

# Learning disability or low ability?



A learning disability (LD) is a life-long neurobiological disorder that causes a person to have difficulty receiving, storing, processing, and producing information- *in spite of average ability*. Low ability refers to a person with a lower Intelligence Quotient (IQ) or ability score and profile. Below is an explanation of Intelligence Quotient (IQ) scores and profiles.

## What is average?

**Intelligence Quotient (IQ)** is a measure of academic ability using standardized testing. Numerous subtests are administered and combined into scale or index scores. Scale scores often reported are Verbal, Performance, and Full Scale. Index scores may include Verbal Comprehension, Perceptual Organization, Working Memory, Freedom from Distractibility, and Processing Speed. It should be noted that these tests do not measure creative talent, study skills or curiosity - all factors that need careful consideration when interpreting results and using them to predict future academic performance.

**Average ability** is usually determined to be a Full Scale standard score of 90-110 and a percentile score of 25-75%. This is based on a midpoint standard score of 100 and percentile score of 50%. Half of the people tested are expected to receive IQ scores within this range.

**Low average ability** is a Full Scale standard score of 80-89 and a percentile score of 9-24%. According to LDA's operational definition, this range also meets the criteria of "at least average" for the diagnosis of a specific learning disability in adults.

**Borderline ability** is usually considered to be a Full Scale standard score of 70-79 and a percentile score of 3-8%. GED Testing Service considers this range to be within average for meeting LD criteria for GED testing accommodations.

**Low ability** is a Full Scale standard score of 69 and below and a percentile score of 2% or less. Individuals with this IQ profile may be considered Developmentally Disabled (DD) or Mentally Retarded (MR) and are now categorized under the special education area of Developmental Cognitive Disability (DCD).

## What are profiles for these ranges?

### Learning Disability

- A previous diagnosis of LD or family members with LD
- Inconsistent skill profile (high in math, low in reading OR higher oral language skills than reading, writing, or math)
- Knowledgeable and bright in many areas, but cannot express thoughts in writing
- Seems to know the answer, but cannot find the words to express it
- Difficulty learning from or remembering written or visual material
- Difficulty learning from or remembering verbal or auditory presentation
- Difficulty remembering today what was learned yesterday
- Often disorganized, late, loses or misplaces things

### **Low Average Ability**

- May have received special help in school, but is not specific about service
- May have graduated from high school or completed GED tests, but grades and scores were just passing
- Skills in reading, writing, or math are below expected grade level
- Learns new skills at a slow and steady rate, but has a lot to catch up on
- History of a non-stimulating environment when growing up
- History of inconsistent education (moved around a lot, frequent absenteeism)
- Prefers physical or mechanical activities to reading, writing, conversing

### **Borderline Ability**

- May have received special help in school, but is not specific about service
- May have graduated from high school or completed GED tests, but grades and scores were just passing
- Skills in reading, writing, and math (general learning difficulties) are well below expected grade level
- Needs structured, step by step instruction typically at a slower pace than peers
- Requires repeated practice and rehearsal of new information
- Prefers routine and has difficulty with change
- Has difficulty generalizing information from one situation to another
- Thinks concretely in terms of black and white

### **Low Ability**

- A previous diagnosis of Mildly Mentally Impaired or Developmentally Disabled and received special services in this area
- “Flat” profile of academic skills
- Consistent slow processing of information
- Takes a long time to answer questions
- Limited ability to problem solve, reason, and generalize
- Handwriting looks typical of a younger person
- Whole word learner rather than phonetic learner
- Immature social skills compared to other adults
- Does not drive even though of age for a license
- Lives in a supported setting such as a group home or with family members

**These profiles are not to be used for diagnosis.**

## **LDA of Minnesota**

For more than 36 years, **Learning Disabilities Association of Minnesota** has been serving the needs of people of all ages at risk for learning disabilities or related learning difficulties by maximizing their potential so that they may lead more productive and fulfilled lives. Services include educational assessments, one-to-one and small group tutoring, consultations, family literacy activities, school-to-work transition programming, professional training, public education, and high-quality educational products.

LDA of Minnesota is the state affiliate of LDA of America, a non-profit organization of volunteers dedicated to identifying causes, promoting prevention of learning disabilities, and enhancing the quality of life for all individuals with learning disabilities and their families by encouraging effective identification and intervention, fostering research, and protecting their rights under law.