How can I meet the needs of learners with dyslexia? Part 1

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Introduction

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This resource was developed by the National Centre of Literacy and Numeracy for Adults (http://www.literacyandnumeracyforadults.com/). It is part of a suite of resources on dyslexia.

The main purpose of these resources is to support the professional development of educators who are working to strengthen the literacy and numeracy skills of adults studying and working in New Zealand. The resources can also help inform adults with dyslexia and the people who support or work with them.

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The 'Three Knowings' framework

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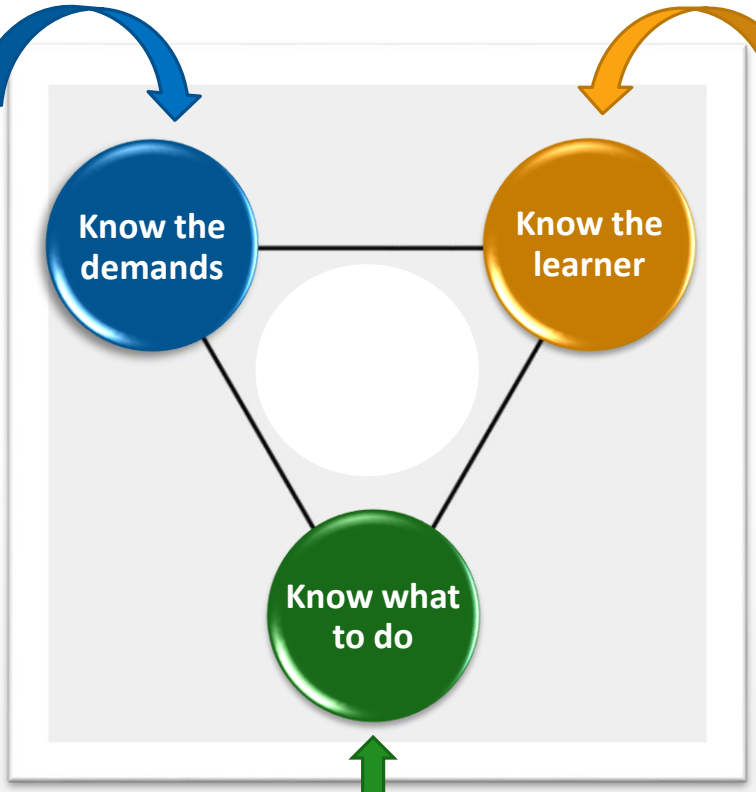
In secondary and tertiary education learners have to read and write large amounts of text. What about the workplace?



From our assessments we know our learners' strengths and areas of need. We can also learn more about dyslexia and how it can affect our learners.

See also What is dyslexia? and How do I know my learner has dyslexia?

This resource is about what we can do to assist and support our learners with dyslexia.

Click here for more information on the 'Three Knowings' framework

The needs of learners with dyslexia

How the impact of dyslexia can be minimised

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If we want to provide an inclusive education and meet the needs of our learners with dyslexia we need to have a good understanding of what these needs are and how we can address them.

This resource is in two parts. Part 1 describes how you can meet their learning needs and Part 2 their social and emotional needs.

PART 1: Meeting learning needs	PART 2: Meeting social and emotional needs
Adopt a suitable teaching approach Teach literacy and organisational skills and strategies Provide accommodations	Raise awareness Commit to inclusion Build rapport

