



Supporting Dyslexic Learners

Physical

Seat learners directly facing the speaker or the board, preferably towards the middle of the class. Some learners may benefit from being at the front.

If using white boards or projectors, check that any text is clear and large.

Use plain fonts (sans serif) where possible (Comic Sans/Arial).

Try to eliminate background noise or distracting sounds.

Check for possible Irlen Syndrome (see screening questionnaire) – also check that the pen colours you use on the board are appropriate. Some learners with Irlen's can't read particular pen colours.

Teaching style and support

Use multi-media presentations where possible. Always try to incorporate visual aids (pictures, graphs, illustrations).

Considering 'pairing' a dyslexic learner with a more able partner who can give support.

When giving instructions, provide a written checklist where possible (handout or on board). Be prepared to repeat instructions several times.

Check comprehension and memory by asking your learner to explain in his own words what is required.

Encourage questions – be available for your learner to ask for clarification personally rather than having to admit in front of the class that they haven't understood.

Give handouts wherever possible rather than expecting a dyslexic learner to copy.

If note taking can't be avoided:

- photocopy another learner's notes for the dyslexic learner if appropriate.
- give extra time (don't rub out notes on the board as you go!).
- write clearly and pause frequently to read out what you have written.

- With learners with tracking difficulties, consider writing notes on a white board with different colours for alternate lines.

When tackling a 'practical' project, try and show the learner the finished article wherever possible.

Demonstrate wherever possible.

Don't have long, wordy verbal explanations. Break up explanations into manageable chunks and have plenty of 'hands-on' activities.

Incorporate pair teaching wherever possible. People learn by teaching.

Incorporate games and fun activities (quizzes, software activities, etc)

Adapt materials as necessary:

- Enlarge photocopies (just 10% makes a difference)
- Photocopy onto pastel coloured paper
- Simplify vocabulary or explanations

Never ask a dyslexic learner to read aloud in front of a group. If it is really unavoidable, make sure the material is of an appropriate level and give plenty of time to practice privately beforehand (and ask you about pronunciation/meaning, etc).

Don't ask a dyslexic learner to answer a question in front of a group unless you know they know the answer and can express themselves. Be ready to prompt with the appropriate word if they get stuck – don't leave them struggling.

Break longer assignments into manageable chunks. Set manageable goals.

Pre-teach new vocabulary (it can be practiced on appropriate software).

Set the context for any new topic – find out what your learner already knows about that topic.

Provide plenty of reinforcement and follow-up activities.

Actively teach study skills.

Ensure your learner genuinely understands the requirements of any exam or assessment.

Explain and develop memory strategies.

Marking work:

- mark spelling and content separately
- allow word processed work

- allow learner to present work orally where possible (live or taped)
- Use green, not red
- Mark positively – find as many things to praise as to correct (more if possible!)

When handing out worksheets or written information, read it through with the whole class. Read slowly and clearly and encourage questions.

Emotional support

Recognise and acknowledge individual difficulties or differences, but don't allow them to become an excuse (challenge to overcome – “how can we do this differently”?)

Take every opportunity to highlight the learner's strengths (without becoming insincere). Give your learner every opportunity to show what they do know and can do.

Ensure that all feedback is worded positively. Praise attempts.

Encourage all attempts – mistakes should be seen as a positive thing.

Maths/numeracy

Provide clear examples of every maths operation, showing all the relevant steps.

Explain slowly and step by step.

Ensure that your learner understands the language of maths. Create a wall-chart if necessary for reference.

Use 'concrete' materials where possible. Develop a genuine understanding of the principles, not just rote learning.

Continually review past topics.

Encourage rote learning (tables, useful facts) and develop game or quiz-type materials to practice, but don't over-emphasize it. Ensure that the learner knows how to use calculators and doesn't feel a failure if he can't remember something.

English/language-based subjects

Help your learner to structure work – provide a framework where necessary.

Give continual feedback and guidance.

Provide lists of key words or phrases to refer to.

Pre-teach specialist/subject vocabulary before tackling texts or written work.

Prepare for individual written work by using discussion and group-work.

Anticipate areas of difficulty

Allow word processors, spellcheckers. Encourage the learner to use a dictionary or thesaurus.

When coping with reading/spelling problems, don't insist that the learner works words out for themselves – give them the word/spelling.

Scaffold wherever possible.

General

Incorporate practical hands-on activities wherever possible.

Use computer software or assistive technology where appropriate.

Use multi-sensory materials/multi-media presentations wherever possible.

Develop metacognition.

Teach memory strategies and study skills.

Teach mind-mapping/planning skills.

USEFUL WEBSITES

- www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk - information on dyspraxia
- www.bdadyslexia.org.uk – very comprehensive UK site
- www.ldanz.org.nz – Learning Disability Association of New Zealand
- www.dyslexia.co.nz – new website, in the process of being developed
- www.aboutdyscalculia.org – site produced by Dr Anna Wilson, a leading researcher on dyscalculia
- www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz – NZ site
- www.literacycenter.net - Literacy centre education network
- www.starfall.com Reading website with a wide variety of reading activities
- www.bbc.co.uk/schools/ - very useful source of materials for adults and older teenagers
- <http://www.riverdeep.net/students> - useful resources
- www.jigzone.com - Jigsaws online, which develop spatial awareness, visual discrimination and perceptual organization.
- www.freetypinggame.net
- www.ultimatevocabulary.com – suitable for adults and older teenagers
- www.ultimatememory.com – excellent memory-building activities for older learners
- www.visionandlearning.org – Very interesting and comprehensive website which explains visual perception and suggests activities and resources.
- www.childrensvision.com – visual perceptual information

- www.lumosity.com – memory and perceptual activities which are useful to many older learners.
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/typing>
- www.assistive.dtsl.co.nz – assistive technology website with a variety of resources
- www.writeonhandwriting.com – useful handwriting website
- www.thinkbuzan.com – mind-mapping resources and study skills
- www.abilitynet.org.uk – free advice about how computers can help you deal with dyslexia
- www.help4adhd.org – National Resource centre for ADHD
- www.additudemag.com – useful resources and information about ADHD and Learning disabilities

USEFUL CONTACTS

- Irlen Diagnostic Clinic Ltd, Suite 5 Pakuranga Professional Centre, 267 Pakuranga Rd, Manukau City. 09 576 5390, www.irlen.co.nz
- SPELD National Office, PO Box 24-042, Royal Oak, Auckland 1345, Ph: 09 624 0839
- Learning Disabilities Association of New Zealand – www.ldanz.org.nz