

What is Self-Advocacy in Transition Planning?

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Effective self-advocates must learn to understand their particular type of disability, their academic strengths and weaknesses, their individual learning styles, and the laws that govern equal access to education. In this first part of an on-going series, we will address a student's need to become comfortable with understanding his or her disability, as well as the importance of describing to others both the disability and related academic accommodations. These strategies and related materials, which were developed by the staff of Project ACCESS Educational Talent Search, will be explored in depth in a Transition Strand during the upcoming NAASLN Conference.

Link directly to this article on the NAASLN web site, or copy and paste into your browser:
[www.naasln.org/Articles.html/Self-Advocacy in Transition Planning](http://www.naasln.org/Articles.html/Self-Advocacy%20in%20Transition%20Planning)

Part A. The 4-Part Learning Model for Learning Disabilities & ADD

Central to understanding a learning disability is an understanding of learning itself. The **Four-Part Learning Model**, developed by Leslie Coull and Howard Eaton, provides the basis of their video and instructional program, *Transitions to Postsecondary Learning for Students with Learning Disabilities and/or Attention Deficit Disorder*. (Eaton Coull Learning Group, Ltd, 1998). In the video, actor Jim Byrnes presents an animated representation of the brain as the foundation to discuss learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder. Although the model is not a definitive scientific representation of human brain functioning, it is both comprehensive and simple. It provides concrete examples of how we learn as well as the terminology of disabilities.

According to Eaton and Coull, learning disabilities affect a person's ability to understand, organize, remember and express information in different areas from reading and writing to math. They also vary according to degree (mild, moderate, severe). Their model gives students a **vocabulary** with which to explain their learning problems, according to:

- **Senses** (attention)
- **Processing** (auditory, visual, kinesthetic, tactile, speed)
- **Memory** (short-term or working memory, long-term memory)
- **Expression** (writing, speaking, doing)

Senses. Information comes from the outside world into our bodies through our sense organs (ears, eyes, skin, nose and mouth). This information is interpreted in specific areas of our brain. Before this can happen, however, we must first pay attention to it. If a person continually has difficulty paying attention to incoming information, it could be an *attention deficit* problem.

Processing. Once the senses have picked up the incoming information and the brain has paid attention to it, the information is then processed in specific parts of the brain, such as **visual, auditory, tactile** and **kinesthetic**. The speed at which a person processes information can also be a significant factor that affects learning. When information is processed either too quickly or too slowly, it can be lost or never reach the memory stage. The processing speed will determine how long a person needs to interpret it, to make sense of it, to organize it for memory and then to remember it. The more severe the processing problem, the more likely it could be a learning disability.

Memory . When information is processed, it is stored in the brain. The memory system is very complex, but it is generally accepted that we have a short-term memory **storage** capacity and a long-term one, just like a computer. Short-term memory is often referred to as “working memory.” Working memory allows us to hold and work through information at the moment – calculating a math problem or answering a question on a test. Long-term memory stores information over long periods of time. When there is a weakness in a person’s memory system, a learning disability specific to memory may result. Strategies such as repetition, mnemonics, drill and multisensory instruction may help.

Expression. Expressing information is the final stage. A person expresses information through writing, speaking or doing something. Difficulties in expressing information in speech could be related to an expressive language weakness such as word retrieval, or to memory weakness. Again, this can be understood in terms of a computer. A database can be constructed in such a way that accessing and tabulating information is relatively easy. If the data is not easily accessible or presentable, expressing it can be a long and arduous task.