



Supporting learners with dyslexia

Physical

Seat learners directly facing the speaker or the board, preferably towards the middle of the class.

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

Use plain, sans serif fonts where possible (Comic Sans, Arial, Geneva, Sassoon Primary are recommended for dyslexics).

Try to eliminate background noise or distracting sounds.

Consider writing alternate lines in different colours.

Don't expect a dyslexic learner to continue to listen to the teacher while copying from the board.

Listening

As far as possible, try to ensure that there is sufficient peace and quiet when explaining things.

If giving instructions individually, get eye contact before starting to speak. Try to maintain eye contact.

Explicitly teach 'listening behaviour'. "Sit still, look at me, think about what I am saying."

Remove distractions where possible – keep desks clutter-free.

When giving instructions, provide a written or visual checklist where possible (handout or on board).

Be prepared to repeat instructions several times and don't be critical about children needing this!

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.

Develop an inconspicuous way for a student to signal when they are not understanding.

Give only one or two instructions at a time. Use short sentences at a slow pace with strong intonation to emphasize key points.

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

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

Preview what is going to be covered in the listening task. "In the next few minutes, I'm going to tell you how to"

Don't talk over a directed task. Dyslexic students cannot multi-task.

Note circumstances where the student is attentive/inattentive and make adjustments accordingly.

Understand that poor listening or comprehension can appear as non-compliance, indifference or even defiance. These behavioural symptoms are most likely to occur when a child feels embarrassed about his/her poor comprehension.

Be aware of abstract language, metaphors, similes, colloquialisms and proverbs which may need explaining.

Listening is helped by beginning with 'settling in' activities before introducing more demanding work.

Allow 'time out' in a quiet room or library for children who become overloaded with sensory input.

Use your ADHD children for practical tasks, i.e. running errands, handing out paper. They need to move!

Provide a 'kush' ball or other sensory stimulus for children who need to do something with their hands. Many children concentrate much better on listening tasks when squeezing a kush ball.

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.

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.

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

Demonstrate wherever possible.

Incorporate pair teaching wherever possible. People learn by teaching.

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

Adapt materials as necessary:

- Enlarge photocopies
- 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.

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 and social 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.

When correcting behaviour, make it clear what the appropriate behaviour should have been. Many dyslexic children frequently get told off for doing something wrong, but no-one has ever explained to them why it is wrong and what would have been more acceptable.

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.

Teach mind-mapping and brain-storming.

Give continual feedback and guidance.

Provide lists of key words or phrases to refer to.

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

Anticipate areas of difficulty

Allow laptops, 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.

Homework

Ensure that homework is always directly relevant to classwork.

Eliminate 'filler' homework tasks. Adapt homework requirements.

Understand that dyslexic learners are considerably more likely to suffer from fatigue and over-load.

For primary pupils, do not insist that they read with parents. Help parents to understand that their most important role is to develop an enjoyment of books. If a child is reluctant to read, read to them from books which are their own choice and appropriate to their intellectual level.

Allow parents to 'scribe' for their children for at least some of their tasks.

General

Incorporate practical hands-on activities wherever possible.

Teach appropriate strategies, particularly for study or memory.

Use computer software or assistive technology where appropriate.

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

Make sure that learners are aware that 'I don't know' is a valid answer! Dyslexic learners or learners with language difficulties often assume that, if an adult has asked them a question, they are expected to always be able to know the right answer. They feel a failure if they cannot provide one.

Appropriate responses to a question could include:

I don't know the answer.

I can't remember.

I don't understand the question.

Could you say that again – I wasn't listening!

I don't know what that word means.

Or even:

I haven't a clue what you're talking about! (At least it's genuine communication!)

Develop metacognition.

Don't use worksheets to teach! Worksheets don't teach – teachers teach and worksheets are a way to provide a written reinforcement and a check that learning has been assimilated. Use games/practical activities where possible as your active teaching tool!