

Learning support can help you to develop your skills so that your work reflects your true abilities

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LEARNING SUPPORT

Tutor Guide

Supporting students with dyslexia

What is dyslexia?

Over the last 100 years there have been many definitions. There is an on-going debate among dyslexic people and other specialists about what dyslexia is and what causes it. We know that there is no link between dyslexia and general intelligence level – even Einstein was thought to be dyslexic. Many dyslexic people are bright, verbally articulate and talented. They are often artistic, creative, lateral thinkers and good problem solvers. People often describe themselves as 'picture thinkers' and have excellent visualisation skills when it comes to looking at layouts, diagrams and how things fit together. This may account for some of the talented artists and engineers in our college!

So, is dyslexia a 'disability'? It is often described as a 'hidden disability' because the underlying problems are often masked by good verbal ability. It can certainly cause a variety of difficulties and frustrations affecting areas such as literacy, listening skills, holding attention, short-term memory or co-ordination. There are many common features, although no two people are alike.

We might prefer to think of it as a 'learning difference' as many people would not consider themselves to have a disability. 'Picture thinkers' may think predominantly in images rather than words. This may cause some specific problems with language processing, so that people may need to 'translate' their thoughts into language and convert the language they hear and read back into images. This can cause processing delays. Many people with dyslexia experience sensory disturbance of some sort, for example visual disturbance when looking at print or auditory processing difficulties.

The dyslexic learning style may be different and with better understanding about our learners' strengths and the difficulties they face in the classroom, we can ensure that dyslexic learners are successful.

The learning support service

The learning support service is there to help students and staff. We can provide:

- ◆ Dyslexia counselling – from general help and advice to full diagnosis where appropriate
- ◆ Arrangements for exam concessions (for example, extra time, a reader or a scribe)
- ◆ 1-1 learning support where possible and appropriate
- ◆ Software help – training to use computer dictation and screen-reading software
- ◆ Other specialist software for reading and spelling
- ◆ Equipment loan – spellcheckers, reading pens, Dictaphones, keyboards
- ◆ Assessments for visual disturbance with print, provision of plastic overlay sheets
- ◆ Advice for staff – we are always happy to discuss a learner's needs and offer advice
- ◆ We have a good range of books on loan in the library dyslexia section

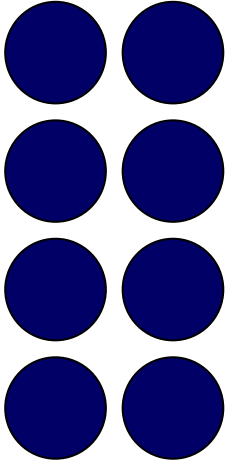
- ◆ There are many useful websites on dyslexia. One very practical and comprehensive website is: www.uji.com/dyslexia

In general:

- ◆ Be positive about dyslexia. Recognise and praise people's strengths and support their difficulties. Make it clear that having dyslexia is not a stigma
- ◆ Talk to learners in general about dyslexia and make opportunities for learners to disclose their difficulties
- ◆ Tell people about the help they can get and encourage them to come to learning support for a confidential chat
- ◆ If student is comfortable, pair them up with a 'study buddy' – another learner who can support them for example, by providing photocopies of their notes or helping with reading difficulties
- ◆ Support learners in developing good study habits –labelling work, filing it correctly, revising frequently

Supporting students with maths

- ◆ Learners are curious – they will want to know why, so...
- ◆ Avoid abstract rules and rote methods (e.g. 'borrowing' in subtraction without showing why)
- ◆ People can sometimes work out a rule from a series of examples
- ◆ Use visual and practical hands-on activities wherever possible
- ◆ Show tables visually e.g. as columns of squares or circles, rather than rely on auditory rote-learning:



- ◆ Some people like learning 'finger methods' for tables
- ◆ Provide squared paper
- ◆ Use coloured square background on electronic board or OHT transparency
- ◆ Provide talking calculators so that learners can check they are pressing the right number!
- ◆ Discuss alternative names for instructions (e.g. for multiplication: multiply, times, lots of, x, product, of, by, 'six sevens')
- ◆ Lots of good strategies for maths can be found in: Maths for the Dyslexic (Anne Henderson), What to do when you can't learn times tables (Steve Chinn) and The Gift of Learning (Ronald Davis)
- ◆ Learners are often affected by short-term memory difficulties, so build in plenty of review opportunities.

