

## What is Dyslexia?

The word 'dyslexia' comes from the Greek. It means 'difficulty with words'.

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty or learning difference that affects many aspects of life and learning. There is no one, definitive definition of dyslexia and the different definitions give greater or lesser weight to various aspects of the syndrome. Many definitions of dyslexia focus on the negative aspects; deficits and difficulties that are experienced. However, other definitions focus to a greater degree on the associated talents and skills that people with dyslexia often exhibit.

People with dyslexia may experience a range of the following “symptoms”, with differing degrees of severity:

- Difficulties with literacy (eg reading, comprehending, spelling, handwriting, structuring writing)
- Difficulties with numbers (eg learning times tables, getting numbers in the wrong order, confusing numerical signs)
- Poor organisation
- Directional confusions
- Difficulties with sequencing information
- Poor sense of time
- Problems making skills become “automatic”
- Difficulty taking in oral information
- Problems with pronouncing some words
- Problems finding the right words (word retrieval)
- Difficulty learning and applying rules eg punctuation rules

Not all people with dyslexia experience all of these “symptoms”. Everyone is different. People with dyslexia may also experience some of these strengths, again to differing degrees:

- Intuition
- Good at visualisation, including in 3D
- Creativity
- Good at seeing the whole picture
- Good at making links between things, seeing connections

### What causes dyslexia?

The causes of dyslexia are not fully understood. However, there is strong evidence to suggest biological differences between the brains of dyslexic and non-dyslexic people. These differences are small but significant and affect the processing of

visual and auditory information as well as the ability of the brain to make skills “automatic”.

There is also evidence of a genetic cause. Dyslexia tends to run in families but there is no “dyslexia gene”; rather, several chromosomes have been identified as important, and this may account for the wide variety in symptoms and severity from person to person. These biological and genetic differences mean that information, especially language, is processed differently.

### Teaching approaches

There are many different approaches to teaching adults with dyslexia used in the UK. Details of the main approaches can be found in “**A Framework for Understanding Dyslexia**”, see below.

### Support for learners with dyslexia

Education providers are obliged to support learners with dyslexia under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act (see below). Support can take many forms, for example providing assistive technology. Often providers employ a specialist dyslexia tutor to assess and support learners. Smaller organisations may “buy in” specialist support from local organisations such as Dyslexia Action. All staff working with learners should be made aware of learners with dyslexia and their needs via dyslexia awareness training. This may be provided by an “in house” specialist tutor or “bought in” from an external specialist. Details of some larger dyslexia organisations are given below.

### Key facts

- Research from the British Dyslexia Association suggests that as many as 10% of the population are affected by dyslexia to some degree, 4% severely. Some parts of the population, for example offenders, are more likely to have dyslexia, although it may be undiagnosed.
- Dyslexia is unrelated to intelligence or IQ.
- People with dyslexia may have poor literacy or numeracy skills. Figures from the Department for Education and Skills suggest that employees with poor literacy and numeracy skills can expect to earn 11% less than average. However, there are very successful people with dyslexia in a wide range of careers and professions.

### Dyslexia and the law

The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) applies to providers of goods and services, educational providers and employers. Dyslexia can be classed as a disability under the terms of the Act. This means that employers and educational institutions need to consider the needs of people with dyslexia and make “reasonable adjustments” for them. This might be providing assistive technology such as voice recognition software, mentoring, specialist assessment or 1:1 support. It may also mean changes to the presentation of documents. More advice about the DDA can be obtained from the Disability Rights Commission at: [www.drc-gb.org/index.asp](http://www.drc-gb.org/index.asp).

## **NIACE's work on dyslexia**

### **Access for All**

NIACE runs the national training for Access for All (2002).

### **Framework for Understanding Dyslexia**

NIACE and the Learning and Skills Development Agency led the project that culminated in the development of the Framework for Understanding Dyslexia (2004).

