

DYSLEXIA

Basic Information

Dyslexia is one of several distinct learning disabilities. Dyslexia is displayed by variable difficulty with different forms of language often including, in addition to problems with reading, a conspicuous problem with acquiring proficiency in writing and spelling.

The first president of the United States, George Washington, was dyslexic. So was Albert Einstein. Dyslexia, which comes from the Greek meaning “difficulty with words,” is a language-based learning disability. It affects the ability of a person — even one with above-average intelligence — to read, write, and spell. Individuals with Dyslexia may also have difficulty putting things in order, following instructions, and differentiating between left and right.

Thought to be genetic and hereditary, some forms of Dyslexia can also be caused when hearing problems at an early age affect a person’s language comprehension skills. Doctors still don’t know for sure what causes Dyslexia, but they suspect a correlation between left-handedness and a learning disability in many families. It is estimated that one in 10 children has Dyslexia. More males are affected than females.

Children with Dyslexia can usually succeed at the same levels as others once they are diagnosed and start receiving extra support and attention at home and school. Children suspected of having Dyslexia undergo a series of reading, spelling, drawing, math and intelligence tests, as well as visual tests, laterality tests, visual scanning tests, sequencing and other tests to examine which brain functions are interfering with their acquisition of normal school learning.

Dyslexia also affects adults, but those who receive attention early in life often learn how to compensate for the disability by adulthood.

Adults with Dyslexia, however, may tend to have difficulty with language skills throughout their lives. It is important to remember that a diagnosis of Dyslexia is not necessarily a barrier to success.

Strengths Include:

- Good at ideas and innovative thinking
- Good problem solver and lateral thinker
- Creative in the way they make links and connections
- Have excellent visual and spatial awareness
- Good with practical tasks and creative in many ways

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- Strong in the areas of art, music, design, architecture and engineering
- Good communicators

Difficulties Include:

- Erratic spelling
- Misreading, leading to comprehension difficulties
- Poor handwriting inaccurate number work
- Difficulties with sequences e.g. date order
- Ability to solve problems but inability to show process
- Poor organization or time management
- Inaccurate number work

Persons with Dyslexia in the Workplace (From Job Accommodations Network)

A diagnosis of Dyslexia does not mean that accommodations are essential to ensure workplace performance. Many individuals with Dyslexia perform well in their jobs, without requiring additional assistance.

As an employer, it is important to conduct a thorough evaluation process with the individual to determine what is needed. Working with the individual to understand what the challenges of Dyslexia are, and how Dyslexia affects him or her, will make for a far more accommodating environment. Breaking down the job task by task and looking at how the individual performs at each is a good way of assessing where accommodations may help. They can be as simple as reorganizing a system, using coloured paper for memos, using “dyslexia-friendly” font for all written communication, or a new piece of equipment.

Technology and Adaptive Devices

There are several tools that can make life a lot easier for persons with Dyslexia in the workplace. Most are relatively simple tools that we use every day.

- Daily planner – this will help with time management

- Wall planner – this will help with time management
- Personal Information management software – designed to help to keep a schedule, organize phone calls, and handle other memory-based tasks
- Alarm Clock – to assist remind individuals to be on time
- Tape recorder – just like a journalist would use to help with recalling details from a conversation
- Talking calculator
- Computer and software – has several uses, including writing, grammar and spelling checking, calculating, and organizing.