What difficulties do our dyslexic learners face?

- ◆ **Writing** – slow, laboured handwriting, erratic spelling, poor independent spelling skills, so will not be able to spell words 'unseen'. There may be a big gap between reading and writing ability, poor sense of punctuation, muddled sentence structure – inability to transfer thoughts clearly onto paper, even though they can express their ideas well verbally.
- ◆ **Short-term memory** – people are often 'quick forgetters' rather than slow learners. They may understand well but are unable to retain information. This will apply to any rote learning tasks (such as learning times tables) or information presented as an abstract rule or rote method ('i' before 'e' except after 'c'; 'always start on the right when you subtract'). When spelling, people may not be able to remember what the word looks like, even if they have seen it many times. This can be a great source of frustration.
- ◆ **Maths** – may confuse numbers (69/96) and symbols (+ x), may not be able to follow a sequence of instructions. They may get to an answer by an unconventional route and cannot show workings, they may not be able to line up figures accurately. They may have difficulty understanding the language of maths questions.
- ◆ **Reading** – learners may need to a text a few times to absorb it fully, they may experience visual print disturbance which can be quite severe, they may not be able to relate sounds to letters so will not be able to work out unfamiliar words, they may be thrown by little, everyday words which do not make sense in isolation (such, so, that...). They often have poor proof-reading skills (can't spot errors) and may hate reading aloud.

Supporting students with reading

- ◆ Cut down on tasks involving excessive reading and copying
- ◆ Make sure photocopies can be read clearly (no tiny reductions or wobbly print)
- ◆ When producing handouts, avoid lots of changes of font size and style, italics etc which make the text look too 'busy'
- ◆ Try out a variety of handout styles – e.g. mind-maps, flow charts
- ◆ Produce electronic handouts (via intranet, 'pool' or disc) for reading back on a pc using a screen-reader
- ◆ Make sure board work is clear, using different colours to highlight important parts
- ◆ Allow extra time for reading and writing support in class work and tests
- ◆ Refer to learning support to arrange reading support in exams
- ◆ Try to select reading material that is clearly laid out and uses straight forward language
- ◆ Encourage people to make a mental image of what they read as they go along
- ◆ Provide text with diagrams, graphics, tables etc. where possible
- ◆ Reading aloud causes much anxiety – don't insist
- ◆ Check for print disturbance and provide notes on coloured paper, according to student preference (or an overlay sheet may help, so refer them to learning support)
- ◆ Make adjustments to the computer screen (background colour, font size, style and colour)
- ◆ Where possible, adjust the background colour of the electronic whiteboard to reduce glare
- ◆ Some people find handwriting especially hard to read- so check discretely that they can read yours!

Supporting students with writing

- ◆ Avoid excessive amounts of copying from the board – students who struggle may not copy accurately or absorb the information
- ◆ Provide gapped handouts or copies of notes to reduce writing load
- ◆ AVOID DICTATION
- ◆ Mark for content, make allowances for technical errors – people are not necessarily being sloppy or careless!
- ◆ Explain corrections fully and give examples to help learners improve
- ◆ Provide spelling support (good strategies to learn important words)
- ◆ Avoid giving rules – let learners work out the rule from a series of examples
- ◆ Encourage students to keep alphabetical notebooks for difficult and important vocabulary
- ◆ Allow students to tape-record important parts of the lesson instead of note-taking available in class
- ◆ Have portable spellcheckers
- ◆ Let learners present work in different formats – mind-maps, bullet points, taped or video evidence, photographs
- ◆ Always give written instructions for important tasks and make sure instructions are clear and precise so that learners know what is expected
- ◆ Check portfolios etc. regularly to make sure learners are on track – there's nothing more disheartening (or difficult) than having lots of bits of work to complete at the end of the course
- ◆ Provide examples so that learners know what is expected and use writing frames (outline guidelines), for example for writing a report
- ◆ For people with real handwriting difficulties, borrow a portable keyboard from the LRC if they prefer to type.
- ◆ Tell them about computer dictation – our up-to-date software can provide a real solution for learners.