

# DYSLEXIA IN THE CLASSROOM

## A Teacher's Guide



### INTRODUCTION

You have a student who has been diagnosed with dyslexia. You may be wondering, what now? How do I support this student? We are here to help.

First and foremost, it is important for you to know that this is not the only dyslexic student in your classroom. It may be that this is the only student that has received an official diagnosis.

1 in every 5 students is dyslexic. Consider how this translates to the context of your classroom.

A dyslexic student's degree of difficulty with reading, writing, speaking varies from child to child due to inherited differences in brain development, as well as the type of teaching the child has received. Their brain is perfectly normal, often very intelligent, but their strengths are in areas other than reading and writing. This "difference" goes undetected until the student finds difficulty when learning to read and write. This guide is to provide you with basic information about dyslexia and to be a resource that will increase your capacity to ensure the success of the diverse group of learners in your classroom.

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## WHAT IS DYSLLEXIA?

The formal definition of dyslexia is:

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

In short, dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, which result in people having difficulties with certain language skills, especially reading. Students with dyslexia usually experience difficulties with other language skills, such as spelling, writing, and pronouncing words. Dyslexia affects individuals throughout their lives; however, its impact can change at different stages in a person's life.

It is referred to as a learning disability because dyslexia can make it very difficult for a student to succeed academically in the typical instructional environment, and in its more severe forms, will qualify a student for special education, special accommodations, and/ or extra support services.



## WHAT CAUSES DYSLEXIA?

The exact causes of dyslexia are still not completely clear, but brain imagery shows differences in the way the brain of a person with dyslexia develops and functions.

Dyslexia has a genetic component and can often be traced in family lines.

Dyslexia is not due to either lack of intelligence or desire to learn; with appropriate teaching methods, students with dyslexia can learn successfully.

Dyslexia occurs in people of all backgrounds and intellectual levels.

Dyslexia is not caused by environmental factors such as watching too much tv, not doing enough homework or eating too much junk food.

## MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT DYSLEXIA

There are many misconceptions about dyslexia which make it much more difficult for someone with dyslexia to receive help and generally be understood.

It is a myth that individuals with dyslexia “read backward.” Their spelling can look quite jumbled at times not because they read or see words backward, but because students have trouble remembering letter symbols for sounds and letter patterns in words.

Dyslexia is not a disease and, therefore, there is no cure. A dyslexic child will be a dyslexic adult.

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### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DYSLEXIA

As a teacher, you are on the front lines of identification. Although you can not diagnose dyslexia, it is important that you can recognize the signs and point parents in the right direction for getting help.

General problems experienced by people with dyslexia include the following: Learning to speak, learning letters and their sounds, organizing written and spoken language, memorizing number facts, reading quickly enough to comprehend, keeping up with and comprehending longer reading assignments, spelling correctly, and doing math operations.

Some specific signs for elementary-aged children may include:

- Difficulty with remembering simple sequences such as counting to 20, naming the days of the week, or reciting the alphabet
- Difficulty understanding the rhyming of words and producing rhymes.
- Trouble recognizing words that begin with the same sound or manipulating sounds. Such as what is fat without the f?
- Difficulty with word retrieval - frequently uses words like "um " and "that thing" rather than specific words to name objects.
- Trouble remembering names of places and people
- Difficulty remembering spoken directions.

### IMPACT IN THE CLASSROOM

Academic accommodations and modifications help students with dyslexia succeed in school.

Accommodations level the playing field for students with dyslexia.

Some accommodations can be implemented in the classroom while others need to be supported by an individualized plan such as an IEP or 504 plan.

For example, a student with dyslexia can be given extra time to complete tasks in the classroom but needs this documented on an individualized plan in order to receive this accommodation on standardized tests.

It is important that accommodations are reasonable for the teacher to implement in the classroom. If they go beyond what is reasonable for the classroom you can advocate for an individualized plan for the student.

The following accommodations provide a framework for helping students with learning problems achieve in general education and special education classrooms.



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### ACCOMMODATIONS

**Simplify written directions:** Some directions are written in paragraph form and contain many units of information. These can be overwhelming to some students. The teacher can help by underlining or highlighting the significant parts of the directions.

**Highlight essential information:** If an adolescent can read a regular textbook but has difficulty finding the essential information, the teacher can mark this information with a highlighter.

**Provide additional practice activities:** Some materials do not provide enough practice activities for students with learning problems to acquire mastery on selected skills. It is helpful when teachers can supplement the material with practice activities.

**Provide a glossary or word bank on a sticky-note in content areas.** Students benefit from a glossary of content-related terms.

**Develop reading guides:** A reading guide helps the reader understand the main ideas and sort out the numerous details related to the main ideas. A reading guide can be developed paragraph-by-paragraph, page-by-page, or section-by-section.

**Use of assistive technology:** Students benefit from listening to books on tape and using text reading and word processing computer programs. Speech-to-text opportunities such as Voice Typing in Google Docs is extremely helpful for students with dyslexia.