Response to Intervention

A whole-organisation approach to dyslexia

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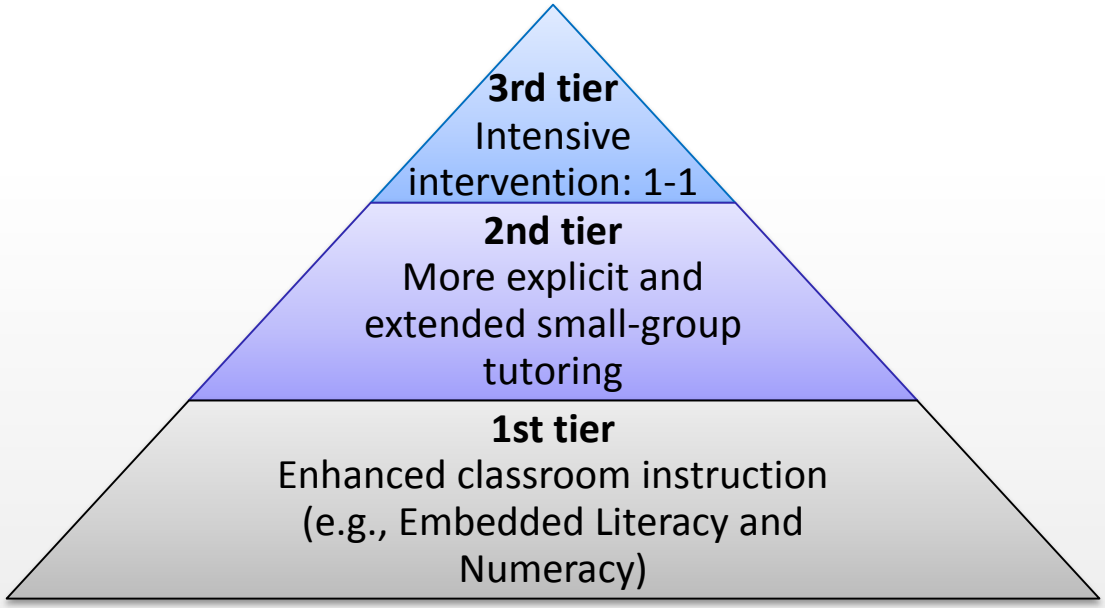
Meeting the needs of learners with dyslexia is not just the responsibility of individual teachers, but of the whole organisation. A good example of a whole-organisation approach is the RTI model, which ensures early identification; evidence-based instruction targeted to individual needs; and using assessment results to monitor progress and inform instruction.



If the learner does not respond to 1st tier instruction, they should be able to access 2nd tier support. Learners can move up or down tiers as needed. Assessment results will guide the process.

(Tunmer & Greaney, 2008)
(Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006)
(http://www.rtinetwork.org/essential/assessment/screening/readingproblems)

Finding the balance

A dual approach

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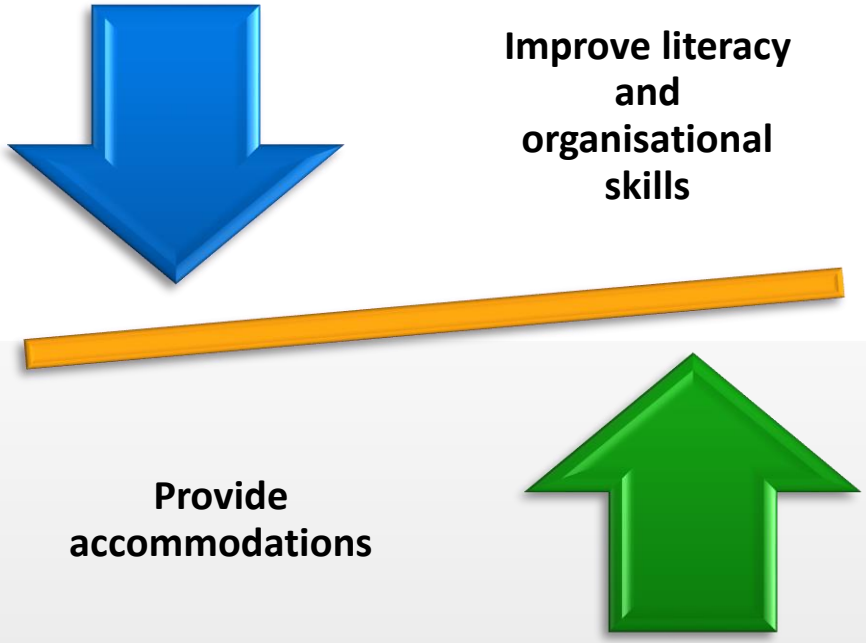
It is helpful to take a dual approach and find the right balance between helping our learners with dyslexia improve their reading, writing and organisational skills on the one hand and providing accommodations on the other.



Adopt a suitable teaching approach

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If they can't learn the way you teach, can you teach the way they learn?

