

WHAT IS DYSLEXIA?



INTERNATIONAL DYSLEXIA ASSOCIATION DEFINITION (2025)

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterised by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities.

These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction.

Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities.



DSM-5 DEFINITION

Specific Learning Disorder with impairment in reading (dyslexia) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterised by difficulties with accurate or fluent word recognition, poor decoding, and poor spelling abilities.

These difficulties result in problems in reading comprehension and can interfere with academic achievement and daily activities.

The difficulties begin in the early school years but may not become fully manifest until the demands for accurate and fluent reading exceed limited capacities.



QUICK FACTS

- ✓ Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability.
- ✓ Around 1 in 5 people have dyslexia.
- ✓ It affects reading accuracy, fluency and spelling.
- ✓ It is not related to intelligence.
- ✓ Dyslexia often runs in families.
- ✓ With the right support, people with dyslexia can achieve their potential.

Dyslexia is neurobiological.

Dyslexia is unrelated to intelligence.

Dyslexia exists on a continuum from mild to severe.

Dyslexics can learn to read and spell with evidence-based instruction and appropriate support.



SIGNS OF DYSLEXIA

The list below is a guide to consider when you are looking for signs.
Not all children with dyslexia present the same and signs may change over time.



YEARS 0–2

- Trouble with rhyming
- Difficulty learning and sequencing letter names and sounds
- Struggles to remember phonics patterns
- Inconsistent memory for words
- Can't remember lists/sequences (days, months, seasons)
- Can't recite the alphabet song in order
- Mispronounces words ('cause' instead of 'because', 'tainer' instead of 'container')
- Easily distracted by background noise
- Poor retrieval of names for colours and objects
- Frustration or avoidance in learning related to reading
- Looks like they are guessing words on the page



YEARS 3–5

- Reverses letter sequences ('soiled' / 'solid', 'left' / 'felt')
- Problems with phonic decoding (struggles to use sounds to read words)
- Substituting words when reading aloud, like saying 'house' when the story says 'home'
- Over-reliance on context and guessing to decode words – looking for pictures or clues to work out the word
- Poor spelling
- Difficulty learning new vocabulary
- Symbol confusion (e.g. arithmetic symbols: =, +, -, x)
- Difficulty remembering multi-step instructions
- Disorganised schoolwork and difficulties managing tasks



YEARS 6–8

- Poor spelling, symbolic errors
- Poor punctuation, capitalisation
- Difficulty learning cursive writing
- Over-reliance on context to read; poor decoding
- Dislike and avoidance of writing and reading
- Slow reading
- Can't decode (read) new vocabulary
- Poor spelling
- Difficulty organising written compositions
- Word confusions



HIGH SCHOOL

- Written language skills less developed than reading comprehension
- Poor spelling and 'mechanics' of writing
- Difficulty learning a second (or third) language
- Slow, minimal, or disorganised writing
- Challenges with planning and structuring essays or written work
- Avoidance of tasks that require extensive reading or writing



RED FLAGS AT ANY AGE

- Persistent difficulty with phonological awareness (hearing and manipulating sounds in words)
- Reading progress significantly behind peers despite effective instruction
- Difficulty retaining spelling patterns and previously learned words
- Avoidance or extreme frustration with reading and writing tasks
- Low self-esteem related to literacy
- Family history of dyslexia
- Dyslexia exists on a continuum and signs may change with age

