

- A Quick Guide to Working with Students with Dyslexia -

Characteristics of the Condition

- Dyslexia is not necessarily the result of a visual problem; it may or may not involve the reversing of letters or words.
- Research has shown that it results from a genetically based difficulty in establishing awareness of elements of linguistic structure.
- Children with this problem have difficulty recognizing the individual sounds of words.
- This interferes with the development of decoding skills and ultimately, with visual word recognition.
- Reading is typically slow and halting, with marked difficulty identifying relatively unfamiliar words.
- At the college level, students may have developed compensatory skills in decoding, but visual word recognition remains effortful, inefficient and inaccurate.
- Comprehension may be compromised by the fact that attention and higher-level cognitive resources may be needed for recognizing individual words.

Impact on Classroom Performance and Writing

- Poor handwriting is common (though not invariably present).
- Writing may be slow and effortful, either because of the demands of spelling or because of concurrent dysgraphia.
- Punctuation and capitalization may be flawed.
- Spelling is almost always compromised.
 - Some students may rely primarily on phonological strategies (spelling words as they sound).
 - Others may seem to base their spelling more on word appearance.
 - Syllables may be omitted due to processing load imposed by spelling (or to a concurrent attention difficulty).
 - "Learned-isms" are common: misapplying particular spelling phenomena (e.g., "drum" spelled as "drumb" on analogy with the spellings, "dumb," "thumb," "numb").
 - Vocabulary knowledge is often restricted due to limited exposure to literature.
 - Vocabulary used in writing may be simplified to avoid words that represent spelling challenges.
 - Knowledge of phrase and sentence structure may be limited.
 - Note-taking in class or from reading may be impeded by these difficulties.

Interaction with Students

- Accurate spelling isn't achieved through memorization. It requires abstract linguistic ("orthographic") representations that these students have difficulty developing. Sheer memorization of spellings is a very unproductive use of learning energy. **Be judicious in penalizing students for misspellings** unless they have had a reasonable opportunity to use human or technological spelling check.
- Interventions for spelling difficulty:
 - Help student learn to use spell-check effectively.
 - Mark misspelled words, but let student make corrections.
 - Draw student's attention to important spelling contrasts (e.g., common heterographic homophones (e.g., "there/their"; "here/hear").
 - Punctuation and capitalization conventions can also be very resistant to explicit instruction. These are not the result of carelessness or "lack of effort" in previous learning.
Recommended responses:
 - Mark errors and explain principles, but don't expect a memorization approach to work wonders.
 - Suggest strategies for deciding where punctuation should be used, but don't expect quick resolution.
 - Proof written work with student, allowing her/him to find errors with guidance and decide on fixes.
- Coach use of more varied vocabulary.
 - Encourage student to choose interesting words first and worry about spelling later.
 - Draw attention to word structure and morphological relationships to build linguistic awareness
- Coach syntactic awareness, with an emphasis on practical understanding of language structure (without technical terminology or formalisms).