



Learning  
Connections  
Hamilton

## Learning Exploration

Strengths, Challenges, Strategies and  
the Learning Exploration Tool (LET)

May 2026



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## Agenda

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. What We Know
3. An Overview of Learning  
Challenges and Markers
4. Learning Exploration Tool
5. Learning Strategies
6. Key Takeaways



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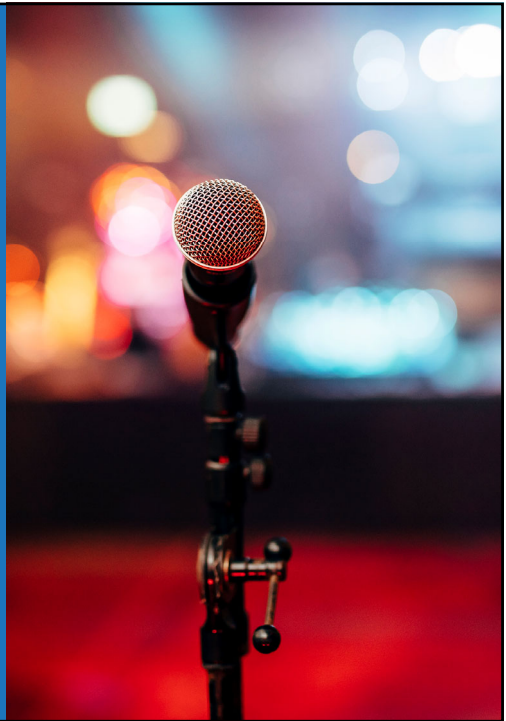


Photo by [The Jopwell Collection](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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## Welcome/Introductions

No seriously... welcome. Please tell us what brought you here today.



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## What We Know Let's Zoom out for a Sec



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## What We Know



- Get SET is built for this.
- You're awesome.
- Everyone is unique.
- Learning is dynamic.
- Learning is for everyone.
- The "how" matters.



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## An Overview of Learning Challenges



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## Let's Start with Strengths

(Raskind, n.d.)



Everyone has a lot they're bringing to the table. These are as diverse as the people themselves but may include

- self-awareness
- proactivity
- perseverance
- goal-setting
- use of effective support systems
- emotional coping strategies



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## Let's Start with Strengths

(CADDAC, 2024)



Also

- **bravery**
- creativity
- enthusiasm/energy
- empathy
- problem-solving
- imagination, divergent thinking, wide range of interests
- understanding the big picture
- resilience and the ability to adapt
- hyperfocus



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## What Else?

What other strengths  
have you observed in  
your learners?



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## Neurodiversity

(Centre for  
Diverse Learners,  
2024)

- neurocognitive functioning is part of natural human variation – it's normal to be different
- there's a huge variety in how we think, learn and relate to others
- medical model – psychological, neurological or physiological limitations
- includes
  - learning disabilities
  - autism
  - ADHD



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## What are learning disabilities?

(LDAO, 2024)

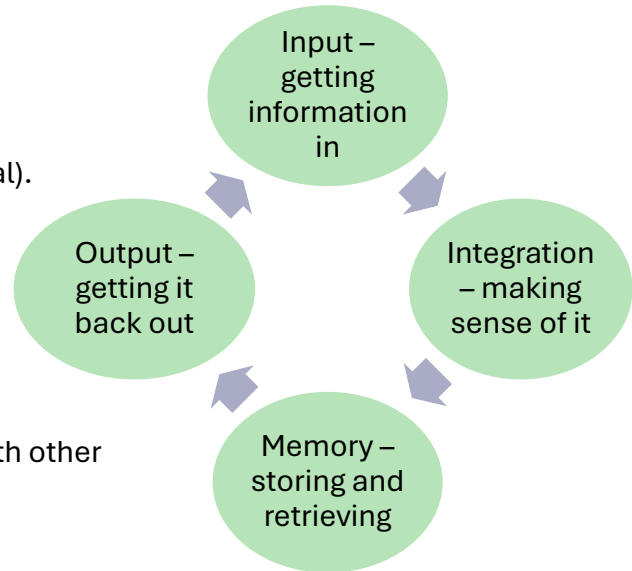


Learning Disabilities (LDs) affect the way a person takes in, remembers, understands and expresses information.

They are due to neuro-biological factors (congenital).

They may present themselves in groups.

They may exist with other conditions.



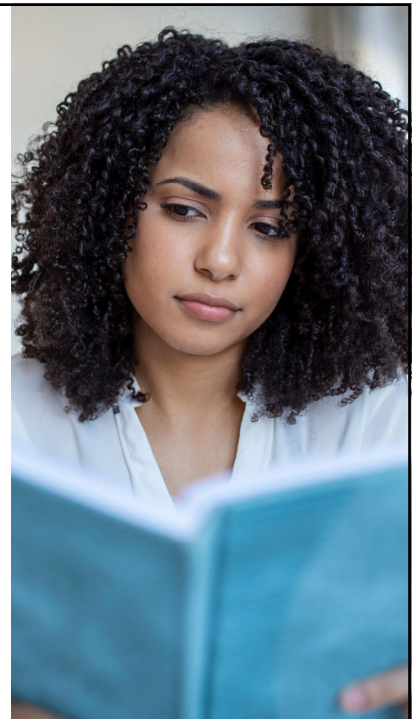
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## People with Learning Disabilities

