According to the Yale Resource Office on Disabilities, “[s]tudents with disabilities are individuals” and having “[a]n open mind, avoiding stereotype images and experiences, and recognizing the student for his or her abilities are important in establishing a successful working relationship with each student”. Therefore, while we have collected here a number of general strategies for working with differently abled students, it is important to keep in mind the needs of individuals. In addition, one of the most effective strategies for helping these students through the Graduate Writing Lab will most likely be asking the student what is most helpful for them based on their experiences.

**Students with learning disabilities**

Individuals with learning disabilities may have difficulty with information processing, including reading comprehension, written or verbal expression, understanding or using language, sequencing of events and memory, and/or auditory or visual processing. Some examples of learning disabilities include dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia.

**Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder**

Individuals with ADD or ADHD may experience inattention or difficulty concentrating, and their environment may exacerbate this. These students may have difficulty focusing during consultations and retaining information presented. In addition, students may have trouble with time awareness, organization, and scheduling.

**What accommodations can we offer during GWL consultations?**

**Before the consultation**

- **Communicate ahead of time:** If a student discloses to you that they have a learning disability ahead of a consultation, consider presenting clear guidelines about the format of GWL consultations and ask the student if they have any particular accommodations that they would find most useful.
- **Send reminders:** In the days leading up to a consultation, you may find it helpful to send one or two reminders about the time and location of your meeting to the student.
- **Consider developing a long-term working relationship with a student:** For example, arrange to have the student sign up for a weekly or biweekly consultation to work on a specific skill (such as outlining essays, finding and editing errors in their work, etc.) over the course of an entire semester or academic year. Being familiar with a student’s thesis work and following their progress over time will be helpful for both you as the tutor and for the student. This may become an important part of the editing process for a student. You may even consider speaking with the student’s academic advisor, if the student believes it would be helpful.
• **Extended consultation time:** In some cases, a one hour-long consultation may be too short a timeframe to work through a piece even if it is under 20 pages long. Consider allowing the student to sign up for an additional 30 minutes – 1 hour of consultation time per week if possible.

• **Send comments ahead of time:** If a student needs extra time to process your comments (especially if the comments are more abstract/higher order suggestions), consider adjusting your commenting style to suit their needs. For example, you might write out more detailed comments in electronic form and share these comments with the student ahead of time.

### During and after the consultation

• **Adjust your teaching style:** Try using multiple modes of “teaching” during consultations (verbal, visual, or performance) to find a style that is most effective for a particular student. For example, you might explain a higher order suggestion regarding the organization of a student’s piece by working together on a visual diagram of alternative outlines or using colored highlighting to group related ideas in their piece.

• **Read aloud to identify errors:** Some students, such as those with dyslexia, may find it difficult to visually identify typos or other errors in their writing. Consider working with the writer to create a list of common errors and help them go through their piece(s) to identify the errors. You might read sections of the piece aloud to the writer, as it may be easier for these students to hear errors than read them. In addition, you might suggest that these students try text-to-speech software, such as the free NaturalReader or the built-in Mac text-to-speech function, to help them with self-editing if they are not already using such services. Optical character recognition (OCR) software, such as OCR Kit, may be useful for converting PDFs into a file format compatible with text-to-speech software. In addition to finding errors in their own work, students may also have difficulty reading longer written comments. If this is the case, consider reading your comments to the student during the consultation. In addition, it may be helpful to record your consultations if listening back to your conversation is more helpful for the student than reading notes.

• **Take notes for the student:** While some students may find free writing exercises helpful during a consultation, others may have difficulty. Consider allowing a student to verbally express their ideas about the construction of a new sentence, the central idea of a paragraph, or the organization of their essay while you take notes on their behalf. This could even extend to typing out full sentences as the student dictates to you.

• **Be patient and kind:** Give students who need extra time in thinking about and responding to your questions or suggestions the time that they need. If necessary, ask questions that require shorter responses.

• **Take a break during long appointments:** Some students may find it difficult to concentrate for the entirety of a one-hour appointment. Consider taking a break at the 30-minute mark. Additionally, some students may find it easier to concentrate if they can get up and walk around during a consultation.
• **Find a quiet consultation space:** Consider the space where you meet with a student. For example, large, open rooms may be distracting for some. If possible, try to meet in a quieter space with fewer distractions such as the small meeting rooms in the campus libraries.

• **Reinforce what you discuss:** It may be helpful to reinforce your comments or suggestions to the student. For example, you might repeat your suggestions more than once and/or you may ask that the writer (or you) takes notes while you discuss their piece. In addition, you might ask that the student repeats back to you what you have discussed throughout the consultation to ensure that they have a sense of what changes they could make to their piece(s). It may also be helpful to send a follow-up email to the student summarizing what you discussed during the session and what next steps the student can take to improve their piece.

**References and further reading**


[http://rod.yale.edu/faculty-guidebook](http://rod.yale.edu/faculty-guidebook). (Note: behind CAS login).
