

The 6 R's:

In the second feature of our series on enhancing learning for dyslexic pupils, Julie Bennett provides tips for improving verbal communication.

Dyslexic learners may have difficulties with: auditory memory, auditory processing and auditory sequencing. This means that they may experience some degree of difficulty in:

- **remembering** what you have said to them
- **quickly processing** what you say to them
- **attending** to your verbal instructions
- **recalling** a list or series of auditory instructions
- **focusing** on learning whilst there are other things going on (particularly other noise around them)



Sometimes you will be addressing the whole class, the learning group, or sometimes the individual. Among the general classroom noise a dyslexic with auditory processing difficulties may 'miss' verbal instructions. This article addresses some of the reasonable adjustments you can make for dyslexics in your verbal communication:

1. Redirect
2. Repeat
3. Reduce
4. Relate
5. Remind
6. Recap

1. Redirect their attention

The phrase 'redirecting attention' refers to attracting attention away from one



activity, towards another. Good teachers will use effective techniques to **redirect** their learners' attention to verbal instructions. One example would be to have a **key word** such as "**Focus!**" which means "Everyone pay attention". Every time you need the attention of the whole class' you say, "Focus!" This acts as an attention-grabber and enables the use of a single word

rather than a lengthy sentence which may be lost among other noise.

Another technique would be to use a small hand bell, which is rung just before you give an announcement to the whole class.

It has been common practice for many years to give students the instruction, "Look at me when I am talking to you!" However, recent research suggests that gaze aversion (not making eye contact), may be more helpful than we first thought. Perhaps 'looking away' is a technique which helps processing, focus and concentration. One dyslexic boy illustrated this well when he said:

"When you ask me to look at your face when you are talking to me, that's all I can do ... look at your face... I can't hear what you are saying."

What he meant was that the focus of his attention became the teacher's face, rather than the words he was listening to.

Another way that you can **redirect** their attention is to use learners' first **names** when addressing them with personal instructions. Some learners respond well to a gentle **touch** on the shoulder in order to get their attention.

Alerting learners to the fact that they will need to **remember** what you are about to say, will help them to take in the information.

Giving **advanced notice** that you are going to issue **instructions** or **ask for a response**, will also **redirect** attention. It will allow dyslexic learners time to prepare and organise a response.

2. Repeat

You will find that some dyslexic learners frequently ask you to **repeat** questions and directions. It may seem as if they constantly need to check and clarify the instructions. What is most likely to be happening is that their auditory memory system is under pressure and they are checking that they have recalled and processed the information correctly. If you discourage the asking of questions, you are potentially placing your students under more stress and decreasing the effectiveness of their already overworked auditory memory. However, if you are happily prepared to **repeat** the question, this will help lessen the stress and minimise the difficulties.

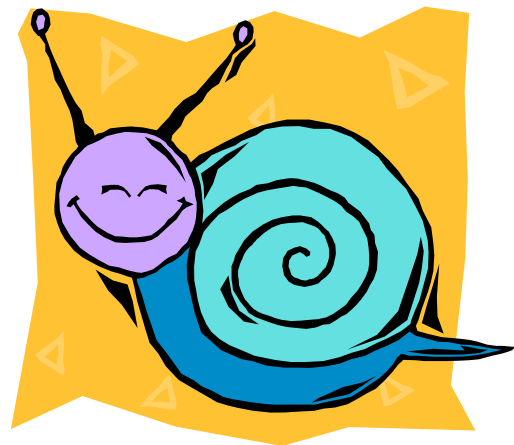
3. Reduce

When giving a series of verbal instructions, **reduce** the items in the list. Some dyslexic learners with auditory difficulties will find it very difficult to recall more than two instructions; many will find it difficult to recall more than three. Reducing the number of directions makes the process of remembering less complex.

4. Relate

Once you have reduced the list you might like to try teaching the use of strategies which create **relationships** between the items in order to aid recall. So, for example, the instruction might be, 'When you go home tonight I would like you to find some information about snails, learn your spellings and remember to bring in your PE kit tomorrow.' In order to **relate** these items to each other you could work with visualisation and multi-sensory imagination

and create a short story: 'In your mind's eye create a picture of a snail. Imagine the snail crawling in your hand. What does it feel like? Now put a magician's hat on your snail. What colour is it? Get the snail to give a wave of a magic wand and mutter a spell. (The link here is 'spell' and 'spellings'!) Then the snail 'magics' a rucksack to put on his back.



What noise do you hear as the rucksack appears? Can you see the PE kit popping out of the rucksack?'

The technique builds on the strengths of dyslexics in order to overcome their weaknesses. So, in this case the learner only has to recall a short story of a snail with a magician's hat and wand magicking a PE bag onto his back.

You will generally find that, once you have taught this technique, your learners will become very skilled at practising it and remembering short lists of information. It is a useful tool for those learners who struggle with organisation skills, because it enables them to recall things, even if they lose the piece of paper or the book they have written it in.

Using **multisensory language** is also a useful technique. It **relates** your speech to the learners own **language preferences**. You can vary your use of language so that it includes some visual, auditory, kinaesthetic and non

specific words. So for example when giving feedback you might say: “Jenny, that’s a great idea!”

That example uses language which is non specific to a particular sense. If you translate this to sensory specific language you might say:

Visual	Auditory	Kinaesthetic
Jenny, that looks like a great idea!	Wow Jenny! That sounds like a fantastic idea!	Jenny, that feels like a really good idea to me.

By adapting phrases to include sensory-specific language you are helping to create rapport as well as introducing richness to your language.

5. Remind

Given that there is often a significant auditory processing issue for dyslexics it is always beneficial to offer **reminders** to pupils, not only in the sense of repeating the instructions but also in terms of providing the information in a different form. You could offer **reminders** of any auditory lists of information in written form. This can be **full written directions, key words, memory-maps or key pictures**. Some pupils may prefer to make notes using key words or pictures and therefore create the reminder themselves.

Alternatively you can record your instructions by dictaphone so that the pupil can play it back later on. This works particularly well for homework instructions.

6. Recap

If you are giving detailed instructions, **recap** on the key points at the end. The recap need only be a **key word**, or a **picture** representing the word, for each

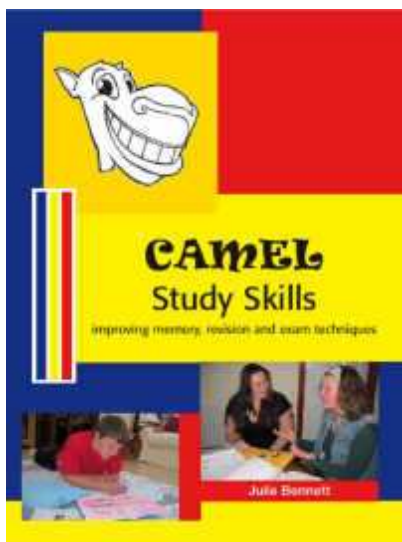
stage. Giving a **summary** in this way relieves the working memory and reinforces the verbal information.

So, when talking with dyslexics, if you are mindful of the six R's, you will go a long way to minimising the effects of weaker auditory skills. You will not only improve your communication, but also assist your learners to enhance their listening skills.

For more information

Research about gaze aversion by Dr Gwyneth Doherty-Sneddon at Stirling University can be found in an article called "Don't look now I'm trying to think: children's eye gaze and cues to comprehension. The Psychologist, 2004, Vol 17, 82. It is available free of charge online at www.bps.org.uk

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