

INFORMATION SHEET – TEACHING DYSLEXICS EFFECTIVELY

How does dyslexia affect students?

Dyslexia is a different way of thinking.

The dyslexic brain functions more holistically than a non-dyslexic brain. In other words, the dyslexic learner may use more of his or her brain on each task and therefore not take the quickest route to the answer. Sometimes they might not see the answer at all.

But dyslexics tend to be really good conceptual thinkers. Although they are often less suited to tasks requiring analysis and logic, they may be highly creative.

Why do dyslexics have difficulty reading and writing?

The answer is complicated. Each dyslexic person's brain is unique but the following issues often have an effect in varying degrees:

- Dyslexics seem to process written and spoken language differently;
- They are usually not aware of separate sounds in words (lack of phonological awareness) and may not perceive the symbols (letters) that make up words on a page as real or meaningful (visual processing difficulty);
- Even dyslexics who are good at reading may have difficulty with small words that are easily confused;
- Dyslexics are often visual thinkers and need to link words to images to make them memorable;
- Dyslexics may have problems tracking print and reading black print on a white page.

In the classroom

Do dyslexic students have to be taught differently?

Yes, if what you are doing isn't successful (as with any student). However, fortunately, the best way to teach dyslexics is the best way to teach the whole class.

Multi-sensory teaching methods are best. In the classroom, students are likely to learn mainly in three ways:

- *Visual* – seeing;
- *Auditory* – speaking and listening;
- *Kinaesthetic* – doing a task e.g. handwriting, cutting and pasting or modelling.

All teaching sessions should provide opportunities to learn through these three channels because each student has their own preferred learning style.

How can reading be helped?

Students usually read two types of texts in the classroom; text from outside sources e.g. newspapers, books and articles, and text prepared by the tutor for the student's use.

- Many students prefer to read from coloured paper or use a coloured overlay; yellow or blue are useful but personal preference should dictate. *Cerium Visual Technologies* is a good source of coloured overlays (www.ceriumvistech.co.uk). Otherwise use coloured plastic wallets;
- Tracking exercises are excellent for developing reading skills. You can make up your own sentence tracking sheets on topical matters;
- Encourage students with tracking difficulties to use a line guide e.g. coloured Perspex ruler, or card cut to the correct size for the column to be read (useful for reading newsprint);
- Presentation of text is very important:
 - Use a sans serif font e.g. Arial, Tahoma, Comic;
 - Highlight **headings**;
 - Do not capitalise **F**irst word on a line unless grammatically necessary;
 - Do not justify right-hand margins;
 - Space information clearly – 1.5 line spacing is better than single or double;
 - Use **14 point** font at minimum;
 - Use **colour** and appropriate images to help student find information easily;
 - Box information to make it stand out;
 - Do not try to fit too much information on a page;
 - Print on two separate sheets rather than both sides of a page;
 - Don't use *italics* because they slow down the reader;
 - DO NOT WRITE ALL IN CAPITALS - lower case words are easier to read.

Picture at Punctuation

Some students have problems using punctuation as an aid to meaning when they are reading. They do not always see it there. Take plenty of time to explain the main functions of , . ? !


Ask students who have comprehension difficulties to stop and picture what they have read when you reach each full-stop.

How can I help with spelling?

Dyslexics need to be able to attach an image for words they want to spell. This is why simple words are often misspelled. Auditory discrimination is not good, so similar looking words may be confused: *want/what, there/they*.

Ways to anchor spellings

The best solutions are the student's own ideas, with tutor help if necessary. But note:

- Mnemonics are often too long and complicated:
Never Eat Chips Eat Side Salad And Remain Young (necessary) is longwinded;
Try instead a picture of **1 Coffee** and **2 Sugars** (1 'c' and 2 's's');
- Identify any part the student gets wrong and ask him to highlight it;
- Use colour to break words into syllables, e.g. **sep/ar/ate** (use 'How many times your chin drops' to count syllables because some students cannot hear syllables);
- Find words within words and link with an image, e.g.
bus **in** ess 
- Teach root words and prefix and suffix, e.g. **re/member/ing**;
- Change the look of the word **div/ide d/ivi/de**;
- 'Difficult to spell' address words can be given an image and modelled (3D) in clay with the word in clay (lower-case) underneath the model, e.g. one student represented the word 'avenue' by modelling two lines of trees with an arrow in between, pointing to the clay, lower-case word 'avenue';
- Encourage students to visualise whenever they try to spell a word (NLP Magic Spelling);
- For kinaesthetic learners, trace, write, model words multiple times;
- Say the word wrongly (for old chestnuts like '**Wed/nes/day**');;
- Do not teach homophone/homonyms together e.g. 'where' and 'were'. Teach in families instead e.g. here, where, there.

Colour and image are the best tools to work with!

How can I help with writing?

Dyslexics are understandably reluctant writers. They worry predominantly about spelling. So:

- TELL THEM NOT TO WORRY ABOUT SPELLING;
- Give them stimulating, real-life, relevant things to write about;
- Use discussion, whole class planning, brainstorming on the board;
- Use a variety of planning tools, e.g. mind maps, flow charts, writing frames;
- Remind them that no one writes a first draft perfectly;
- Be enthusiastic and inspirational - you will give them initial confidence;
- Point out that entry level spelling does not mean the content of the writing will be 'entry' level.

Are computers useful?

