Adult Basic Education Association
Hamilton's Connection to Lifelong Learning

Learning Challenges – Definitions and Markers

Visual Processing Challenges

Visual Processing Challenges make it difficult for a learner to make sense of information taken in through the eyes. These challenges are not because of visual disorders such as myopia, astigmatism, etc.). Visual processing challenges can affect a learner's reading, writing, and mathematic abilities.

Major Markers

    a. has a physical reaction to print (for example, headaches, tired or red eyes)

    b. may be sensitive to light (will likely have a lot of difficulty working under fluorescent light)

    c. text may move or shake on the page – learners may see rivers of white down the page

    d. difficulty discriminating between different letters or words

    e. has a lot of difficulty tracking text

    f. difficulty remembering the "look" of letters or words (visual memory)

    g. over relies on sounding out words – poor sight word memory

    h. reading substitutions are visually similar (for example, "horse" for "house")

    i. spellings are usually a phonetic alternative to the correct spelling

    j. mixes upper and lower letters inappropriately

    k. may spell the same word differently in the same document

    l. confuses similar numbers or transposes numbers (wrong order)

    m. has difficulty copying

    n. has difficulty with left/right and working in columns

Auditory Processing Challenges

Auditory Processing Challenges effect how aural information is interpreted by the brain. This can interfere with speech and language acquisition and can affect all areas of learning, especially reading and spelling. An auditory processing challenge isn't a hearing problem. It's a difficulty in perceiving aural information. A learner may not be able to recognize or isolate individual parts of speech or remember spoken language. The learner may have difficulty with auditory sequencing and blending or reading and spelling phonetically.

Major Markers

    a.   has difficulty retaining and recalling oral information

    b.   has difficulty explaining themselves to others

    c.   dislikes or avoids reading, especially out loud

    d.   has a lot of difficulty or is unable to use phonics to sound out words

    e.   may reverse or transpose letters

    f.   has difficulty understanding text on the first reading

    g.   spellings are not good phonetic alternatives

    h.   letters are added or missing or in the wrong order (reverses or transposed)

    i.   has difficulty processing numbers correctly

    j.   says a number backwards or may transpose number when doing oral drills

Visual Processing	Auditory Processing
Physical reaction to print	Typically no difficulty
Difficulty tracking text – text may move on the page	Typically no difficulty
Over relies on phonics	Unable to use phonics
Misspellings are phonetic	Misspellings are not phonetic
Mixes upper/lowercase	Typically no difficulty
Spells the same word differently	Significant difficulty with all spelling
Transposes numbers	Difficulty hearing numbers
Difficulty copying	Difficulty with oral drills

Organizational Processing Challenges

Organizational Processing Challenges make it difficult for a learner to manage time and space and organize their daily activities. The learner may have difficulties when receiving, integrating, remembering, and expressing information. The learner may also difficulty with gross and/or fine motor skills.

Major Markers

    a.   has difficulty remembering things

    b.   has difficulty performing under stress

    c.   has difficulty following a schedule

    d.   has difficulty prioritizing and organizing

    e.   has difficulty adjusting to change

    f.   writing shows poor organization

    g.   has difficulty with directions

    h.   has an awkward pencil grip

    i.   letters are poorly formed

    j.   appears clumsy or poorly coordinated