

Julie Bennett offers a brief overview of dyslexia, and gives you some pointers on what to do and what not to do in the classroom in order to be dyslexia-inclusive



Dyslexia

What is dyslexia?

The word 'dyslexia' has Greek origins and means 'difficulty with words or language'. There are four components of the dyslexic profile:

- difference
- weakness
- self-belief
- strengths.

Dyslexia is a learning difference. Scientific research has shown that there are differences between the ways a non-dyslexic brain and a dyslexic brain function. Dyslexia affects the way that linguistic information is processed.

Dyslexic learners may have weaknesses in some of the following areas:

- memory
- spoken language
- auditory perception and processing
- sequencing
- word naming
- visual perception and processing
- speed of processing
- decoding written language: A phonemic difficulty (phonological processing) or a graphemic difficulty
- visual disturbance.

These weaknesses often affect a student's learning in one or more of the following areas: reading, writing, spelling, maths, coordination, directionality, and time management.

If dyslexia is not addressed, further difficulties such as frustration, low self-esteem, feelings of failure, a sense of being different and anxiety may

come into play. These are all linked to a dyslexic's self-belief.

There are also some strengths in the dyslexic profile. Research indicates that dyslexic people often excel in areas such as creativity, lateral thinking, 3D thinking, imagination, problem-solving, making unexpected connections and interpersonal skills.

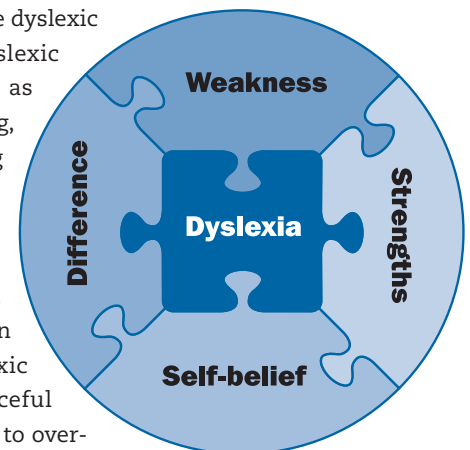
The key to unlocking the potential of learners with dyslexia is to teach them in a way in which they can learn easily. This means teaching dyslexic learners how to become resourceful learners, who can use their strengths to overcome their weaknesses.

The most successful way of teaching dyslexic learners is to use multi-sensory teaching methods, which have proved effective with all ages of students. The advantage of a multi-sensory method is that it enables the learner to use their strengths, while supporting their weaknesses.

Three tools for teaching dyslexic learners

1. Learning spellings

Use the 'look, say, cover, write, check' method along with a multi-sensory approach. For example, use a whiteboard to write the word down, then rub it out and re-write the spelling. You could also write the words in the playground with washing-up bottles filled with water and say the word while looking at it, then sing the word and then over-articulate it (eg 'Wed-nes-day'). You could also say the word again, tapping out the syllables or use puppets and funny voices.





2. COPS Proof-reading

Dyslexic students often have difficulty checking their own work for errors. Assist students to proof-read their written work using the COPS method:

- C**apitalisation
- O**missions
- P**unctuation
- S**pelling.

You can use this as a marking model and teach students to use this method themselves. Check for one aspect of COPS at a time rather than checking for everything all at once. This enables proof reading to become more manageable.

3. Multi-sensory revision

Many dyslexic students find revision and exams a real challenge. The vast quantity of facts that have to be recalled, creates more stress for an already over-worked memory system. Again, one way to help is to introduce the use of multi-sensory learning. If information is learned using as many senses as possible, this will aid dyslexic students to recall the

information. Try using the 'Roman room' method. This is where you attach information (in your imagination) to features of a room that you know very well. It could be the bedroom, kitchen or living room – any room will do. In the room are objects: chairs, pictures, bookshelves, etc. This method will encourage students to associate the things they want to remember with the objects in the room. To recall the information, the student takes a mental 'video tour' around the room and notices the items and recalls their associations with these objects. You can expand this by using another room in the building or even the entire house!

Here is an example of using the Roman room method to recall two key 19th-century figures who helped to advance the study of human biology.

'As you walk into the room, you are greeted by a loud honking noise from an enormous swan. This represents Theodor Schwann. This very serious swan is sitting by the door (The-o-door=Theodor) trying to sell (cell) some small animals. This reminds you that Schwann realised that animal matter was made of cells not 'humours'. (He is very serious not humor-ous.) As you walk over towards the next item you notice that it is a grey bookshelf with a grey man leaning on it. This is Henry Gray who wrote *Gray's Anatomy*. He is holding his book open. On the open page you can see the numbers '5' and '8'. Five looks like a

pregnant woman and eight looks like a snowman. So you see the story in his book of a pregnant woman building a snowman. This reminds you of the year *Gray's Anatomy* was published (1858)'.

To be dyslexia-inclusive:

Don't

- insist on making students copy from a whiteboard/blackboard, as this is incredibly difficult for most dyslexics
- insist on making a dyslexic student read aloud in front of the whole class (reserve reading aloud for a quieter time with the class teacher or give time for the student to prepare a selected passage)
- correct every single mistake every single time
- make the student rewrite every piece of work if there is a mistake in it.

Do

- enable dyslexic learners to go home with accurate instructions about the homework that you have set for them; give them a handout, dictate it into a dictaphone, set up a homework buddy system
- explore a variety of methods for dyslexic students to record information or outcomes, such as tape recording, typing, mapping, voice-activated software, etc
- let the dyslexic learner know that you are interested in their difficulties and encourage them to ask for help.

Do give three views – overview, preview and review

- give an **overview** of the lesson – this helps dyslexics gain a sense of time and place in the lesson
- **preview** activities: 'At the end of the lesson I will ask everyone to tell me what they think is the most important aspect of the Industrial Revolution'. This gives dyslexics extra time to process the information, reflect on it and avoid panic.
- **review** activities: summarise or recap the information that you have covered in the session. This helps to embed the learning in the student's long-term memory.

You will find that these 'three views' are good for all students and are particularly helpful for dyslexic students in coping with some of the memory issues that they face.

More ideas on revision and study can be found in Julie's second book, *Camel Study Skills: Improving Memory, Revision and Exam Technique*, due to be published in Autumn 2006 by Tiercel Publishing. **TEX**



Julie Bennett is a freelance consultant. She can be contacted at: Julie@key4u.co.uk. For a more detailed look at working with dyslexic learners, see Julie's book, *The Dyslexia Pocketbook*, published by Teachers' Pocketbooks.

Further information about dyslexia can be found at:

- Being Dyslexic www.beingdyslexic.co.uk
- British Dyslexia Association www.bdadyslexia.org.uk
- Dyslexia Institute www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk

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