

# What is dyslexia?

**Dyslexia is an alternative way of thinking which often runs in families.**

Brain research, including ground breaking work from Auckland University, shows that while most of us use the 'verbal' left side of our brain to understand words, dyslexic people use the 'pictorial' right side – making them slower to process and understand language, but stronger in creative areas like problem solving, empathy, leadership and lateral thinking. Dyslexia affects at around 10% of the general population. We know that dyslexia impacts much more than literacy alone.

While the most immediate characteristic is a problem in decoding words and their meanings, this is still only one aspect of a broader spectrum of difficulties such as auditory and visual perception, planning and organising, fine motor skills, short-term memory and concentration. Some of these can make it especially challenging for individuals to follow multiple instructions, turn thoughts into words and finish work on time.

Recognition, understanding and effective action unlock potential and allow dyslexic individuals to access and use their talents.

**There are many aspects to dyslexia. Here is a short summary:**



**Dyslexia tends to run in families**



**Dyslexia affects boys and girls**



**Dyslexic people are not less intelligent**



**Dyslexia affects auditory & visual perception**



**Dyslexic brains are wired differently**



**Dyslexic people think predominantly in pictures, not with the sounds of words**



**Dyslexia affects planning & organising**



**Dyslexia affects fine motor skills**



**Dyslexia affects short term memory & concentration**



**The upside of dyslexia is the ability to perceive the world from many perspectives, allowing special talents and skills to flourish in fields such as invention, the arts, design, engineering, and entrepreneurship.**

## How can teachers help?

Teachers play an essential role, both in identifying dyslexic students and in creating an environment that helps them to learn effectively. It's never too early to observe "dyslexic type tendencies" and provide support through classroom action. There are many simple changes a teacher can make to the classroom to make life easier for students that learn differently. Multi-sensory teaching and experiential learning can make all the difference.



**Instructions:** Students with dyslexia can become overloaded when receiving instructions, finding long or complicated lists difficult to deal with.

- Break down into chunks
- Slow down talking speed
- Set clear objectives



**Time:** Dyslexic take extra time to access basic skills like reading & writing, which leaves them little time to demonstrate their knowledge.

- Provide an overview of topic
- Allow extra thinking time & time to finish tasks
- Allow more time in tests for dyslexic kids



**Notetaking:** Dyslexic students can have trouble reading and copying from whiteboards

- Minimise whiteboard copying
- Provide handouts which use clear font and are on an off-white background
- Include pictures if possible

### **Creative/Multi-sensory approaches:**

Dyslexic students are often picture thinkers, and find things easier if supported by visual and hands-on instruction.

- Use video, internet, mind maps, graphics
- Do quick drawings to illustrate concepts
- Use real objects as props
- Use role-plays



**Classroom environment:** There are a number of adjustments that will improve the learning environment:

- Relocate dyslexic students to areas near visual aids, but away from fluorescent lighting
- Ensure noise is not a distraction
- Accept work in different formats
- Have a well-organised environment
- Link learning tasks to previous knowledge



## Dyslexia beyond the schoolyard

School is one place where dyslexic individuals need our understanding and help, but there are other places too.

Families, for example, should keep a child's dyslexia in mind when giving instructions or helping with homework. Research shows that dyslexia is hereditary, so it may be that by finding out more about your child's dyslexia, further insights are gained about members of the extended family.

The workplace is another environment where understanding and recognition of dyslexia can yield positive results. While misunderstandings can reinforce low self-esteem and limit opportunities for both the dyslexic individual, and the business, recognising and harnessing talents and creative strengths has the potential to do the opposite and have powerful social and economic impacts.



**Reading, writing, spelling:** Frustrations with these skills are the biggest challenge for dyslexic students.

- Always explain 3 parts of the word – what it looks like, what sounds like, what it means
- Don't overly focus on handwriting
- Relax-interesting words spelt wrong are of more value



**Marking:** the way you mark can assist dyslexic students

- Mark "target" spellings only (apply 80% accuracy standard)
- Focus on big picture success
- Give a max. of 2 tips in positive language



**Self Esteem:** having a difficulty with basic skills can be accompanied by feelings of failure or low self-worth.

- Emphasise a student's strengths
- Develop the student's knowledge of their own abilities, and what to do when things go wrong
- Support target setting & celebrate success



**Homework:** dyslexic students often find homework intimidating

- Include clear instructions & a realistic time frames
- Include the family in the loop
- Set homework at beginning of lesson & remind again at the end