**Use explicit teaching procedures:** Many commercial materials do not cue teachers to use explicit teaching procedures; thus, the teacher often must adapt materials to include these procedures. You can include explicit teaching steps within your lessons (i.e., present an advanced organizer, demonstrate the skill, provide guided practice, offer corrective feedback, set up independent practice, monitor practice, and review).

**Repeat directions:** Students who have difficulty following directions are often helped by asking them to repeat the directions in their own words. If directions contain several steps, break down the directions into subsets. Simplify directions by presenting only one portion at a time and by writing each portion on the chalkboard as well as stating it orally.



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### ACCOMMODATIONS, CONTINUED

**Clarify written directions:** When using written directions, be sure that students are able to read and understand the words as well as comprehend the meaning of sentences.

**Provide a copy of lesson notes:** The teacher can give a copy of lesson notes to students who have difficulty taking notes during presentations.

**Use step-by-step instructions:** New or difficult information can be presented in small sequential steps.

**Simultaneously combine verbal and visual information:** Verbal information can be provided with visual displays (e.g., on an overhead or handout).

**Write key points or words on the chalkboard/whiteboard:** Prior to a presentation, write new vocabulary words and key points on the chalkboard/whiteboard.

**Use mnemonic instruction:** Mnemonic devices can be used to help students remember key information or steps in a learning strategy.

**Emphasize daily review:** Daily review of previous learning or lessons can help students connect new information with prior knowledge.

**Have students turn lined paper vertically for math:** Lined paper can be turned vertically to help students keep numbers in appropriate columns while computing math problems.

### LITERACY INSTRUCTION

Most people with dyslexia need help from a teacher, tutor, or therapist specially trained in a structured literacy approach.

Many individuals with dyslexia need one-on-one help so that they can move forward at their own pace.

In addition, students with dyslexia often need a great deal of structured practice and immediate, corrective feedback to develop automatic word recognition skills.

For students with dyslexia, it is helpful if their outside academic therapists work closely with classroom teachers.

### STRUCTURED LITERACY

Structured Literacy instruction is marked by several elements:

1. Phonology is the study of the sound structure of spoken words and is a critical element of Structured Language instruction. Phonological awareness includes rhyming, counting words in spoken sentences, and clapping syllables in spoken words. An important aspect of phonological awareness is phonemic awareness or the ability to segment words into their component sounds, which are called phonemes. A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in a given language that can be recognized as being distinct from other sounds in the language. For example, the word cap has three phonemes (/k/, /ă/, /p/), and the word clasp has five phonemes (/k/, /l/, /ă/, /s/, /p/).

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### STRUCTURED LITERACY, CONTINUED

2. Sound-Symbol Association: Sound-symbol association must be taught and mastered in two directions: visual to auditory (reading) and auditory to visual (spelling). Additionally, students must master the blending of sounds and letters into words as well as the segmenting of whole words into the individual sounds. The instruction of sound-symbol associations is often referred to as phonics. Although phonics is a component of Structured Literacy, it is embedded within a rich and deep language context.

3. Syllable Instruction: A syllable is a unit of oral or written language with one vowel sound. Instruction includes teaching of the six basic syllable types in the English language: closed, vowel-consonant-e, open, consonant-le, r-controlled, and vowel pair. Knowledge of syllable types is an important organizing idea. By knowing the syllable type, the reader can better determine the sound of the vowel in the syllable. Syllable division rules heighten the reader's awareness of where a long, unfamiliar word may be divided for great accuracy in reading the word.

4. Morphology: A morpheme is the smallest unit of meaning in the language. The Structured Literacy curriculum includes the study of base words, roots, prefixes, and suffixes.

5. Syntax: Syntax is the set of principles that dictate the sequence and function of words in a sentence in order to convey meaning. This includes grammar, sentence variation, and the mechanics of language.

6. Semantics: Semantics is that aspect of language concerned with meaning. The curriculum (from the beginning) must include instruction in the comprehension of written language.

### SYSTEMATIC & CUMULATIVE

Structured Literacy instruction is systematic and cumulative. Systematic means that the organization of material follows the logical order of the language. The sequence must begin with the easiest and most basic concepts and progress methodically to more difficult concepts. Cumulative means each step must be based on concepts previously learned.

Explicit Instruction: Structured Literacy instruction requires the deliberate teaching of all concepts with continuous student-teacher interaction. It is not assumed that students will naturally deduce these concepts on their own.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

5 Core Components of Literacy  
[www.smarterintervention.com/membership](http://www.smarterintervention.com/membership)

This course provides you immediate access to training and a growing library of resources around the 5 Core Components of Literacy. Perfect for teachers, this gives you activities to use in your phonics, phonological awareness, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and vocabulary (and writing!) instruction.

Delivering SMARTER Intervention  
[www.smarterintervention.com/course](http://www.smarterintervention.com/course)

This comprehensive training program is designed for SLPs/Interventionists who want to support struggling readers. It comes with our online training course, a full curriculum, and so much more!