

Dyslexia

WHAT IS IT?

Dyslexia means 'difficulty with words'. It affects the ability to read, spell and write. It can also affect the processing of information, motor skills, sequencing, short-term memory, left/right orientation and awareness of time. The severity of the condition varies, ranging from difficulty with spelling to an inability to write or spell and great difficulty with reading.

Dyslexia is a neurological condition that can run in families. It is more common in males than females. The symptoms change

with age and experience but dyslexia does not go away. Each person has a different pattern of difficulties. Typically, the poor literary skills of dyslexic students mask their intelligence and ability.

About 10% of the population are estimated to have some degree of dyslexia. About 4% experience severe dyslexia. It is found at every level of learning ability. The Disability Discrimination Act acknowledges dyslexia as an example of a specific learning difficulty.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LEARNING

■ Approach to learning

Students with dyslexia are often holistic, 'whole picture' thinkers who take a qualitative rather than an analytical and quantitative approach to learning. They need to know how their new learning will fit in with what they already know. They often have excellent visual-spatial skills, and like to attach information to images.

■ Learning styles

Students with dyslexia often learn best through a multi-sensory approach combining visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles.

■ Spelling

The learner with dyslexia may spell the same word differently each time they use it, often taking a phonetic approach (e.g. spelling *ache* as *ake*). **Word retrieval** can be a problem, and similar words may be confused (e.g. *vertical* and *vertices*).

■ Understanding instructions

Complex instructions can be confusing and words may not be retained accurately. Students with dyslexia may have difficulty with integrating new information into existing information.

■ Reading

Reading can be slowed down because of the need to read material more than once. Students may lose their place when reading, miss a line out, miss out words altogether or misread words. Sequencing can also be difficult. This affects the ability to remember mathematical tables, alphabetical order, months of the year, days of the week, and left and right.

■ Writing and other motor skills

Students may have poor-quality or difficult-to-read handwriting, co-ordination problems and inconsistent handedness. Copying information from book or board is especially difficult, particularly if the words are in cursive (joined-up) handwriting or small print. They also have difficulty with returning to the correct place.

■ Concentration

Dyslexia can lead to short concentration spans. Students may tire easily in a lesson that involves a lot of reading or writing.

■ Personal organisation

Organisational skills may be poor.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

■ Use differentiated resources and a variety of learning styles

Build in the chance for discussion, a hands-on approach and group work as well as teacher-led and independent learning. Use a variety of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic resources and activities. For example, making tapes, discussion, practicals, making notes or highlighting in a visual and colourful form, studying photographs/images/video, drama.

■ Equipment

Students benefit from having the following essential 'kit': a highlighter to highlight key points; *post-it* notes to mark pages; a small hole-puncher for handouts. Students should also be encouraged to date everything for easier retrieval.

■ Instructions

Instructions should be sequenced clearly. Do not give too many instructions at once. Avoid instructions while students are reading or copying. Break large tasks into smaller chunks and take in work at stages to help keep students on task. Give deadline reminders. Put new vocabulary on a wall chart. Direct students to key points and encourage them to highlight.

■ Marking

Use clear writing when marking. Avoid correcting each spelling: target a few key words to be learned. Give these on a *post-it* note that can be attached to any relevant file or book for easy viewing.

■ Handouts/resources

Written resources should use a sans serif font such as *Arial* or *Comic Sans* with a minimum font size of 12. They should contain a summary at the start and end. Introduce new vocabulary right at the beginning. Provide information visually or in diagrammatical form where possible. Number any paragraphs. If you are using *Powerpoint* make it clear which point you are talking to. When writing on **white boards** use lower case print (not UPPER CASE). Use different colour pens on the board to make it easier for students to locate things. Provide **writing frameworks** as examples of the type and style of writing required for your subject. Ask students if they would prefer material on pastel-coloured rather than white paper.

■ Summarise and check

Summarise the previous lesson at the beginning of the next. Remind students of key points at the end of each lesson. Check that learning is taking place.

■ Be positive

Ask the students what makes learning a positive experience for them. Remember that self esteem may be low and in need of boosting.

■ Examinations

Students with dyslexia may be granted special examination provisions. These will be agreed by the examination boards depending on the circumstances. The special provisions may include extra time in exams, a reader, amanuensis (scribe), use of a word processor, or specially adapted papers. Such special provisions should also be taken into account for internal tests and examinations.