The Development Officer for dyslexia is **Rachel Davies**. Current areas of interest are supporting people with dyslexia in workplace learning, and older adults' experiences of dyslexia. Contact the Literacy Language & Numeracy Team at:  
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### **Useful contacts**

#### **Adult Dyslexia Organisation**

Ground Floor, Sector House  
Minet Road, Loughborough Estate  
London, SW9 7TP  
Tel: 020 7924 9559 (helpline)

Website: [www.adult-dyslexia.org](http://www.adult-dyslexia.org)

Work relates to adults with dyslexia (including in employment), runs support groups and provides a helpline, provides training and tuition, lobbies on behalf of adults with dyslexia.

#### **British Dyslexia Association**

98 London Road  
Reading, RG1 5AU  
Tel: 0118 966 8271

Website: [www.bdadyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk)

Provides advice to teachers and employers on dyslexia issues, provides training for teachers, has a helpline for individuals with dyslexia, local associations, approves specialist training qualifications for teachers.

#### **Dyslexia Action**

Park House, Wick Road  
Egham, TW20 0HH  
Tel: 01784 222300

Website: [www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk](http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk)

Email: [info@dyslexiaaction.org.uk](mailto:info@dyslexiaaction.org.uk)

Provides training for teachers and tuition for individuals with dyslexia, publishes research and materials about dyslexia.

#### **International Dyslexia Association**

Website: [www.interdys.org](http://www.interdys.org). Based in the USA.

#### **LLU+**

London South Bank University  
103 Borough Road  
London SE1 0AA  
Tel: 020 815 6290

Website: [www.lsbu.ac.uk/lluplus](http://www.lsbu.ac.uk/lluplus)

Provides training for teachers of adult students with dyslexia, and consultancy.

## References and Useful Resources

**Access for All.** Department for Education and Skills, 2002. ISBN 1853386952. Email: [dfes@prolog.uk.com](mailto:dfes@prolog.uk.com). Written as a companion to the adult literacy and numeracy core curricula, this suggests teaching approaches and materials that may be used with learners from Entry 1 to Level 2 who have a disability or learning difficulty, including dyslexia. The dyslexia section in the introduction is very clear and easy to understand, and the teaching suggestions within the document are an excellent resource.

**Developmental dyslexia in adults: a research review.** NRDC, 2004. ISBN 0354649281. Website: [www.nrdc.org.uk](http://www.nrdc.org.uk). This document reviews academic research about dyslexia in adults.

**Dyslexia Assessment Materials.** DfES, 2004. ISBN 7777084372. This is a pack of assessment materials with tutor notes, designed to assist Skills for Life tutors in devising appropriate ILPs for dyslexic learners. The assessments are mapped to the Core Curricula. They do not provide the means to diagnose dyslexia, however.

**Dyslexia Demystified.** Newsletter. Produced by NIACE, 2005. Contact Emma Tierney, 0116 2042826. One-off newsletter.

**A Framework for Understanding Dyslexia.** Department for Education and Skills, 2004. ISBN 1844781593. Email: [dfes@prolog.uk.com](mailto:dfes@prolog.uk.com). This document, written for a non-specialist audience, collects together information on the key theoretical approaches to dyslexia as well as describing the range of teaching and support approaches that are used with adult learners in the UK.

This is the seventy-sixth in a series of briefing sheets, which aim to provide an introduction to a variety of lifelong learning issues. Other titles in the series which may be of interest include:

72. Funding support for adults with dyslexia
66. Promoting literacy, language and numeracy programmes
65. Learning and Skills Council funding for literacy, language and numeracy
64. Embedding literacy, language and numeracy
59. Skills for Life teaching qualifications framework

Requests for briefing sheets in other formats, such as large print are welcomed, we will be pleased to consider your request. Copies of this and other sheets are available from NIACE:

21 De Montfort Street  
Leicester, LE1 7GE  
Tel: 0116 204 4289

Email: [information@niace.org.uk](mailto:information@niace.org.uk)

They are also available on the website at [www.niace.org.uk/information](http://www.niace.org.uk/information)

NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training. It aims to do this for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties, or insufficient resources. Registered charity number 1002775; Company registration number 2603322