

The 6 L's

In the first feature of a two part series on improving communication with dyslexic learners, Julie Bennett outlines her tips for presenting written communication.

Good communication is fundamental to good education. This article is intended to give

practical ideas of how to make written information more accessible to dyslexic people and those who experience visual disturbance. The ideas and tips will also help



all learners because they will assist you in producing clear, concise information which will help your readers to stay focused on your message.

You can use these tips to produce documents such as worksheets, PowerPoint presentations and letters, whether they are for students, staff or parents. The 6 L's of presenting information are:

1. Legibility
2. Layout
3. Links
4. Language
5. Large picture and Little chunks
6. Look again and Let it settle

1. Legibility

We all know how important it is, when marking books, to ensure that our learners can read our handwriting. It is equally important that printed text is legible. Two aspects which we need to consider regarding legibility are font and effects.

Font- There are two main forms of font those which are: 'serif' (with the curly bits), for example: 'Times New Roman' and those that are 'sans serif' (without the curly bits) such as 'Arial'. Dyslexic learners find it easier to read 'sans serif' fonts.

Recommended styles are:

- Arial
- Comic Sans
- Verdana
- Tahoma

Text is best read when the font is a minimum size of 12 point.

Special fonts- You can purchase some specially designed fonts which might be of interest:

- **Sassoon** - a typeface originally designed to make reading easier - various types of Sassoon are available. www.clubtype.co.uk
- **AFont™** - a typeface designed specifically for low vision readers www.aph.org

There is a typeface under development called read regular, which is being designed specifically for dyslexics. Visit www.readregular.com for more information.

Effects- If you would like to **emphasise** words, make text **bold** rather than underlining text or using whole words made of capital letters. Underlining text can create the impression that the text is blurring for some dyslexics. Using lower case text will generally make it easier on your readers. Compare this example:

Capitals are all the same height which makes it less easy to distinguish the letters.

CAPITALS ARE ALL THE SAME HEIGHT WHICH MAKES IT LESS EASY TO DISINGUISH THE LETTERS.

When working with younger children, who are learning to read and write you might like to consider the choice of font in relation to particular forms of letters. For example: the letters g and a may be printed as g and a, which may not be the most appropriate forms to support your teaching of literacy skills. Other aspects to consider would be the spacing of letters 'r' and 'n' - if they are printed too closely together they look like letter 'm' and could potentially cause confusion to early or poor readers.

2. Layout

Spacing - When planning the layout of information on the page, keep it uncluttered and limit the possibility of visual disturbance by giving consideration to spacing and justification. Between typed lines you should ideally allow for 1.5 lines spacing. The end of lines (right hand edge of the text) need to be uneven, not justified. This makes tracking across from one line to the next easier.

Paper - Some dyslexics experience visual disturbance, which is made worse by reading black text on a white background, so printing on a grey, off-white or pastel paper may help with minimising this difficulty. Using matt paper rather than shiny paper also reduces reflection of light from the paper. Using paper that is not too thin will help to ensure that print from the back of double-sided sheets cannot show through to cause visual interference.

3. Links

Using key words and pictures helps everyone to take information in quickly. The brain receives information more quickly from

Put **key** words in text boxes.



pictures rather than words. If you **link** important parts of the text to **key words** and **pictures**, you will help dyslexics to contextualise the information quickly. You can highlight keywords by making them bold or putting key parts of the information in text boxes within the document. Using pictures which represent key pieces of information helps dyslexic learners to gain meaning from the text and it also provides a break for the eyes when reading.

4. Language

If we keep sentence length **short** and sentence structure **simple**, we will help to combat some of the difficulties that many dyslexic learners have in processing written language. Use:

- **Plain English:** '*Explain why...*' rather than '*Explore the permutations of ...*'
- **Active language:** '*Mrs Jones decided ...*' rather than the passive '*It was decided ...*'

Readability - There are two useful tools which come as part of Microsoft Office Word; **The Flesch reading ease score** and **The Flesch Kincaid grade score**. You can use these to check the readability levels of your computer-generated information, such as letters and worksheets. The readability levels indicate what reading level your text is suitable for.

The Flesch Kincaid grade score rates your writing on an American school grade system. So a score of 7 means an 'average' seventh- grader can

easily understand your writing. (To convert the American grade to the English year group equivalent; add one year, e.g. American grade 7, plus 1 = English Year 8).

