Every teacher should be trained to be alert to signs that might suggest a specific disability. The following is a quick checklist to use when one finds a child who has normal vision, hearing, and intelligence and still has difficulty keeping up with the class in language skills.

Disturbances in speech are common if learning to talk began late—at ages three or four—and words were and continue to be mispronounced.

**Determine if the following exist:**
- Left-handedness
- Alternation in lateral dominance
- Significant defects in left-right discrimination
- Dysgraphia (poor handwriting) is present.

The students are better at copying than at spontaneous writing. Reversals are observed in various performances—confusion of reversible letter, the “static reversals,” and letter-order errors. They can more easily than others mirror read and write—the “kinetic reversals.”

- The child is poor in written work but participates with intelligent oral questions and responses.
- A striking finding is that non-phonetic words in their limited sight vocabulary are often written correctly, whereas a perfectly phonetic word, even when it is totally unfamiliar, may be written incorrectly. In fact, they can often spell better than they can read or vice-versa.
- Difficulty in figure-ground perception is present.
- Difficulty in comprehending written language exists.
- Reading is avoided, but information is sought.
- They are able to derive pleasure in a normal way from listening to stories and participating in discussion and conversation.
- Unusual interest in drawing and mechanics is apparent.
- They are sometimes restless, hyperactive, easily distracted, hypo-kinetic (sluggish), or unusually clumsy.
- Emotional disturbances are usually present due to the child’s failure in one or more of the following—spelling, writing, arithmetic, or reading.
- The familial incidence of this problem is impressive. It is a dominant trait.
- One should check to see if the child can read the words in the reader out of context as frequently as possible at the first grade level. The textbook can easily be memorized and, thus, the problem can be overlooked.
- Research has indicated that although both girls and boys are equally afflicted with learning disabilities, boys tend to act out more and are therefore usually diagnosed earlier.
- They have good days and bad days; they’ll appear clearheaded one day but may forget learned material by the next lesson.

One or more of the above symptoms associated with difficulties in academic learning should prompt the teacher to seek a psychological evaluation. Ideally, the diagnosis of the problem should be made no later than the middle of the first grade.

Some characteristic emotional disorders tend to be mistakenly interpreted as the *primary* or *fundamental* cause of the child’s inability to read rather than *secondary* and *reactive* to it. Yet, reading disability is one of the most common and least recognized causes of school failure. It is a significant factor underlying school behavioral problems, dropouts, and the drift to juvenile delinquency. We no longer use the hickory stick, but, somewhere from the first grade on, the child with learning disabilities has begun to hurt. As a result, the atmosphere for learning becomes a punitive experience.

The student may:
- Get low grades
- Be placed in the slow group
Disappoint parents and teachers
Incur the ridicule of classmates in and out of the classroom
Fail a grade

And the student is the most disappointed of all!