(LDAO, 2024)



- people with learning disabilities are intelligent and can learn despite difficulties in processing information
- living with a learning disability can impact friendships, school, work, self-esteem and daily life
- people with learning disabilities can succeed when solid coping skills and strategies are developed



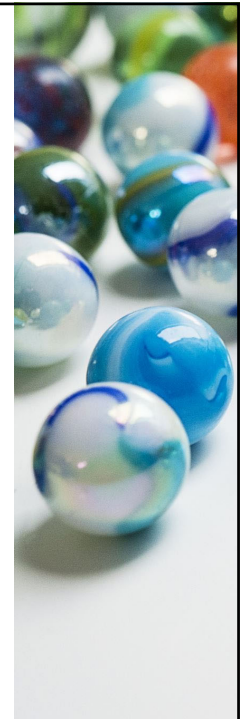
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## The Facts about LDs

(LDAO, 2024)



- between 5-10% of adults in Canada have a learning disability
- they come in many forms and affect people with varying levels of severity
- they're lifelong but may change how they present at different times and in different situations (mild to severe)
- they are different for each person so each learner will need individualized strategy development



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## They affect

(LDAO, 2024)



- language (receptive/expressive)
- communication skills
- reading, writing and math skills
- memory
- reasoning and executive functions
- coordination
- organizational skills
- social skills



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## Affects

(LDAO, 2024)



Learning disabilities can affect success in

- education
- work
- daily life

They may affect

- relationships
- self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy



Can be associated with feelings of isolation, frustration, anger, resentment and negative past experiences (how is Get SET different?).

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## Neurodiversity and Mental Health



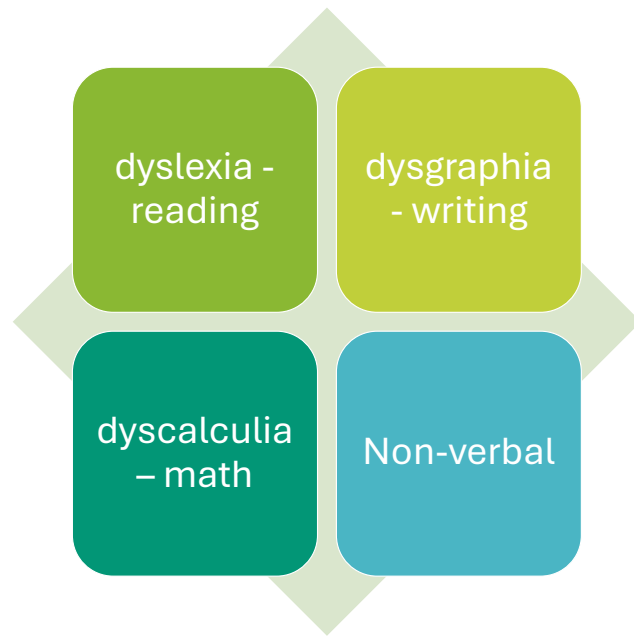
- 36% of youth with learning disabilities don't get their high school diploma (CDC, 2024)
- 46% of adults with learning disabilities are more likely to attempt death by suicide than their peers (CDC, 2024)
- 80% of adults with ADHD have at least one additional mental health condition (CADDAC, 2024)



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## Types of Learning Disabilities

(LDAO, 2024)



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## Non-Verbal Learning Disability

(LDAO, 2024)



- **visual-spatial skills** – difficulty perceiving the relative positions of objects in space
- **organizational skills** - how things fit together in time and in space (example, breaking tasks down into parts)
- **motor skills** - physical awkwardness, writing problems
- **social and emotional problems** – difficulty learning the meaning of actions, the nonverbal behaviour and the emotions of others leading to difficulties with social judgement and social interaction

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## Diagnosing Learning Disabilities

(LDAO, 2024)



Assessments must be done by a qualified member of the College of Psychologists (a psychologist or psychological associate).

[Ontario Psychologists Association Referral Services](#) have listings of most psychologists in Ontario.

Psycho-educational assessments can range from \$1,500-\$3,500 and beyond.

A screenshot of the Ontario Psychological Association's website. The page has a purple header with navigation links: "About Us", "Public", "Members & Students", "Become a Member", "Continuing Education", "Careers", and "LOGIN". A search bar is located in the top right corner. The main heading is "Find a Psychologist" in bold black text. Below the heading, it says "Use this search tool to find a psychologist or psychological associate in Ontario". There are two input fields: "Location" with a sub-label "City or Province" and "Area of Concern" with a dropdown menu currently set to "ALL".

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## Let's Try Something...

### Little Red Riding Hood



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## Let's Try Something



Wants pawn term, dare worsted ladle gull hoe lift wetter  
murder inner ladle cordage. Disk ladle gull worry putty ladle  
rat cluck wetter ladle rat hat, an fur disk raisin pimple colder  
Ladle Rat Rotten Hut.

Wan moaning, Ladle Rat Rotten Hut's murder colder inset.

“Ladle Rat Rotten Hut, heresy ladle basking winsome burden  
batter an shirker cockles.”