They can be. Dyslexics need to understand how *Microsoft Word* works, e.g.

- Spell-check is helpful but not infallible;
- Grammar-check can be confusing;
- Terms such as 'icon', 'toolbar', 'dot' as in '*dot com*' need explaining;
- Presentation generally improves but basic keyboarding/mouse skills need to be taught;
- Demonstrate use of the undo button and important shortcuts e.g. home, end;
- The student should use at least 14 point font to help error correction.

Keyboarding can be a multi-sensory activity: look at the word and say the letters as the fingers do the typing.

For specialised software go to iANSYST at www.dyslexic.com.

How can I help with speaking and listening?

Many dyslexics are good at expressing themselves but not all. Lack of confidence may make them reluctant to speak out. Build a supportive class environment where individuals can feel secure.

Dyslexics may have difficulty remembering what they hear. Tell students to visualise what they hear and pause when reading aloud to them. Dyslexics are literal and may well need help understanding figurative language.

Dyslexics and organisation

To the dyslexic, time is like a river; it is fluid, elastic. He or she is not sure where it starts or finishes or how long it goes on for

Time is the enemy!

Dyslexics tend not to have good time awareness. They have problems gauging how long it takes to do things or go to places. Time planners, timetables, electronic organisers, notice boards, diaries, Post-It notes help highlight the importance of dates and events but the student must be encouraged to write these down straight away.

Organisation of materials

The dyslexic's global approach to organisation is generally bad news for paperwork and other items of equipment.

How can tutors help with organisation?

- Encourage the use of a ring-binder - papers put away in binders should stay in place if put in the rings!
- Ask students to separate work for different units or modules with different coloured dividers;
- Write clearly on each divider what each section contains;
- Demonstrate the use of highlighters, post-it notes, different colour pens to colour code information sheets and notes;
- Use analogy, humour, personal connections to aid memory and understanding;
- Provide an indexed notebook or file box to hold notes of technical terms and their definitions;
- Suggest putting aside 10 minutes per day (start or end) to organise paperwork and equipment for the day to come.

Encourage the use of a study plan

- Study information in small chunks;
- Plan a study schedule to see when you have time to study and study regularly;
- Study in a quiet place;
- Make notes and use highlighters while you read;
- Test yourself regularly – or better still, find someone else to test you.

Create a culture of confidence – a 'CAN DO' approach and encourage students to ask for help if they need it.

Encourage techniques that aid focus

- Teach relaxation skills, exercises and activities;
- Revision skills, discipline and motivation e.g. breaks and treats
- Recommend a realistic approach to the length and time of study periods;
- Brain tuning - focused rather than non-focused attention
- Advise on brain food – what to eat and drink (water!)

Teach memory techniques

- Mnemonics;
- Association - hooks and links;
- Humour, personal events;
- Repetition.

SUMMARY

Dyslexics are holistic, 3D thinkers. All students work better when given a whole picture that lets them see how the parts fit together. Always give an overview of the lesson's aims before you start and use multi-sensory teaching methods. If what you are doing isn't working, then try something else.

FURTHER READING

Demystifying Dyslexia, Marysia Krupska and Cynthia Klein, London Language and Literacy Unit, 1995
ISBN 1 872972 14 4

Diagnosing Dyslexia, Cynthia Klein, The Basic Skills Agency, 1995, ISBN 1 870741 61 7

Unscrambling Spelling, Cynthia Klein and Robin Millar, Hodder and Stoughton, 1990
ISBN 0-340-51234-2

The Gift of Dyslexia, Ronald Davis, Souvenir Press, 1995 ISBN 0-285-63281-7

The Dyslexic Adult in a Non-dyslexic World, Ellen Morgan and Cynthia Klein, Whurr Publishers, 2000
ISBN 1 86156 207 1

Get Ahead: Mind-Map Your Way to Success, Vanda North and Tony Buzan, B C Books, 2001

Dyslexia and the Bilingual Learner, Sunderland, Klein, Savinson and Partridge, London and Language Literacy Unit, (no date)

How Dyslexics Learn: Grasping the Nettle, Saunders, K., White, A., PATOSS, 2002, (a book with children in mind but with much of relevance to adult learners)

Beating Dyslexia - A Natural Way, Heath, A and Ellis, J M, available from www.learning-solutions.co.uk (also a good supplier of books on Brain Gym)

In the Mind's Eye: Visual Thinkers, Gifted People with Learning Difficulties, Computer Imaging and the Ironies of Creativity, West, T G, Prometheus Books UK

Specifically Dyspraxia

Developmental Dyspraxia, Madeleine Portwood, 1996

Praxis makes perfect, A Dyspraxia Foundation publication (an essential guide for parents and teachers).

Specifically Maths

Working with dyscalculia, Henderson, A. Published by Learning Works

Mathematics for Dyslexics: a Teaching Handbook, Chinn and Ashcroft, Wiley 1998

The Mathematical Brain, Butterworth, B., Macmillan 1999

Dyscalculia, Sharma, M., and Loveless, e. CT/LM 1988

Useful web sites

British Dyslexia Association

www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

Adult Dyslexia Centre (Thames Valley)

www.adult-dyslexia-centre.co.uk

Dyspraxia Foundation

www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk

BBC Skillswise

www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise

Talent (Teaching Adult Literacy, ESOL and Numeracy Teachers) www.talent.ac.uk