

PDX Reading Specialist, LLC



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Dear Fellow Educator:

I would like to give you a little bit of background on a common, genetically-caused brain wiring called dyslexia, since one (or more!) of your students is dealing with it this year.

First of all, you may not realize how lucky you are to have one of these students! They are typically very intelligent and tend to be creative, out-of-the-box thinkers. You will also find that many of these students are very kind, intuitive, and sensitive to the needs of others. Most also have at least one area that is a HUGE strength (3D art, sports, speaking, building, logic, inventing, comprehension of and insight into an orally-read story, acting/performing, problem-solving, and more...)

These students are often misunderstood to be lazy or just not trying hard enough. These students have tried **hard**. We often don't realize that these students' brains are working many times harder for a task that seems automatic to most students.

The good news for you and these students is that, because of advances in science, we now know how to help people with dyslexia.

An ideal teacher for a student with dyslexia would be one who:

- Is willing to learn a little more about dyslexia (see attached list for a few possible resources).
- Will be supportive and encouraging, and will recognize the student's strengths and intelligence.
- Will encourage and reward effort, not just the end product; grades should be less important than progress.
- Is willing to provide some classroom/homework accommodations until the student reaches grade level (see below for some common accommodations).
- Will keep communication lines open with the student's parents as the school year progresses.

Thank you so much for keeping an open mind, and please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

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"In an era when we can image the brain as an individual reads and literally see the brain at work, it is unacceptable to have children (and adults) struggling to read when they could benefit from what neuroscience has taught us about reading and dyslexia."

–Dr. Sally Shaywitz, neuroscientist at Yale University

Dyslexia is not new, but because of technology and scientific breakthroughs, our understanding of it IS new!

DYS= "difficulty with"

LEXIA= "language" (spelling, reading, writing, and speech)

DYSLEXIA is an unexpected difficulty with language despite intelligence, motivation, and education.

NEW understanding:

- Live brain imaging shows that dyslexia is a genetic "miswiring" in the brain (scientists find this "neural signature" of dyslexia in all languages and in people of all ages).
- A dyslexic reader CAN read, but the area designed to make reading automatic is not being used, so reading will be slow, choppy, and inaccurate.
- It is **not** rare—(Affects 1 in 5 to some degree).
- It can happen to very intelligent people (Albert Einstein, Walt Disney, Thomas Edison, ...).

"American novelist and Academy Award-winning screenwriter John Irving liked to make people understand that dyslexia affects your ability to read and to spell, but not to have an imagination and be creative." –Sally Shaywitz, 2004

- Dyslexia can be detected as early as 5 ½ years of age (watch for non-reading signs: chronic ear infections, delayed speech, trouble memorizing address or alphabet, difficulty learning to tie shoes, trouble pronouncing words correctly, a hard time with rhyming and late to pick a dominant hand).
- It is not a visual problem.
- It does not make people see things backwards.
- It cannot be outgrown.
- The word "dyslexia" CAN be used by teachers if they suspect it.

What you might see:

Spelling

- Poor spelling, even on common words or sight words that have been seen and used over and over.
- Trying to spell by memory, and may treat every word as a sight word to be visually remembered.

Reading

- Slow, choppy, inaccurate reading (attempts will often have similar shape or same letters but in different order). Examples include: likes/licks, stop/spot/post/pots, lots/lost, on/no, from/form, who/how, saw/was, girl/grill, of/for, every/very, called/could, horse/house, how/now, mouth/month, left/felt, etc.
- Guessing based on picture clues or context clues (saying *horse* when the word is *pony*, saying *kitten* when the word is *cat*, or *rug* instead of *mat*).
- Skipping or switching smaller words and prepositions (the, a, of, and, at, to...).
- Leaving off word endings/suffixes.

Handwriting

- Odd letter formation (starting the same letter many different ways, starting at the bottom and going up, using many strokes for a letter that only needs one stroke, no ascending or descending letters, letters have trouble sitting on the line).
- Cursive can be excruciating.
- Odd pencil grip (usually with fist grip or thumb control).
- Often leaves off capitals at beginning of sentence, and sometimes uses capital letters midsentence.
- Very little use of punctuation.