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## What Dyslexia Can Look Like



ew<sup>u</sup> The s<sup>o</sup>n<sup>d</sup> r<sup>l</sup> a d' g b<sup>h</sup> s  
hou<sup>s</sup>e o<sup>n</sup>c of s<sup>t</sup> The b<sup>i</sup>s<sup>o</sup>s s<sup>i</sup>d  
"On b<sup>y</sup> th<sup>e</sup> h<sup>a</sup>i<sup>r</sup> o<sup>m</sup>y h<sup>i</sup>n<sup>n</sup>y c<sup>h</sup>i<sup>n</sup>.  
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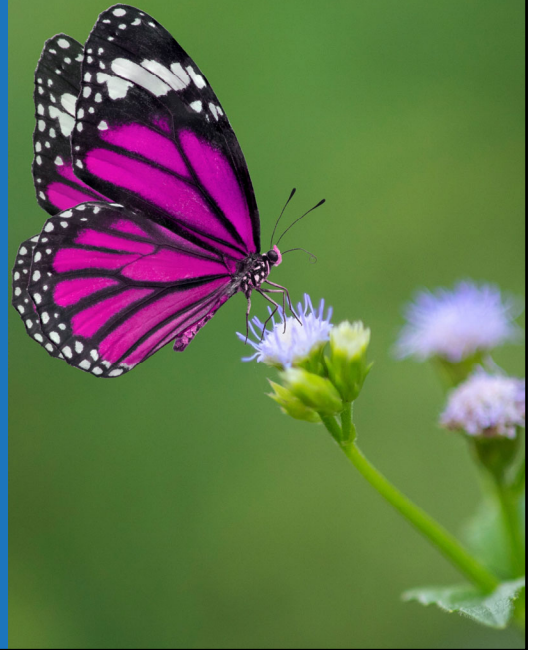
(Proper Course, 2011)

(Boland, 2022)

*is created without copying or mirroring shapes. The repeated shapes in a text is decreased. This results in a equal distortions (swirl-effect). The aim is to create inter that will maintain the readers' interest and will prevent or frustrated. Diversity in text knows many variations ie fact that typography for a novel is different from a n ar education. Even so a novel has the potential to be el his can be achieved in any level of creativity, thinking mount of words on a sentence and the character/paper*

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# Characteristics of Learning Challenges



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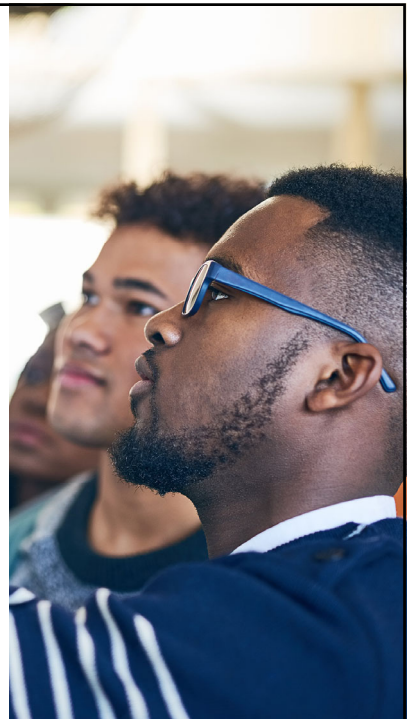
## Learning Challenges – Working Definition

(ABEA, 2005)



Learning Challenges (used today) is intended to mean

- specific learning challenges (both academic and personal/social)
- likely due to processing difficulties
- require individualized strategy and accommodation development



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## A Few Notes



- It's important to remember that many people have a few learning challenges characteristics. It doesn't mean that they have a learning disability.
- A person may have many learning challenges, as well as other disabilities.
- Everyone has different challenges and needs, and they need to be supported individually.

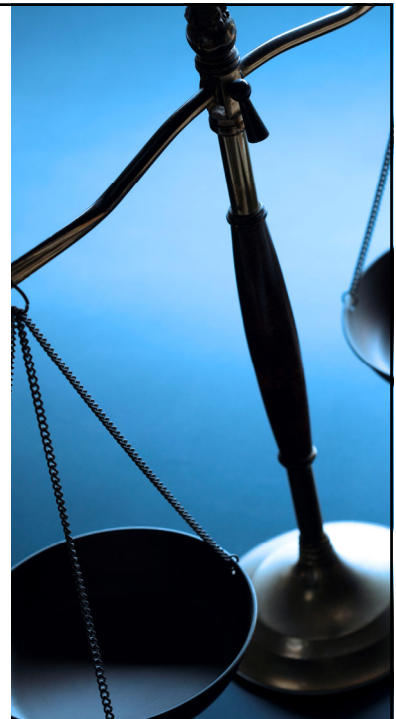
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## General Characteristics

(LDAO, 2024)



- has great strengths in some areas but great weaknesses in others
- performs similar tasks differently from day to day
- has a short attention span, is impulsive, or is distractible
- learns something one day but can't remember it the next day
- misinterprets directions or instructions



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## Reading, Writing and Math

(LDAO, 2024)



- reads well but doesn't write well
- has difficulty keeping their place when reading, following columns, or following small print
- has difficulty sounding out words
- has difficulty understanding what is read
- has difficulty writing ideas on paper but can express themselves orally



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## Reading, Writing and Math

