



Dyslexia Assessment and Consultancy

Email: info@workingwithdyslexia.com Telephone: 020 7582 6117

DYSLEXIA: A STUDENT'S GUIDE

Dr Sylvia Moody

Do you find reading tiring and have difficulty in remembering what you have just read? Do you write down numbers wrongly and mix up the letters in words? Do you have trouble organising your study schedule? Do you find it hard to express your ideas clearly in writing? And do you feel baffled and frustrated by your difficulties, feeling that they constantly hold you back in your course of study or professional career?

If you answered 'yes' to some or all of these questions, then it could be that you are experiencing dyslexic difficulties.

What is dyslexia?

The term 'dyslexia' has changed its meaning over the years: originally, it was used to mean difficulty with reading; then it was extended to cover difficulty with all literacy and numeracy skills. More recently, it has been extended again to cover weaknesses in short-term memory, phonology, visual processing and organisational skills.

Dyslexic students, therefore, may have difficulty not just with reading and writing, but also with remembering instructions, procedures or appointments; they may find it hard to take notes efficiently from books or lectures; they may operate generally in a state of muddle, typically failing to hand in course assignments on time and to schedule revision properly.

Associated syndromes

Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia is the term used to describe difficulties with spatial skills and physical co-ordination. Other commonly-found problems are poor organisational ability and weak social skills. So dyspraxic students may write slowly and illegibly; they may find it hard to

structure essays and to analyse complex visual arrays (such as blocks of multiple choice questions); and they may not feel at their ease in social groups.

Attention Deficit Disorder

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is often associated with dyspraxia. It is characterised by a short attention span, distractibility and impulsiveness. (If physical restlessness is also present, it is referred to as ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.) People with ADD easily become disoriented in noisy or 'busy' environments.

Visual stress

People who suffer from visual stress find that print 'jump abouts', patterns are stressful to look at, and white paper 'glares'. Visual stress is often associated with *binocular instability*, which is a problem with the way the eyes are co-ordinated. People with binocular instability typically mis-read words and often lose their place on the page. They may also develop headaches or eye-strain if they read for long periods.

Specific maths difficulty ('dyscalculia')

The term *dyscalculia* means difficulty with understanding maths concepts and the relationship between numbers, e.g., being unable to estimate percentages. The term is often also used for difficulties in reading, writing and copying numbers; doing mental arithmetic; and reading written maths problems. However, these types of difficulty are probably better seen as dyslexic rather than dyscalculic.

Help and support at college

The help and support available to you could include:

- specialist tuition
- IT support / technological aids
- optometry (for visual stress)
- occupational therapy (for dyspraxia)
- social skills training
- general counselling
- concessions for course work and examinations

Applying for the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA)

Most UK students doing a first degree, either full-time or part-time, will be eligible for the DSA, and so will most post-graduate students. Applying for the Allowance is a relatively

lengthy process, but *the Dyslexia Support Advisor at your college will be able to guide you through it*. The stages you will have to go through in your application are as follows:

1. *Arrange a Diagnostic Assessment.*

The Dyslexia Support Advisor at your college will be able to give you a list of qualified assessors. You may have to pay for this assessment yourself, but often the college is willing to finance it.

2. *Discuss your diagnostic assessment report with your Dyslexia Support Advisor.*

You need to be sure that you fully understand your diagnostic assessment report and the implications it may have for the academic, practical and fieldwork requirements of your course of study. Also, you need to be clear about exactly what help you will be requesting in the next stage of the application process, which is called the Needs Assessment.

3. *Arrange a Needs Assessment.*

You do not do any further tests in this assessment; you simply discuss your study needs (as specified in the diagnostic report) with the assessor, who will calculate the costs of these. You will receive a report listing the equipment and tuition that the needs assessor will be recommending.

4. *Discuss your Needs Assessment report with your Dyslexia Support Advisor.*

If you, or the Advisor, feel that your needs have not been fully addressed in your Needs Assessment report, you can ask for appropriate revisions.

If you are planning to go up to university, it is preferable to go through this process of having a diagnostic and needs assessment before you begin your university course; otherwise it could be well into your second term before funding for support is available to you. *For this to happen, one of the following three things needs to be the case:*

1. You are willing to fund the initial diagnostic assessment yourself. In this case, it is vital to ensure that the assessor you choose is approved by your future university.
2. Your future university is willing to fund the diagnostic assessment once they have given you a definite place.
3. You already have a diagnostic assessment (done since your sixteenth birthday), which the relevant authorities are happy to accept.

Self-help book

Dyslexia: Surviving and Succeeding at College. Sylvia Moody. Routledge.

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