

Handy Tips

- It is critical to keep in mind that functional impairment must be tied to a “medically diagnosable physical or mental” condition.
- People will often try to present themselves in the best way they can; this is simply human nature. With this in mind, phrase questions about functioning carefully and with sensitivity.
- Open-ended questions are the best interviewing approach to learning about a person’s functional abilities. Rather than asking “can you,” ask “what do you ...” or “how often do you...” or “how do you ...”
- Information about functioning should be considered within the context of ability to perform at the level of substantial gainful activity. Consider whether the person’s abilities are consistent. Often people can do a task one day, but not the next. Some can perform several aspects of a task consistently, but they cannot consistently complete the task.
- Use clear language that is easily understood by anyone in interviewing or in reporting. Avoid the use of jargon and psychiatric terms.
- Keep in mind that the DDS disability examiner (or adjudicator) may—or may not—have a background in health, mental health, or a related field.