(LDAO, 2024)



- has persistent problems with spelling
- often misreads or miscopies
- has persistent problems with sentence structure, writing mechanics, and organizing writing
- confuses similar letters or numbers, reverses them, or confuses their order



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## Robyn's Story

(Sonic Learning, 2012)



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## Specific Processing Challenges

(LDAO, 2024)

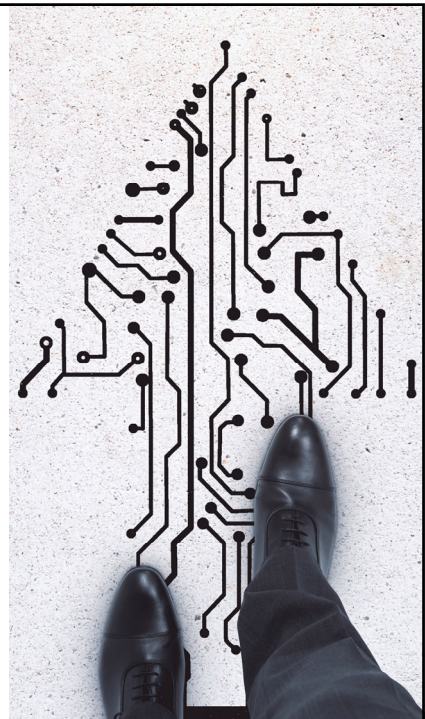


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- Visual Processing Challenges
- Auditory Processing Challenges
- Organizational Processing Challenges

Other

- Attention/Hyperactivity



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## Visual Processing Challenges

(LDAO, 2024)



### 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.

They can affect a learner's reading, writing, and mathematic abilities.



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## Visual Processing Challenges - Markers

(LDAO, 2024)



- has a physical reaction to print (for example, headaches, tired or red eyes)
- may be sensitive to light (will likely have a lot of difficulty working under fluorescent light)
- text may move or shake on the page – learners may see rivers of white down the page
- difficulty discriminating between different letters or words
- has a lot of difficulty tracking text

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## Visual Processing Challenges - Markers

(LDAO, 2024)



- difficulty remembering the “look” of letters or words (visual memory)
- over relies on sounding out words – poor sight word memory
- reading substitutions are visually similar (for example, “horse” for “house”)
- spellings are usually a phonetic alternative to the correct spelling
- mixes upper and lower letters inappropriately

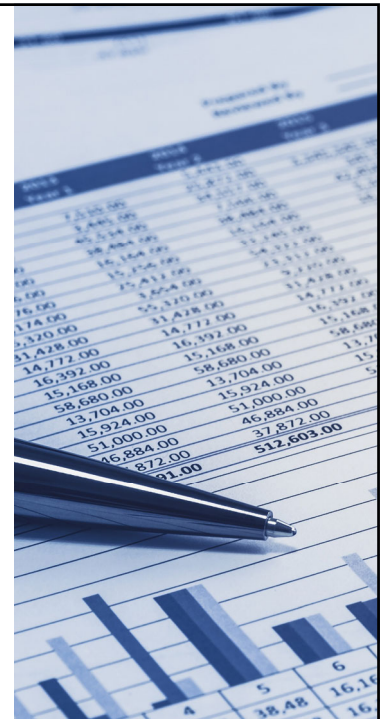
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## Visual Processing Challenges - Markers

(LDAO, 2024)



- may spell the same word differently in the same document
- confuses similar numbers or transposes numbers (wrong order)
- has difficulty copying
- has difficulty with left/right and working in columns



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## Visual Processing Challenges - Example

(ABEA, n.d.)



My plan to reach a goals  
is School and Stoping Smoking  
but I can do it at ones  
So I will finsh School, ~~finsh~~  
and then ~~stop~~ Smoking

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## Auditory Processing Challenges

(LDAO, 2024)



**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.

- not a hearing problem – difficulty perceiving aural information
- may not be able to recognize or isolate parts of speech or remember spoken language
- difficulty with auditory sequencing and blending

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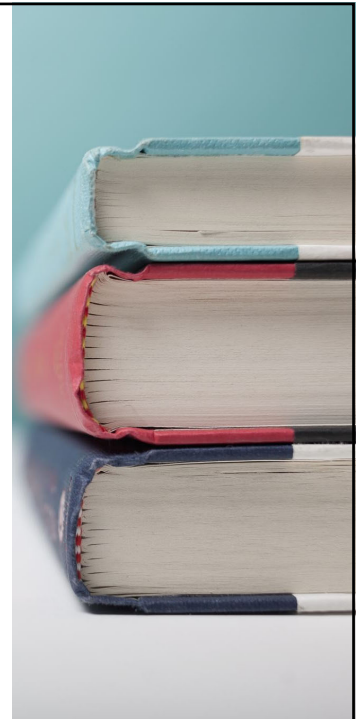
## Auditory Processing Challenges - Markers

(LDAO, 2024)



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- has difficulty retaining and recalling oral information
- has difficulty explaining themselves to others
- dislikes or avoids reading, especially out loud
- has a lot of difficulty or is unable to use phonics to sound out words
- may reverse or transpose letters



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## Auditory Processing Challenges - Markers

(LDAO, 2024)



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- has difficulty understanding text on the first reading
- spellings are not good phonetic alternatives
- letters are added or missing or in the wrong order (reversed or transposed)
- has difficulty processing numbers correctly
- says a number backwards or may transpose number when doing oral drills



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## Auditory Processing Challenges - Example

(ABEA, n.d.)



