

Helen Arkell
Director of Learning Support

Understanding Dyslexia and other Literacy Difficulties



Yvonne Whitestone
Head of Education
Helen Arkell

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Definition

"Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling.

Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed.

Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities.

It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no clear cut-off points.

Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor co-ordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia.

A good indication of the severity and persistence of dyslexic difficulties can be gained by examining how the individual responds or has responded to well-founded intervention."

Rose J., 2009, *Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties*.

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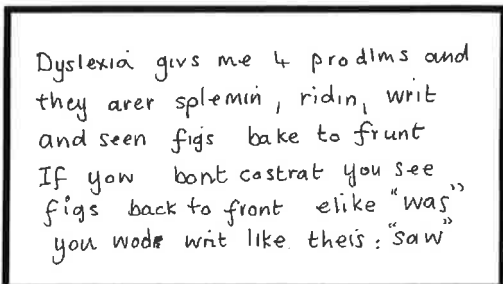
BDA Definition

The BDA Management Board adopted Sir Jim Rose's definition with the addition of a further paragraph:

'In addition to these characteristics, the BDA acknowledges the **visual processing difficulties** that some individuals with dyslexia can experience, and points out that dyslexic readers can show a combination of abilities and difficulties that affect the learning process. Some also have **strengths** in other areas, such as design, problem solving, creative skills, interactive skills and oral skills.'

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Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling.



Dyslexia givs me 4 problms and
they arer splemin, ridin, writ
and seen figs bake to frunt
If you bont castrat you see
figs back to front elike "was"
you wod# writ like theis: "saw"

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J., age 7

Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed.

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Phonological awareness

Phonological awareness – the ability to identify and manipulate the sounds in spoken language.

- Learning the code can be very difficult for learners with dyslexia
- Harder for them to map sounds to symbols
- May be, or have been, difficulties with rhyme, alliteration, blending, segmentation
- Reading and spelling development affected



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Verbal memory

Verbal memory – the ability to retain an ordered sequence of verbal material for a short period of time.

- Stores verbally presented material for seconds e.g. remembering a phone number
- One component of working memory

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Working memory

- The ability to hold information for a short period of time while manipulating it, often while linking to long-term memory
- Important for many aspects of learning
- Capacity varies from person to person typically 7 +/- 2 digits



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Effect of Working Memory Difficulties

- Reading/Spelling – holding sounds long enough to work with
- Reading comprehension – maintaining comprehension while decoding
- Writing – planning, sequencing sentences and ideas
- Maths – mental arithmetic, getting lost in processes
- Instructions, homework, organisational difficulties
- Remembering sequences

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Verbal Processing

Verbal processing speed – the time taken to process familiar verbal information.

- Processing information given verbally and responding appropriately
- The information may need to be organised or sequenced in order to perform a task
- Examples - answering a question or carrying out an instruction

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Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities

- A move away from the 'discrepancy' theory.

It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no clear cut-off points.

- From mild to severe
- No sharp dividing line between having dyslexia and not having it.

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Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor co-ordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia.

Difficulties with language, e.g.

- Word retrieval problems
- Pronouncing, perceiving and manipulating the sounds of language
- Understanding and constructing language at speed
- Take things literally



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Difficulties with motor co-ordination, e.g.

Younger

- Getting dressed
- Holding a pencil
- Drawing
- Sports and games

Older

- Speed
- Presentation skills
- Self help and independence



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Difficulties with

- Mental calculation
- Concentration



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Difficulties with personal organisation

- Belongings
- Personal tidiness
- 'In his/her own world'
- Having right equipment and materials
- Time-keeping and meeting deadlines
- 'Bringing it all together', i.e. previewing and planning, having the right equipment, in the right place, at the right time.



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A good indication of the severity and persistence of dyslexic difficulties can be gained by examining how the individual responds or has responded to well founded intervention.

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Visual Processing Difficulties

Some learners experience visual difficulties when working with text. These may include:

- Visual confusions – b/d, u/n, f/t for/from/form
- Blurring/seeing double
- Moving text
- Visual stress/glare from paper
- Tracking difficulties – keeping place



They are often not aware that this is a difficulty and think it is the same for everyone.

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Automaticity



- The ability to perform a task without needing to consciously think about it.
- Many learners with SpLDs often have difficulty achieving automaticity and therefore need to consciously carry out tasks others can do automatically
- A lot more loading on brain power

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Often a mismatch



- general development
- levels of reasoning
- personal skills
- problem solving
- spoken communication



- spelling
- reading
- organisation
- sequencing
- numbers
- writing
- short term memory

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Consequences

- poor self-esteem
- lack of confidence
- excessive tiredness
- lack of motivation
- poor response when under stress
- negativity



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But it is not all bad...

Many dyslexics have strengths in other areas, such as:

- Design
- Problem solving
- Creative skills
- Interactive skills
- Oral skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Practical skills



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Classroom practice



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The Carter review of initial teacher training (ITT) – January 2015, states:

‘.... good teaching for SEND is good teaching for all children’

The strategies used to help learners with dyslexia will benefit **all the learners in the classroom.**

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Slow down.

Allow 'Think Time' – 3 second rule.



Keep instructions simple, and in the order you want them to be done.

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Use signal words – *'three things to remember'*.

Check understanding – verbalising to peers/adults. Ask the student to repeat information back to you (in his own words and in private).

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Break tasks down into achievable chunks.

Give visual support

- Gesture
- Mind maps
- Diagrams/sketches
- Demonstrating
- **WAGOLL** (What A Good One Looks Like)

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- Simplify your grammar – don't use a complex sentence when a simpler one will do

Instead of 'The obstacle course was run by Ben in record time',

say 'Ben ran the obstacle course in record time.'

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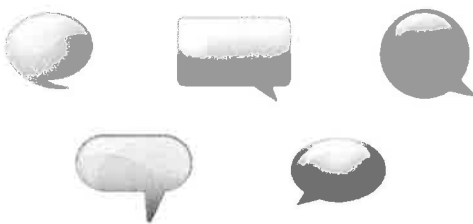
Avoid

- Idioms
- Sarcasm
- Double meanings



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Be prepared to repeat yourself!



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Use positive language

- Would it help if I.....?
- Which bit can I help you with?
- I really like the way you have.....
- That would be even better if.....
- Which bit do you like best?
- Concentrate on what is wanted, not on what to avoid



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Documents/Handouts



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Use a dyslexia friendly font

Verdana
Arial
Comic Sans
Calibri

NOT
Times New Roman

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Avoid underlining and *italics* – can make text appear to run together.

Bold is better.

AVOID BLOCK CAPITALS – the text is much harder to read.

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Left justify passages of text. This is much easier for dyslexic individuals to read than text that has been.....

fully justified as the gaps between words are uneven. This can result in jerky eye movements which make the text more difficult to read.

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Use cream/pastel paper if possible.....

Or

Use grey or blue ink.

Or

Use muted black (85%)

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Copying from the board should not be the homework!

Provide homework instructions:

- > on paper
- > on portal

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3 Top Tips

- ✓ Give 'Think Time' (3 seconds)
- ✓ Give one instruction at a time
- ✓ Give homework on paper or portal, not copied from the board

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t 01252 792400

e enquiries@arkellcentre.org.uk

w www.helenarkell.org.uk
