

Five Forms of Giftedness



Gifted students are present in all races, ethnicities, cultures, and economic groupings around the world yet identifying them can be challenging. Identification often requires multiple measures such as intelligence testing and academic assessments. In many cases, gifted students develop unevenly and have learning differences that require specialized intervention and accommodation for them to develop optimally - academically, socially and emotionally.

There are numerous definitions of “giftedness.” In essence, it means an individual who displays advanced abilities in one or more of five forms.

Five Forms Explained

Intellectual giftedness is intellect and ability known to be significantly higher than the average. It is most often identified through scores of 130 and above on IQ tests like the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) and standardized achievement tests like the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). It is the most broadly accepted and researched form of giftedness.

Academic giftedness comes through in “specialists” with an unusually advanced ability to understand material and retain knowledge related to a specific subject area. These students may spend significant time thinking about a problem before they begin working on it, and they can exhibit an insatiable appetite for more and more content in their area of specialty. Standardized assessments and qualitative input provide assistance in identifying these students.

Artistic giftedness most often refers to advanced abilities in the visual and performing arts. These students often are visual and spatial learners who produce original works viewed as superior to those produced by peers. Although there are no standardized tests to measure artistic giftedness, a combination of qualitative data from questionnaires, surveys, and portfolio documentation may be used to evaluate.

Leadership giftedness manifests as a noticeably advanced ability to plan backwards from a goal, see similarities and differences in complex information and situations, an even-keeled and accepting temperament, and an affinity toward topics related to justice. These socially adept students often have strong interpersonal skills, take on leadership roles for group work, and serve as formal and informal leaders in and out of the classroom.

Creative giftedness refers to the ability to apply knowledge and problem-solving abilities to develop new, uncommon, or unique products and ideas. There are very few assessments for creativity. Some schools and private agencies use checklists of creative strengths and the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT) as a productive measure of divergent thinking.



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Characteristics of Gifted Students

- Rapid learner with very good memory; may be impatient with slowness of others; may resist mastering foundational skills; resists practice or drills
- May be frustrated or bored at school; may not perform to potential
- Concern with social and political issues and injustices; may become discouraged or overwhelmed with the problems of the world; may be highly critical of self and others
- Asks probing questions; goes beyond what is being taught; may ask limitless questions; may be strong-willed; argumentative
- Keen and sometimes unusual sense of humor; sees absurdities of situations; may become “class clown” to gain attention
- Large vocabulary and complex sentence structure; advanced comprehension of word nuances, metaphors, and abstract ideas
- Unusual emotional depth; intense feelings and reactions; highly sensitive; may feel different and alienated; emotional and intellectual development may be out of sync (asynchronous)
- Longer attention span, persistence and intense concentration when interested; may neglect duties or people during periods of focused interest
- Tendency to put ideas or things together in ways that are unusual or not obvious (divergent thinking); may disrupt plans or reject what is already known

(adapted from: “A Parent’s Guide to Gifted Children”, Webb, Gore, Amend, DeVries, 2007)

Serving Gifted Students

Although a federal definition of giftedness exists in the United States, states and schools adopt their own definitions of giftedness as well as mandates outlining requirements for educational offerings. To best serve gifted students, understanding whether specific mandates are in place and what they require from educational systems is essential.

How gifted students are officially identified for entrance into gifted programming also is important for parents and teachers to understand. A variety of tests, referred to as ability and achievement tests, provide scores to represent a student's performance in relation to their peers. Scores above a specified threshold often are required to gain access to gifted programming. Although some schools utilize a single score for placement, many take a more comprehensive approach by considering scores from group and individual ability and achievement tests in conjunction with subjective tools, such as input from teachers and parents. Understanding a child's entire learning profile is important for identifying their areas of giftedness and need.

Resources for Parents & Educators

- 2e News
- Bright & Quirky
- Davidson Institute for Talent Development
- GHF Gifted Learners (formerly Gifted Homeschoolers Forum)
- Hoagies’ Gifted Education
- Let’s Talk 2e
- National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC)
- Renzulli Center at University of Connecticut
- Roeper Review
- Summit Center
- Supporting the Emotional Needs of the Gifted (SENG)

About Summit Center

Summit Center, founded by Drs. Daniel B. Peters and Susan Daniels, provides educational and comprehensive assessments, consultations, and counseling for children, teens, adults, and families. We work with clients who are neurodiverse, gifted, talented, twice-exceptional (have both gifted and less developed abilities), and/or are asynchronous in their development. Summit Center has assembled an expert team of professionals and specialists dedicated to using a strengths-based approach to help our clients reach their fullest developmental potential.