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19. Spell the following words. Start with the left column.

- |                         |                           |                             |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. <u>ride</u>          | 1. <u>NUMBER</u> (number) | 1. <u>August</u>            |
| 2. <u>more</u>          | 2. <u>Shade</u>           | 2. <u>Airport</u>           |
| 3. <u>back</u>          | 3. <u>Quite</u> (quit)    | 3. <u>Kitchen</u> (Kitchen) |
| 4. <u>Sayed</u> (said)  | 4. <u>Reward</u> (reward) | 4. <u>KNOWS</u> (Knowledge) |
| 5. <u>Stait</u> (stiff) | 5. <u>listen</u> (listen) | 5. <u>Awesome</u> (awesome) |
| 6. <u>there</u>         | 6. <u>Blow</u>            | 6. <u>program</u> (program) |

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## What's the Difference?



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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 spelling
transposes numbers	difficulty hearing numbers
difficulty copying	difficulty with oral drills

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## Organizational Processing Challenges

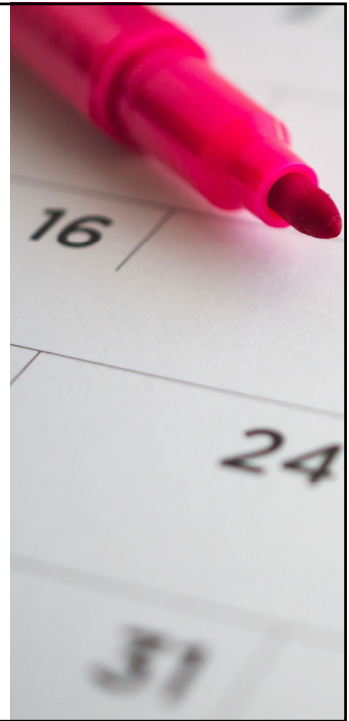
(LDAO, 2024)



### 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 have difficulty with gross and/or fine motor skills.

Similar to Non-Verbal Learning Disabilities.



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## Organizational Processing Challenges - Markers

(LDAO, 2024)



### Difficulty

- remembering things
- performing under stress
- following a schedule
- prioritizing and organizing
- adjusting to change



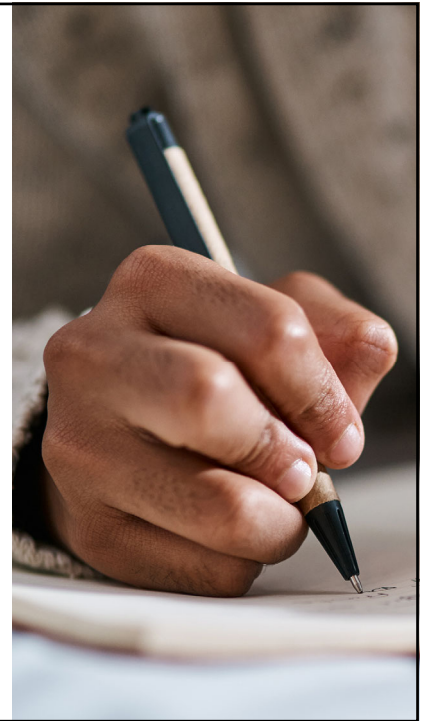
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## Organizational Processing Challenges - Markers

(LDAO, 2024)



- writing isn't organized well
- has difficulty with directions
- has an awkward pencil grip
- letters are poorly formed
- may appear clumsy or poorly coordinated



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## Organizational Processing Challenges - Example

(ABEA, n.d.)



~~IF THINKING~~  
THINKING. CANADA NEEDS DEATH PENALTY  
BECAUSE WHO COMMITTED CRIMES TO FREE  
FALL TO VICTIMS AND THEIR  
FAMILY  
WHO ENJOY TAKES LIFE OF SOMEONE SHOULD PAY  
WITH IS ON LIFE

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## ADHD

(CADDAC, 2024)



- chronic neurodevelopmental disorder that affects approximately 3% to 5% of adults
- it's highly hereditary – up to 75%
- girls are frequently not diagnosed until later in adolescence or adulthood because they often present as inattentive which is harder to spot

There are 3 types of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

- Hyperactive
- Inattentive
- Combined (most common)

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## ADHD Markers

(CADDAC, 2024)



### Attention Regulation

- difficulty focusing attention for a period of time, especially when doing things that are repetitive or boring
- easily distracted by sounds, sights and thoughts
- unable to pay close attention to details (may have been told by teachers, parents or employers that they make “careless mistakes”)

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## ADHD Markers

(CADDAC, 2024)



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### Attention Regulation

- hyper focus, unable to break focus and refocus attention, especially if what they're doing is very interesting to them
- forgetting the steps in tasks or to complete tasks, even if they're routine or common
- frequently losing things
- tuning out, excessive daydreaming

