speaker
Does not enjoy listening to records or rhythmic activities
Becomes irritated by extraneous noise
Has difficulty learning and applying phonetic awareness
May have difficulty remembering what is heard

Possible Adaptations

Keep oral directions short and simple.
Accompany oral directions with written directions.
Ask students to paraphrase your oral directions.
Alert students when you are asking a question by setting the stage.
Be conscious of your rate of speech.
Assist students to stay with you during instruction by using gestures and changes in the tone and pitch of your voice.
Write key points on the board for students to copy for studying during a lecture or oral presentation
Prepare students for listening by giving them an outline to follow and fill in during class presentations.
Allow classmate to use carbon paper to take notes for the student.
Try to use visual support (pictures, photos, charts, maps, films, filmstrips, overheads) with auditory presentations.

Fine Motor Difficulties

Characteristics

Displays poor handwriting and has difficulty forming letters and numbers
Has difficulty in activities requiring cutting or pasting
Finds it hard to trace or color within given borders
Has trouble with speed and neatness while taking notes

Shows fatigue and restlessness during writing or drawing task
Handwritten work often appears sloppy and disorganized
Has difficulty manipulating or using small objects and tools
Usually works slowly in completing written work
Has trouble making straight lines to connect points, matching answers, or labeling maps
Displays poor copying skills

Possible Adaptations

Place the paper to be copied directly at the top of students' papers rather than to one side or the other when copying is necessary.

Minimize copying activities by providing the information or activities on worksheets or handouts.

Allow a peer with good note-taking skills to use carbon paper to make an extra set of notes.

Occasionally allow students to use manipulatives for composing words or sentences.

Visual Perception Difficulties

Characteristics

Frequently loses place while reading or copying.

Has trouble discriminating among similar shapes, letters, and words.

Does not enjoy pictures, slides, or books.

Has difficulty reading and copying accurately from chalkboard.

Shows signs of eyestrain such as squinting, blinking, and holding head close to page.

Has trouble following written directions from board or printed page.

Works slowly on printed assignments or tests.

Displays poor sight vocabulary.

May use fingers to keep place while reading.

Cannot visualize things in mind.

Demonstrate erratic spelling or incorrect letter sequences.

Does not notice details on pictures, maps, and photographs.

Confused by worksheets containing a great deal of visual stimuli.

Has difficulty remembering what is seen.

May whisper to self while working with visual materials.

Possible Adaptations

Try to always give verbal information or an explanation along with a presentation.

Use color highlighting on worksheets to cue the student to important words and concepts.

Introduce new vocabulary in context before reading assignment.

Allow students to use index cards to keep their place while reading.

Pair students for reading assignments.

Pause periodically during oral presentation to ask for questions and give students a chance to add notes to their papers.

Written/Motor Difficulties

Characteristics

Has difficulty writing answers of paper but may be able to give correct answers orally
Written vocabulary much weaker than spoken vocabulary
Handwritten work sloppy and disorganized
Written ideas and concepts usually stronger than writing mechanics
Has trouble writing a sentence with a complete thought
Demonstrates poor spelling skills
Tests better on objective tests that require writing
Frequently does not complete written assignments

Possible Adaptations

Allow students more time to complete written assignments.
Allow students to give all short answers to questions (single word or phrase).
Allow students to complete an assignment that calls for written sentences by doing half in sentences and half in short phrases.
Permit students to do tapes or live oral reports instead of written reports.
When asking students to color or fill in blanks allow them to use sharp colored pencils instead of crayons or markers and provide more space.
Allow students to answer fewer questions on worksheet requiring written statements.
Consider making worksheets that reduce writing requirements.
Use journals and diaries as an informal means to encourage interest and fluency in writing.
Use all-student response cards.
Allow students to tape answers or work with peers, tutors, or volunteers who perform the writing tasks.
Group students together to write round robin stories. Each student is responsible for an assigned portion of the whole story. One student may act as the recorder.

From: Wood, J.W. (1998). Adapting instruction to accommodate students in inclusive settings. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.