

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that mainly affects the development of literacy and language-related skills. It is likely to be present at birth and to be lifelong in its effects. It is characterised by difficulties with phonological processing, rapid naming, working memory, processing speed, and the automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual's other cognitive abilities.

Visit www.bdadyslexia.org.uk for more information.

Key difficulties faced by the dyslexic learner

- Pupils with dyslexia have a marked and persistent difficulty in learning to read, write and spell, despite progress in other areas.
- Pupils may have poor reading comprehension, handwriting and punctuation.
- They may also have difficulties in concentration and organisation together with difficulties in remembering sequences of words or dates and in sequencing ideas.
- They may mispronounce common words or reverse letters and sounds in other words.

Strategies to support the dyslexic learner

Reading

- ✓ Before giving a reading task, give an overview of the topic to the class and put key words on the board.
- ✓ Help to give a focus for the dyslexic pupil by providing a skeleton mind map with key ideas drawn in or outline notes with helpful diagrams or illustrations.
- ✓ Provide a series of questions to guide the pupil through the text.
- ✓ Encourage the use of visualising techniques.
- ✓ Give access to relevant computer software or video/DVD clips.
- ✓ Only use the best quality photocopied material and ensure that any colour preferences are taken into account.
- ✓ Translate words/text into the dyslexic pupil's stronger modality. For example, change

writing into speech, description into diagrams, notes into mind maps, facts into symbols and handwriting into word processing.

- ✓ Introduce key vocabulary before the topic.
- ✓ Deliberately teach and rehearse key words. Use multisensory techniques and encourage the pupil to visualise the word and associated images. Repeat this as often as possible and encourage the pupil to continue this at home.
- ✓ Present explanations and discussions at a pace appropriate for the dyslexic pupil. If a teacher speaks even fractionally faster than a dyslexic pupil can process, the lesson, or teaching point, however well presented, will prove disastrous.
- ✓ The gift of time is probably the most valuable support you can give to a dyslexic pupil.
- ✓ Use mnemonics and symbols where possible.
- ✓ Give semantic clues, derivations and associated words.

Writing

- ✓ Key to success is an understanding of the need to 'question the question' to analyse the title in order to identify the topic area, key verbs and limiting words.
- ✓ Provide a template to enable the pupil to 'question the question'.
- ✓ Practise 'brainstorming' (the technique we use for generating a list of ideas quickly) with the learner (or the class in general).
- ✓ Help to develop thinking steps by encouraging mind mapping.
- ✓ Encourage the use of a computer/word processor for planning, sequencing ideas and writing up essays.

Strategies to support the dyslexic learner (cont.)

Inside the classroom

- ✓ Use alternate font colours (e.g. blue/red or green/black) for each line or teaching point. This helps the pupil to 'keep on track' when moving from board/screen to page.
- ✓ When at all possible, avoid black font on white paper. Cream paper is recommended as is blue font. Use rounded fonts such as Comic Sans or Calibri.
- ✓ Encourage use of a laptop or iPad, especially if the pupil can touch type. This frees the learner up to keep his/her eyes on the board and gain a better understanding by giving full attention to what is written.
- ✓ Provide a handout with the key points written in. The pupil should annotate this, add symbols or diagrams or convert it to a mind map.
- ✓ Pupils with dyslexia can find note taking and copying from the board a real challenge so the pupil can take a photograph of the board.
- ✓ Help to adopt a style of note taking which best suits his/her strengths and learning modalities.
- ✓ Consider use of a voice recorder. The dyslexic learner may find an audio recording more useful than written.
- ✓ Help the pupil to develop thinking steps by encouraging mind mapping. This can be either on paper or a computer or through mind mapping software. Please print a colour copy as the pupil may well have linked specific colours to key themes and meaning.

Organisation

- ✓ Chunk homework tasks or classwork into manageable parts. The dyslexic pupil can become discouraged when faced with large amounts of work so encouraging them to complete smaller pieces of work will help.
- ✓ Go over homework requirements and coursework tasks in detail to ensure the pupil understands what to do.
- ✓ Read instructions aloud when you know it is hard for them to decode accurately and when possible, type up what is needed from them so they can tick off sections once completed.
- ✓ It can often be a good idea to ask the pupil to tell you what he/she needs to do in the task. This will really help with understanding.
- ✓ Dyslexic learners may often appear disorganised – forgetting class notes or bringing the wrong notes, being late for lessons and not being fully prepared for specific tasks or lessons in general. Colour coding can help. Having one colour for one subject (files, paper etc) is often effective.
- ✓ Giving pupils the time to put notes in the correct folder is important. If left to the learner, this may not happen! Giving some lesson time to simply ensure that notes from a particular topic are placed in the correct section can be invaluable. This can be discreetly checked when possible.

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