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## ADHD Markers

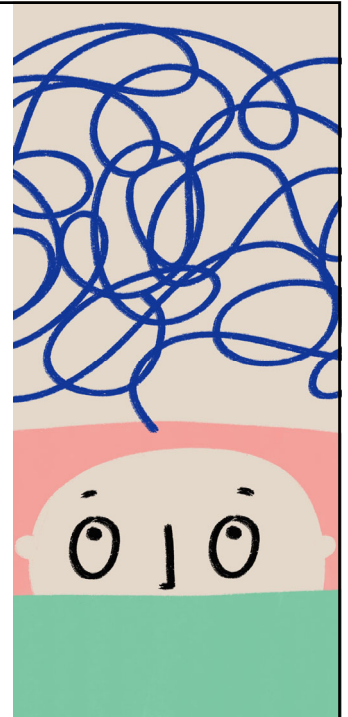
(CADDAC, 2024)



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### Hyperactivity

- fidgeting
- internal restlessness
- mind races or switches focus frequently
- unable to relax
- talking too much too fast
- doing too much at once
- craving excitement and/or risky activities



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## ADHD Markers

(CADDAC, 2024)



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### Impulsivity

- acting before thinking
- making impulsive decisions without thinking them through
- spending first without considering if it's a good idea
- talking at the wrong time
- interrupting others
- speaking without thinking
- reckless without considering the consequences
- quick to react to emotions in unacceptable ways

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## ADHD Markers

(CADDAC, 2024)



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### Executive Functioning

- difficulty prioritizing
- difficulty organizing
- procrastination
- trouble starting and finishing projects
- difficulty tracking time or “time blindness” (frequently late, incomplete work)
- difficulty planning
- starts many projects but doesn't complete them
- Needs external support and accountability for organization, household duties, paperwork, etc.

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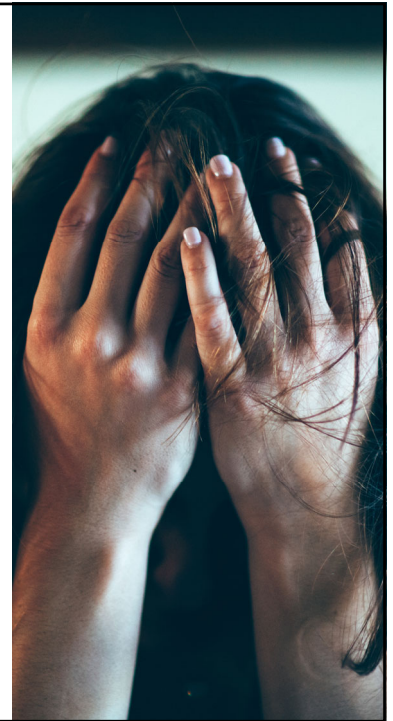
## ADHD Markers

(CADDAC, 2024)



### Regulating Emotions

- reacting emotionally
- emotional outbursts
- impatient
- irritable
- oversensitive to criticism
  - “rejection sensitive”
- becomes easily frustrated
- mood swings



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What about in  
your classes?



What % of your learners  
may have learning  
challenges?

Are attention/hyperactivity  
challenges prevalent with  
your learners?



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# Learning Exploration Tool

Educational Interview for work with  
Learners



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## Before We Dive In



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This is not a diagnostic tool – we’re not psychologists. 😊

We use this tool to better understand a learner’s

- goals
- past experiences with learning
- strength and challenge areas related to language processing

We use this information to develop a learning plan and identify learning strategies that might be helpful.

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## Sections



- Goals
- Learning Summary
- Strengths
- Learning Preferences
- Learning Challenges Pre-Screen
  - Learning Exploration
  - Health/Medical Information
  - Daily Tasks
  - General Learning
- Learning Processing
- School Experiences and Subjects



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## Tool Overview



- Facilitator’s Guide
- Learning Exploration Tool (LET) Template (word)
- Example Report

Your Logo Here



Learning Exploration Report – [Client’s Name]

This tool will help you explore how you learn, your learning strengths and possible areas to further develop. We’ll also help you explore learning strategies that might be helpful for you.

Date	May 8, 2026
Learning Support Person	
Goals	
Employment*	
Education and Training	
Skills Upgrading	[What are you currently working on in the program?]

\*The Job Bank has [job profiles](#) and [Essential Skills profiles](#) for many jobs. These can be very helpful to determine the skills needed for the job.

Learning Summary	
Strengths	[You can add things here from the strengths table or from additional strengths and skills that came out of the rest of the interview.]
Processing Challenge Areas	[If the client has several checks in one of the processing challenge areas, list it/them here (visual, auditory, organizational, attention, etc.)]
Specific Markers	[Optional – here you could include very specific things like has difficulty tracking, sensitivity to light, difficulty with decoding using phonics, etc.]
Learning Strategies to Try	[Start a list of specific strategies the learner could try, maybe offer a learning strategy handout if appropriate.]

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## Learning Challenges Pre-Screen – Role Play



- You'll be working in pairs.
- One person will be the assessor, the other the learner.
- The assessor will use the Learning Challenges Pre-Screen (or the LET template) to facilitate the pre-screen with the "learner".
- The "learner" will use the Role Play script to answer the questions.
- Together, decide if you would continue with the learning challenges checklists.
- If there's time, complete the other Role Play with switched roles.