Speech

- Mispronunciation of words, often switching syllables or sounds (aminal, emeny, bisketti, amblance).
- Hard time finding the right word (word retrieval) despite having a good understanding of the meaning of the word – may confuse words with similar parts tornado/volcano, manager/janitor, or may try to describe a word: “You know that **thingy** that you use when...”

Directionality Issues

- People with dyslexia often think in pictures, and are very good at seeing 3D images (they are often good at interior design, landscaping, architecture, creating with Legos, etc.). Picturing the letter “d” as a 3D shape, it could be a d, b, p, or q depending on your perspective. Because of this, you will often see letter reversals, or confusion of letters such as, b/p, and n/u, a hard time learning the difference between *left* and *right*, a hard time telling the time on a clock with hands, and a hard time reading maps.

Trouble Memorizing

- Unless the student can see the logic behind it, they may have trouble memorizing a list or a sequence of steps, such as months of year, days of week, order of the alphabet (without using the song), steps of long division, steps of tying shoes, and basic math facts).

STRENGTHS!!!

- Look for these, too: Excellent thinking skills, an ability to figure things out, curiosity, a great imagination, talent at building things, inventive, athletics, great people skills, music, good logic, mechanical skill, global thinkers, very intuitive and sensitive.

Accommodations:

Listed below are a few examples of common accommodations.

- Extended time on all tests (no timed tests!)
- Not calling on the student to read aloud in front of his/her peers unless the student volunteers or is given time in advance to preview/practice the passage.
- Being flexible when grading spelling and writing; grading more for content, ideas, organization, voice and word choice and less on spelling and conventions.
- Allow for oral testing, or using the student's strengths to show his/her knowledge (e.g., allow the student to produce an oral report or a skit on the content).
- Encourage use of audio books—students need to be “reading” books at their intellectual level.
- Allow parents to act as scribe (write down answers that student dictates, even if answer is incorrect) for written homework.
- Realize that the student will not learn spelling by trying to memorize a list of words. Even if they do okay on the spelling test, the words will be soon forgotten. If you give a weekly spelling test, the student can take it if he/she does not want

to stand out as different, but please do not grade the test. This will also free up time at home to be used for homework or other learning.

LEARN MORE!!!

Books to Read to Your Class:

- Series: *The Adventures of Everyday Geniuses*, by Barbara Esham
 - *If You're So Smart, How Come You Can't Spell Mississippi?*
 - *Last to Finish: A Story About the Smartest Boy in Math Class*
 - *Free Association: Where My Mind Goes During Science Class*
 - *Mrs. Gorski, I think I Have the Wiggle Fidgets*
 - *Stacey Coolidge's Fancy-Smancy Cursive Handwriting*
- *The Alphabet War: A Story About Dyslexia*, by Diane Burton Robb
- *It's Called Dyslexia*, by Jennifer Moore-Mallinos
- *Tom's Special Talent*, by Kate Gaynor
- *What is Dyslexia?: A Book Explaining Dyslexia for Kids and Adults to Use Together* by Alan Hultquist
- *The Don't-Give-Up Kid: Learning Disabilities* by Jeanne Gehret
- *Thank You, Mr. Falker Hardcover*, Patricia Polacco

Professional Books:

- *Overcoming Dyslexia* (Sally Shaywitz)
- *Understanding Dyslexia and Other Learning Disabilities* (Linda Siegel)
- *Dyslexia Wonders: Understanding the Daily Life of a Dyslexic from a Child's Point of View* by Jennifer Smith
- *The Dyslexic Advantage: Unlocking the Hidden Potential of the Dyslexic Brain* by Brock Eide
- *Proust and the Squid*, Maryanne Wolf (2008)
- *Essentials of Assessment and Intervention* by Nancy Mather & Barbara Wendling; John Wiley (2013)

Movies:

- *Journey Into Dyslexia* [http://www.hbo.com/documentaries/journey-into-dyslexia#/
dyslexia#/](http://www.hbo.com/documentaries/journey-into-dyslexia#/)
- *The Big Picture: Rethinking Dyslexia* <http://thebigpicturemovie.com/>
- *Dislecksia—The Movie* www.dislecksiamovie.com
- "Understanding Learning Disabilities: How Difficult Can This Be? The F.A.T. City Workshop," PBS Video Production