You can set up your system to automatically display the reading scores after Word has finished checking spelling and grammar. Use the Microsoft Office Word Help facility to find instructions on how to do this.



Alternatively you could use the **SMOG readability formula** available in the document 'Making Reading Easier' (listed at the end of this article).

5. Large picture, little chunks

Large picture - When presenting new information, include the **large picture**. In other words, give students an overview and tell them where this information fits into the wider context of their learning - the lesson, the topic, the module. This enables them to understand what context they are learning in and to consciously or subconsciously ask predictive questions about the learning.

Conveying the large picture can be done in a multi-sensory way using diagrams, memory maps, acronyms or mnemonics. A good overview would convey the topic outline, the key elements and the progression.

Little chunks - When we break our learning into little chunks or little steps, we create a progressive, structured approach. Processing little

chunks of information is easier than overtiring a weak memory system by trying to recall large amounts of information. Try using bullet points and separating chunks of information with boxes and borders.

6. Look again and let it settle

Look again: Review - At the end of your learning sessions include a **review** of what you have just done. It need only take a few minutes. Present a summary of the information by using a variety of methods, not just written information.

If you really want information to be retained in your students' long-term memory, review the information regularly. Try reviewing after one hour, one day, one week, one month, and six months.

Let it settle: Reflection - When you allow time for reflection on your written material, students can make meaning from the information and ask further questions when they have thought about it. This enables them to:

- recall the recent learning
- transfer the information to the long-term memory
- make associations and links
- reflect on and absorb what they have just learned
- formulate questions which can clarify their understanding of the content

Allowing reflection time is particularly valuable to dyslexics because it provides extra processing time.

Copying written information - It is worth making a note about writing on boards; this means whiteboards, blackboards, green boards or interactive boards. It is essential that we do not ask dyslexic students to copy information down from a board to paper. Dyslexic learners may experience a combination of difficulties in areas such as:

- reading
- spelling
- writing
- remembering what they have just read
- tracking difficulties
- finding their place each time they look up or down
- recalling the spelling
- maintaining a correct visual image of the symbols/ letters/ numbers
- transferring information from a distant vertical plane near horizontal plane

These difficulties make copying from a board challenging for most dyslexics. The copying process puts an excessive strain on their weaker skills and tires them out easily. The value of dyslexics copying must be questioned. If the information to be copied is for example, homework instructions, it may be more effective to simply give a printed copy which should be stuck or stapled directly into a homework diary rather than left loose. This will give more chance of the homework tasks being completed. Alternatively allow your dyslexic learners to record you reading the directions via a Dictaphone.

Improving accessibility

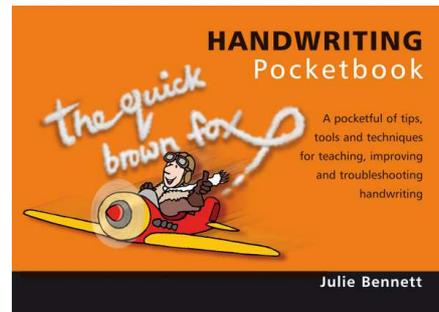
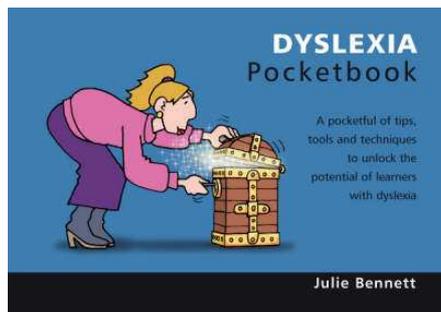
When we incorporate the features of the 6L's into our presentation of written material, we will find that we greatly improve the accessibility of our text to all our readers, and in particular dyslexic learners.

For more information:

- The British Dyslexia Association has a **Dyslexia Style Guide** available on their website: www.bdadyslexia.org.uk
- The **Basic Skills Agency** produces a booklet called **Making Reading Easier: school version** and is available in various forms from www.basic-skills.co.uk
- **The Plain English Society**: www.plainenglish.co.uk

This article by Julie Bennett appeared in nasen's Special Magazine January 2007 . For information about Special magazine go to www.nasen.org.uk .

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