

ABOUT DYSLEXIA

The term dyslexia has Greek origins and is made up of two parts : dys meaning *difficulty with* and lexia meaning *words*. People with dyslexia will have difficulty with words, in one or more of the following areas:

- reading
- spelling
- handwriting
- listening
- language expression (written and oral)
- organizing information

Research indicates dyslexia is caused from a genetically-based neurological deficit in the language processing centers of the brain. People with dyslexia have an average or above-average intelligence level, but process information differently from other people.

The International Dyslexia Association's definition of dyslexia is as follows:

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 the 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.

Dyslexia has appropriately been called the "hidden disability"; if undiagnosed, it can cause a lifetime of struggle and misunderstanding. Symptoms of dyslexia vary in type as well as severity. People with mild to moderate dyslexia often compensate well and may not experience academic problems until middle, high school or even college. Many students remain unidentified, resulting in unnecessary feelings of frustration and failure: If a parent or teacher notices a pattern of symptoms or simply has a "gut feeling", action should be taken to identify the problem. The following is a list of characteristics and "symptoms" of dyslexia:

READING: Most people with dyslexia hate to read aloud and will avoid it whenever possible. This is because they often:

- Confuse similar small words (where/were, off/of, me/we)
- Omit letters and endings (stand for strand, hunt for hunted)

- Insert letters (strip for trip)
- Confuse letters of similar configuration (f/t, k/h, m/n)
- Reverse and/or invert letters (b/d, p/q, u/n, m/w)
- Transpose letters within words (was/saw, felt/left, preserve/persevere)
- Confuse the order of syllables (callapiter for caterpillar)
- Lose their place and read very slowly with little expression, often ignoring punctuation

Parents and teachers of secondary and college students may not have an opportunity to hear students read orally. They should be alert to the following:

- Student rarely reads for pleasure
- Student selects short, easy books for book reports
- Student often misreads directions on homework and tests
- Student does poorly on standardized tests that require reading whole paragraphs
- Student has difficulty reading textbook assignments:
 - difficulty completing reading in time allowed
 - complains of having to re-read to get meaning
 - performs poorly on tests based solely on textbook readings

SPELLING: People with dyslexia are poor spellers. Teachers should be alert of the following common errors:

- Transposition of letter sequences (knowlegde, Michgian)
- Omission of letters and syllables (afaid/afraid, transportation/transportation)
- Omission of whole syllables, especially suffixes
- Insertion of letters (commone)
- Confusion with homonyms (there/their/they're) and common sight words, or non-phonetic words (what/want/who)

Some students are able to memorize spelling lists and can succeed on weekly tests. However, they will misspell these same words the following week.

Students with dyslexia may spell the same word three different ways in the same paragraph.

Poor spellers avoid "big" words, resulting in short essays that do not reflect their vocabulary level or their true knowledge of a subject.

Students with dyslexia often disguise their spelling errors with illegible handwriting.

HANDWRITING: Students with poor handwriting naturally avoid writing tasks. They may respond beautifully in classroom discussions but their responses on essay tests are noticeably brief. They struggle with written homework assignments often spending an unusual amount of time completing them yet producing a final product that looks messy. Teachers should take note of the students who:

- Print instead of write in cursive
- Write with an inconsistent slant
- Space words unevenly
- Have difficulty forming certain letters
- Confuse similar letters (p/q, b/d, m/n) and numbers (3/8, 6/9, 2/5)
- Insert upper case letters (especially B and D) in the middle of words and sentences
- Have difficulty “keeping up” while taking lecture notes

LANGUAGE EXPRESSION: Students with dyslexia vary greatly in their abilities to use oral as well as written language to express their thoughts. Some simply prefer actions to words. The following problems with language output may be observed:

- Word retrieval problems (uses phrases like “you know” or “whatchamacallit”)
- Awkward self-expression (poor syntax, word retrieval, rambling)
- Poor speech articulation
- Frequent mispronunciations
- Difficulty learning grammar terms and rules
- Difficulty learning a second language

SEQUENCING: Seemingly simple tasks can be frustrating to people with mild dyslexia. They may have difficulty:

- Keeping the alphabet in order (using dictionaries and phone books require extra time)
- Knowing the days of the week and months of the year in order, keeping track of holidays
- Following directions (left/right, before/after, north/south)
- Remember telephone numbers, social security numbers
- Taking phone messages or directions
- Remembering a list of oral instructions
- Copying from books or the board without looking back at each word

ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS: In order to compensate for their academic weaknesses, students with dyslexia need to be extremely well organized. Yet,

some lack a sense of time and space that prevents them from achieving this kind of control over their environment. These students may:

- Forget to do assignments or forget to bring completed assignments to school
- Lose homework papers and possessions
- Have messy desks and bedrooms
- Leave assignments to the last minute and cram for tests
- Show up late or early for appointment/class
- Have difficulty moving from class to class, finding a room, allowing enough time to go to a locker, taking the right books, even adjusting to a new subject and teacher

OTHER MANIFESTATIONS OF DYSLEXIA: As discussed above, dyslexia can affect more than a student's academic life. Here are some other symptoms to watch for:

- Short attention span (especially for difficult school-related subjects)
- Poor coordination (crafts, sports, accident-prone)
- Poor social skills (misinterpretation of social cues and subtleties of language – rarely uses humor, doesn't understand jokes or sarcasm)
- Difficulty understanding abstract concepts (proverbs)
- Difficulty learning to read music
- Unusual signs of fatigue and stress which magnify dyslexic symptoms
- Other family members experience similar problems

TALENTS AND GIFTS OF DYSLEXIA: Because of the uniqueness in how a dyslexic brain processes information, people with dyslexia possess gifts and talents in the following areas, especially areas requiring three-dimensional insights:

- Art
- Architecture
- Mathematics
- Engineering
- Science
- Music
- Athletics
- Drama
- Creative thinking, problem solving
- People skills