You Tube Videos:

- [What's It Like Being Dyslexic?](#)
- [Embracing Dyslexia](#)
- [What is Dyslexia?](#) (TED-ED)
- [Dyslexia: A Hidden Disability](#) (Promotional video for Westmark School; excellent information on dyslexia)
- [What is Dyslexia?](#) (National Center for Learning Disabilities)
- [Dyslexia for a Day](#) (Dyslexia Training Institute)
- [Quinn Lathrop \(Kid\) on Dyslexia](#)
- [Henry Winkler Interview](#)
- [I Can't Do That, But I Can Do This <http://vimeo.com/60135023>](#)
- Understanding Learning Disabilities: How Difficult Can This Be? The F.A.T. City Workshop <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZhRf2fxlyw>

Organizations:

- Decoding Dyslexia www.decodingdyslexia.org
- Dyslexia Training Institute www.dyslexiatraininginstitute.org
- National Center for Learning Disabilities <http://www.nclld.org/>
- International Dyslexia Association <http://www.interdys.org/>
- The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity <http://dyslexia.yale.edu/>
- Eye to Eye <http://eyetoeyenational.org/>
- Headstrong Nation <http://headstrongnation.org/>
- Learning Ally www.learningally.org
- Wrightslaw Special Education Law and Advocacy www.wrightslaw.com
- Oregon Branch of International Dyslexia Assoc. www.orbida.org
- Learning Disabilities Association www.ldanatl.org
- National Reading Panel Report www.nationalreadingpanel.org
- Oregon Literacy Framework www.ode.state.or.us
- LD Online www.LDonline.org
- Bright Solutions for Dyslexia www.dys-add.com
- Dyslexia: A Legislative Information Site www.dyslegia.com

Technology Tools:

- Audiobooks www.learningally.org
- Co:Writer <http://donjohnston.com/cowriter/#.Uufk7DfTnIU>
- Dragon Naturally Speaking <http://www.nuance.com/dragon/index.htm>

University Programs Accredited by International Dyslexia Association (*aligned with the IDA Knowledge and Practice Standards*)

- Antioch University Midwest (Ohio); Dyslexia Certificate Program
- College of Mount Saint Joseph (Cincinnati, Ohio); Reading Endorsement; Master of Arts in Reading Science
- Colorado College (Colorado Springs, Colorado); Master of Arts in Teaching: Literacy Intervention Specialist Program
- Dallas Baptist University (Texas); Master of Arts in Teaching Multisensory Instruction
- Fairleigh Dickinson (Teaneck, New Jersey); Orton Gillingham Teacher Certificate
- Gordon College (Massachusetts); Master of Education: Reading Specialist
- MGH Institute of Health Professions (Boston, Massachusetts); Certificate of Advanced Study in Reading; Master of Science in Speech-Language Pathology: Reading Concentration
- Mississippi College (Mississippi); Master of Education: Dyslexia Therapy
- Notre Dame College (Ohio); Reading Endorsement
- Saint Joseph's (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania); Master of Science in Special Education
- Simmons College (Boston, Massachusetts); Master of Science in Special Education: Language and Literacy
- Southeastern University (Lakeland, Florida); Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education with Reading and ESOL Endorsements; Bachelor of Science/Master of Education in Exceptional Student Education with Reading and ESOL Endorsements
- Southern Methodist University (Dallas, Texas); Master of Education in Reading and Writing
- University of Colorado, Colorado Springs (Colorado Springs, Colorado); Bachelor of Arts in Special Education; Master of Arts in Special Education; Dyslexia Specialist Certificate
- University of Dayton (Ohio); Undergraduate: (Early Childhood Education, Middle Childhood Education, Intervention Specialist); Graduate: Reading Endorsement
- University of Florida (Florida); Unified Elementary ProTeach Dual Certification
- William Carey University (Mississippi); Master of Education: Dyslexia Therapy