

Academic Triage: A Cross Training Model for Advisors, Counselors and Learning Skills Professionals

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What is Academic Triage and why is it necessary?

1. The 4 disciplines –learning skills, clinical issues, learning styles, learning disabilities
2. How all problems come to be or look like academic problems
3. Cost effective, holistic and user friendly

Who are we helping?

1. Advisees – poor grades, incompletes, probation, suspension, plateau
2. Counseling consumers – depression, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, sleep problems, substance use, relationship problems
3. Disabled students – previously identified disability, newly surfacing disability, need for accommodations
4. Hidden sources of academic difficulty – learning style mismatches, pursuit of unwanted major, pressure from home

Assessment across disciplines

1. Holistic diagnosis – the “biopsychosocial” assessment borrowed from social work.
 - Present and past “symptoms”
 - Present and past environmental factors
 - “Functional impairments:” how are academics compromised?
2. The 4 disciplines
 - I. **Psychological Presentation:** Mood and Anxiety disorders - Depression, Dysthymia, Bipolar Disorder; Cross-trained understanding of psychological presentation
 - II. **Attention Deficit Disorder** with or without Hyperactivity; Cross-trained understanding of ADD/HD
 - III. **Learning Differences** (Learning Disabilities, LDs): Reading, writing and processing disorders; Cross-trained understanding of LDs
 - IV. **Skills deficits:** Time management, executive function, Reading comprehension, note-taking, test preparation and test taking

Completing the assessment

1. Scenarios
2. When to refer, when to intervene

Building Strategies

1. Time Management
2. Learning Styles
3. Reading & Notetaking
4. Test Preparation

Scenarios

Presentation	Lu a freshman who is taking a relatively modest load of Humanities, Chemistry and Spanish. The Humanities reading is overwhelming her – she can't keep up and she doesn't know how to get herself motivated to read <i>The Republic</i> . She's therefore nervous about the upcoming paper that's due.	Tina is a freshman who is taking a relatively modest load of Humanities, Chemistry and Spanish. The Humanities reading is overwhelming her – she can't keep up and she doesn't know how to get herself motivated to read <i>The Republic</i> . She's therefore nervous about the upcoming paper that's due. Spanish is going fine, but Chemistry is a mystery.	Bo is a freshman who is taking a relatively modest load of Humanities, Chemistry and Spanish. The Humanities reading is overwhelming him – he can't keep up and he doesn't know how to get himself motivated to read <i>The Republic</i> . He's therefore nervous about the upcoming paper that's due. He's a little behind on Spanish, and Chemistry is a substantial challenge.
Questions	<i>How do you approach the Humanities reading? Do you take notes?</i>	<i>How do you approach the Humanities reading?</i>	<i>Do you use a written schedule or calendar?</i>
	Lu has always been a fast reader but has relied on memory rather than comprehension. She highlights as she reads.	Tina hasn't been able to concentrate at all on the reading and so she doesn't sit with it for more than 10 minutes before getting restless. She checks her e-mail, walks around the dorm looking for company, never returns to the reading.	Bo tries to keep a schedule, but ends up spending more time writing lists than getting his work done, often losing his lists. He finds himself up against or just past deadlines constantly.
		<i>Was reading stuff like this always troublesome?</i>	<i>Was this the case in High School and before that?</i>
		Tina is so concerned with Chemistry that she can't focus on Humanities. Her parents expect her to be pre-med though she's ambivalent about pursuing that direction.	Losing things and feeling disorganized have been problems since the 4 th grade. Bo got tremendous support from his parents in staying organized, staying on task and meeting deadlines. His days have always been very structured.
		<i>What's happening in Chemistry?</i>	<i>Have you wondered if your attention was not what it should be?</i>
		Tina scored a 4 on the AP exam, so she's baffled about why she hasn't done well on the Chemistry midterm.	Bo's brother was diagnosed with ADD in the 2 nd grade, but Bo's advanced math and linguistic skills compensated for his problems with attention.
Assessment	Lu is engaged in a passive reading process.	When we look over the midterm, the main problem surfaces: Lu has misread many questions. In the calm of my office, she immediately notices her errors.	Bo is disorganized and with a sibling already diagnosed with ADD, may himself have some attentional challenges.
Triage	Learning Skills: Lu is advised to formulate questions before approaching the reading, and take summary notes answering "What did that just mean?" every page or so. Notes are preferable to highlighting as they will get her thinking about reading and "translating" ideas into her own words. Taking notes also creates a structure and a finite goal.	Stress management: We talk about anxiety, adrenaline, relaxation techniques and preparing for Chemistry exams in a way which will bring her more confidence. We hold off on whether she wants to go pre-med for another time. A referral for counseling is offered.	LD: Bo is invited to take some of the informal inventories available online, and go to the SDRC for formal testing. Time Management: We work together on imposing structure on his day and agree to meet each week to plan his time.