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## Learning Exploration Tool



What do you think?  
Would you use this?  
Good, bad, needs to  
change.



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# Learning Strategies

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## Big Picture

(LDAO, 2024)



- **Learn** as much as you can about the learner and how their processing challenges affect them so you can set clear and realistic expectations together.
- **Recognize** that behaviour may be the result of feeling confused, anxious and overwhelmed.
- **Give** the learner direction and **explicit instruction**.
- **Manage the environment** with predictable schedules as much as possible. Prepare the learner for changes in routines and give them notice about transitions.

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## Some Definitions



**Learning Strategies** are specific techniques that can be customized to fit a learner's strengths and learning style.

**Learning Accommodations** are considerations made for the learner that take nothing away from the skill being learned but accommodate their learning needs.

**Assistive Technologies** are accommodations that utilize technological resources.

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## Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

(CAST, 2024)



The goal of UDL is to create learning environments that work for all students and gives learners agency in their learning. It's based on 3 principles.

**Engagement** – the learner drives what they learn.

**Representation** – teaching through multiple methods and perspectives.

**Action and Expression** – provide choice and flexibility in how learners express their learning.



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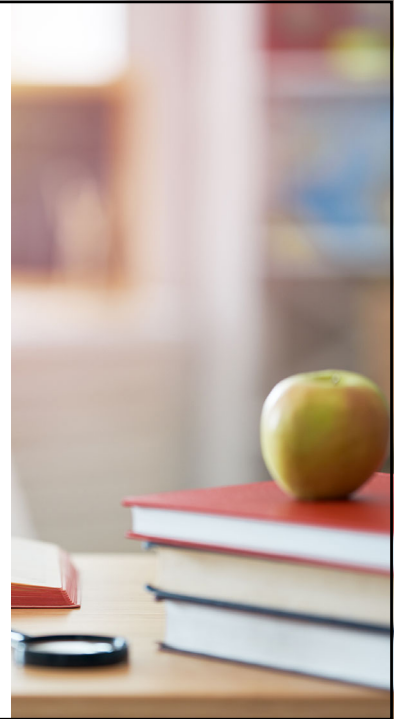
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## In General

(Centre for  
Diverse Learners,  
2024)



- consider your learning spaces – sensory inputs – noise, light, other distractions that could be decreased
- encourage learners to explore how they learn and discuss strategies that might work for them
- provide lots of structure and notice of transitions
- encourage and support learners to use technology for learning



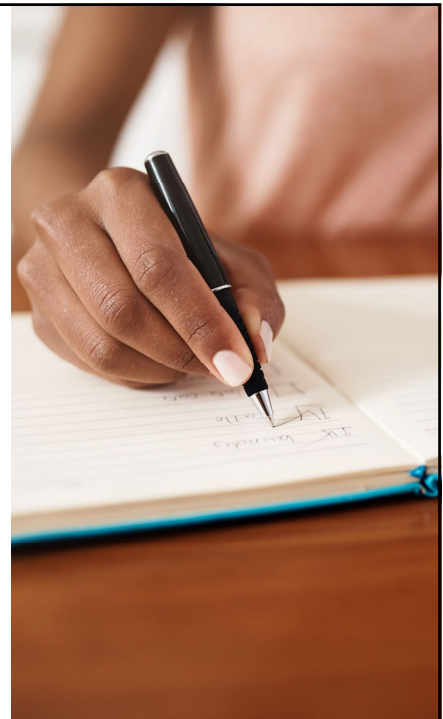
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## In General

(Centre for  
Diverse Learners,  
2024)



- offer instructions in at least 2 ways – verbal and in writing and offer examples
- break things down into parts or chunks with checklists, schedules and graphic organizers
- encourage learners to take their time with their response, they may need more processing time



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## Direct Instruction



- instructor directed, explicit, in steps
  - best teaching method for learners with learning challenges
1. **Explanation** – what is the intention of the strategy?
  2. **Modeling** – how is it used effectively?
  3. **Self-Instruction** – have the learner explain the strategy and how they can use it.
  4. **Practice** – various opportunities to practice on different tasks, repeated explanation, instructions, modeling.
  5. **Feedback** – from you as the instructor and the learner.
  6. **Implementation** – independent and routine use of the strategy.

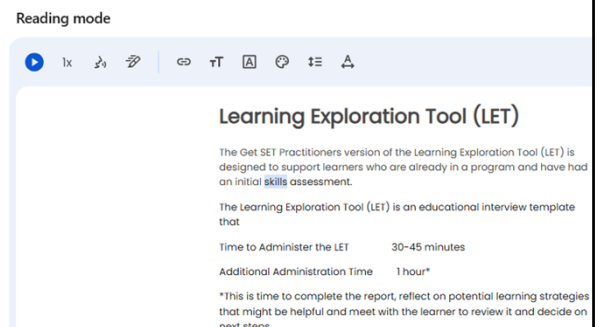
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## Direct Instruction – Group Work



Discuss how you could support a learner to use “Reading Mode” in Google Chrome.