Possible Accommodations for Individuals with Dyslexia

Written Communication

General difficulty with reading:

- Use a font that is easier for a person with Dyslexia to read
Serif fonts, with their 'ticks' and 'tails' at the end of most strokes (as found in traditional print fonts such as Times New Roman), tend to obscure the shapes of letters, so sans-serif fonts are generally preferred. Many people with Dyslexia also find it easier to read a font that looks similar to hand writing as they are familiar with this style, and some teachers prefer them. However, these types of fonts can lead to confusion with some letter combinations, such as "oa" and "oo"; "rn" and "m". The best fonts to use, in order of preference, are:
 1. Trebuchet MS: The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.
 2. Verdana: The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.
 3. Arial: The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.
- Give verbal rather than written instructions
- Provide plastic, coloured overlays for reading documents
- Highlight salient points in documents
- Use voice mail as opposed to written memos
- Use speech to text software
- Supply/use a reading machine – or allocate someone else to read aloud

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- Provide information on coloured paper (find out which colour helps the person to read best)
- Set up a computer screen with a coloured background to documents

Difficulty with reading and writing:

- Allow plenty of time to read and complete the task
- Examine other ways of giving the same information to avoid reading
- Discuss the material with the employee, giving summaries and/or key points
- Utilise information prepared in other formats for example audio or videotape, drawings, diagrams and flowcharts
- Use tape recorders
- Use speech to text software

Spelling and grammar errors:

- Proof read work
- Instant spell checker on all computers
- Verbal Communication

Difficulty remembering and following verbal instructions:

- Give instructions one at a time
- Communicate instructions slowly and clearly in a quiet location
- Write down important information
- Demonstrate, and then supervise tasks and projects
- Encourage the person to take notes and then check them
- Ask instructions to be repeated back, to confirm that the instruction has been understood correctly
- Write a memo outlining a plan of action
- Use a tape recorder to record important instructions
- Back up multiple instructions in writing or with diagrams

Difficulty with hidden meanings in conversation:

- Give clear concise and direct instructions; do not hint or make assumptions that you have been understood

Time and Work Planning

Concentration difficulties/distractions:

- Make sure the workplace is quiet and away from distractions for example away from doors, busy phones, loud machinery
- Allocate a private workspace if possible
- Where feasible allow an employee to work from home occasionally
- Provide a quiet working environment for a dyslexic employee by allocating libraries, file rooms, private offices and other enclosed areas when others are not using them

Coping with interruptions:

- Use a “do not disturb” sign when specific tasks require intense concentration
- Encourage co-workers not to disturb the person unless absolutely necessary
- When interrupting, allow the person to pause and write down what they are doing to refer to when resuming work
- Ensure that each task is completed before starting another
- Encourage outgoing rather than incoming calls. Offer training in how to use the telephone effectively for example jotting down key points before making the call

Remembering appointments and deadlines:

- Remind the person of important deadlines and review priorities regularly
- Hang a wall planner that visually highlights daily/monthly appointments, deadlines, tasks, and projects
- Supply an alarm watch or alarm clock

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- Encourage the employee to use the daily calendar and alarm features on his/her computer

Organization of property:

- Ensure that work areas are organised, neat and tidy
- Keep items where they can be clearly seen for example shelves and bulletin boards
- Ensure the team returns important items to the same place each time
- Colour code items
- Ensure work areas are well lit

Organizing workflow:

- Supply and use a wall planner
- Prioritise important tasks
- Create a daily, dated "To Do" list
- Use diaries
- Design a system for regular tasks with appropriate prompts for example for meetings or taking notes
- Allow extra time for unforeseen occurrences
- Build planning time into each day

General Difficulties

Reversing numbers:

- Encourage the person to say the numbers out loud, write them down or press the calculator keys and check that the figures have been understood
- Supply a talking calculator

Directional difficulties:

- Always try to use the same route
- Show the route and identify visible landmarks

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- Give time to practice going from one place to another
- Supply detailed maps

Short term memory problems especially names, numbers and lists:

- Use mnemonic devices and acronyms
- Organise details on paper so that they can be referred to easily using diagrams and flowcharts
- Check back to ensure that there is understanding
- Use multi-sensory learning techniques such as reading material onto a tape machine and then playing it back while re-reading
- Use computer software; sometimes well developed programme menus and help features are useful
- Use a calculator

This information was compiled by THEO BC to assist BC businesses to have successful working relationship with persons with disabilities in our communities.

For more information contact:

THEO BC Toll Free: 1-866-377-3670

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