1. Explanation
2. Modeling
3. Self-Instruction
4. Practice
5. Feedback
6. Implementation



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## Auditory Processing Strategies



- **Communication** – typically have very good visual processing skills, give visual directions, give oral directions slowly, repeat and allow learner to process them and respond
- **Reading** – phonics may not work, use a whole word approach (dictate stories, copying, remember shape)
- **Spelling** – use word patterns/families (similar shape) and assistive technology
- **Math** – colour code steps of a math problem
- **Accommodations** – visual aids, apps

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## Visual Processing Strategies



- **Problem solve physical reactions** – particularly lighting, text/background contrast of documents
- **Communication** – give step-by-step verbal and written directions
- **Reading** – use a structured phonics program
- **Writing/Spelling** - phonics-based approaches like break words into syllables or chunks
- **Math** – use graph paper to assist with working in columns

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## Organizational Processing Strategies



- **Communication/Interpersonal Skills** - Give the learner verbal direction and explicit instruction. Use the learner's verbal strengths to help them learn what other people learn implicitly, with kindness and patience.
- **Instructions** – Repeat and give in multiple formats.
- **Reading** – Use pre-reading questions.
- **Writing** – Teach printing, cursive or typing explicitly as needed.
- **Math** – May benefit from graph paper to practice working in columns.
- **Accommodations** – Routine, scheduling support.

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## Attention Strategies

(CADDAC, 2024)



- reduce distractions
- encourage frequent breaks
- get the learner's attention before giving instructions (1-2 at a time) – repeat and allow time for processing
- ask them to repeat instructions for understanding
- give frequent, specific and immediate feedback, encourage positive self-talk
- break activities into small chunks (checklists, graphic organizers), help them develop plans/steps, help them get started
- check-in with them to make sure they're on the right track

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## Attention Strategies

(CADDAC, 2024)



Learning  
Connections  
Hamilton

- work with them on self-monitoring their attention and learning about themselves (when can't I focus?)
- give advanced notice about transitions
- teach and use reminder cues, teach time management
- help them to identify what is priority
- find out what works for them to focus – earphones, quiet places, preferential seating
- encourage things that will help them focus – movement, chewing gum, other fidget devices
- use multi-sensory approaches
- use assistive devices like text to speech, speech to text

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## Strategy Lists for Learners



Learning  
Connections  
Hamilton

- Auditory Processing
- Visual Processing
- Organizational Processing
- Attention/Focus



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### Learning Strategies

#### Attention and Focus Challenges

These challenges are often connected to difficulties with executive functioning like having a hard time regulating yourself in daily life.

For example, it may be difficult to

- direct your attention to necessary tasks when needed
- stay on task or complete projects when needed or directed
- control impulses (like interrupting others, fidgeting or talking too much)
- remember things (like difficulty following instructions, misplacing keys/phone/tools)
- regulate emotions
- stay motivated to complete tasks that aren't interesting to you (you may procrastinate and have difficulties with time-management)

For help with any of these, connect with your instructor, tutor or us!

Here are some things you could try.

1. When it's time to learn, make sure you have a good space to work. What works for you? Quiet, with music playing, lots of light, not so much light?

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## Wrapping it all Up



Photo by [Priscilla Du Preez CA](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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## What do you think?



What resonated with you the most from the training? What will you take with you? What other training/resources would be helpful?



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## Key Takeaways



Learners with learning challenges

- have a lot that they're bringing to the table – identifying their strengths, talents and interests will be invaluable
- truly need specialized learning strategies to help them succeed and reach their goals

**You are Get SET's greatest strength** – knowledgeable and passionate practitioners are the key to supporting learners to increase their skills, feel confident and transition to their next step.

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## Key Takeaways



The most important elements to use in the classroom for learners with learning challenges

- use direct instruction of learning strategies
- teach material in small chunks
- repeat, repeat, repeat
- teach material in a variety of ways
- help the learner learn through meaning or association
- develop a structure or routine



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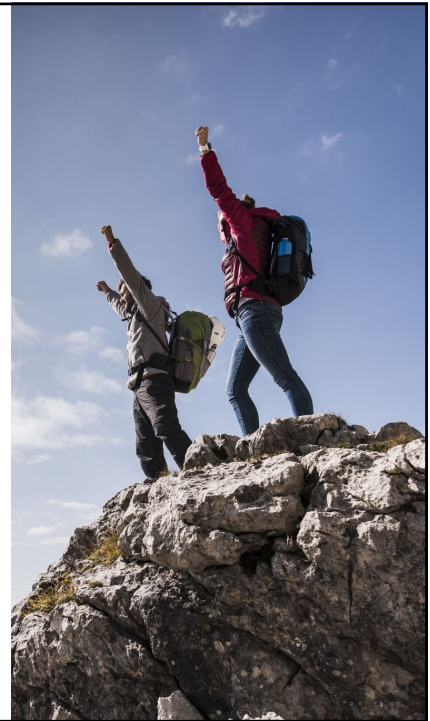
Final Thought  
– I know...  
enough  
already.



Everyone is unique with their own strengths and challenges

– our job is to

- create meaningful relationships
- honor the individual
- and help them see what we see 😊



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## Further Resources



[ADDitude Magazine](#)

[Centre for ADHD Awareness, Canada \(CADDAC\)](#)

[Centre for Diverse Learners \(CDL\)](#)

[Learning Disability Association of Ontario \(LDAO\)](#)

[Universal Design for Learning Guidelines](#)

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## Questions / Comments?

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