Ignacio Estrada

Adopt a suitable teaching approach

How do they learn best?

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Learners with dyslexia learn best when they can:

- make personal, meaningful connections to the subject
- remember patterns rather than sequences
- see the big picture and think holistically: *all at once* rather than *step by step*
- learn by experience, not by being told

Adopt a suitable teaching approach

What works well for learners with dyslexia?

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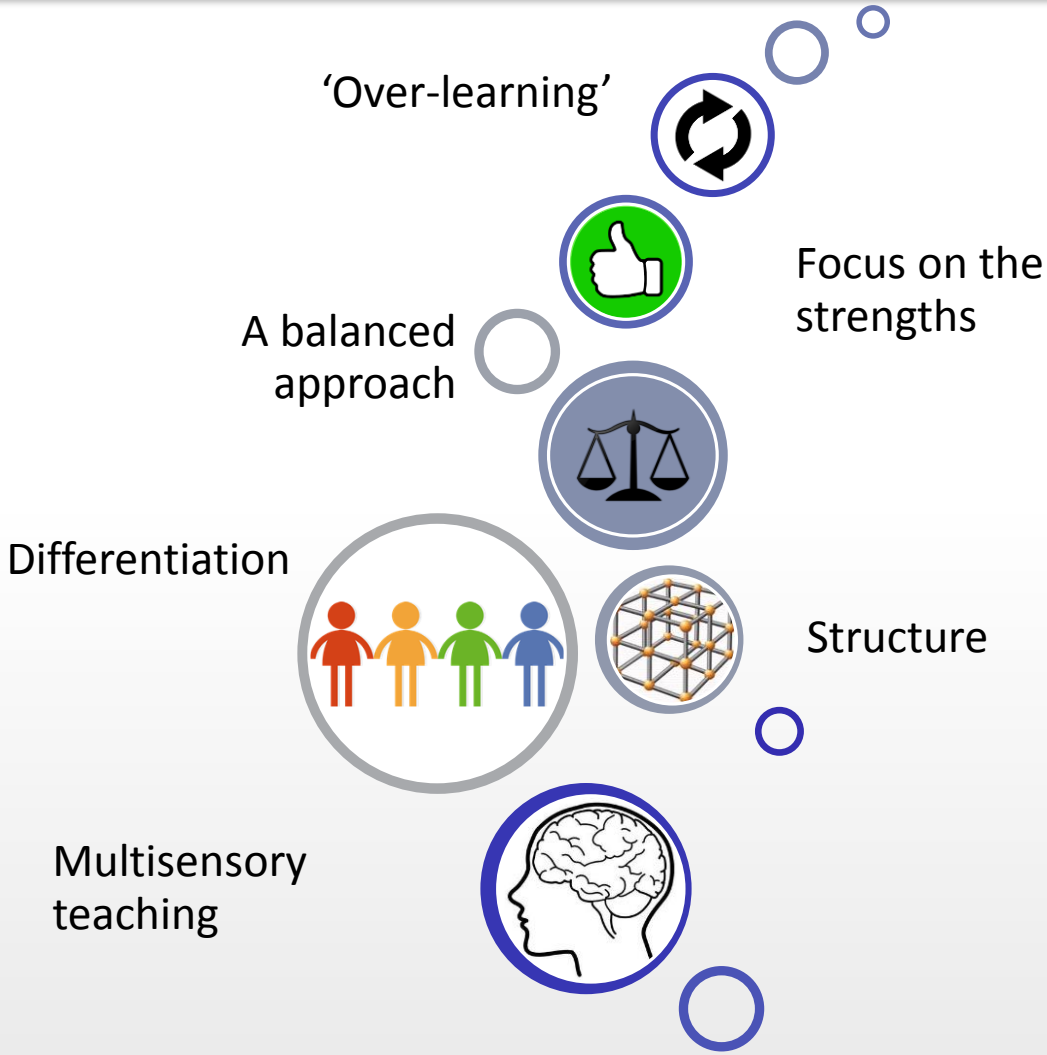

The good news is that this approach works well for all learners, not just those with dyslexia.
(Coffield et al., 2008)

Adopt a suitable teaching approach

A balanced approach

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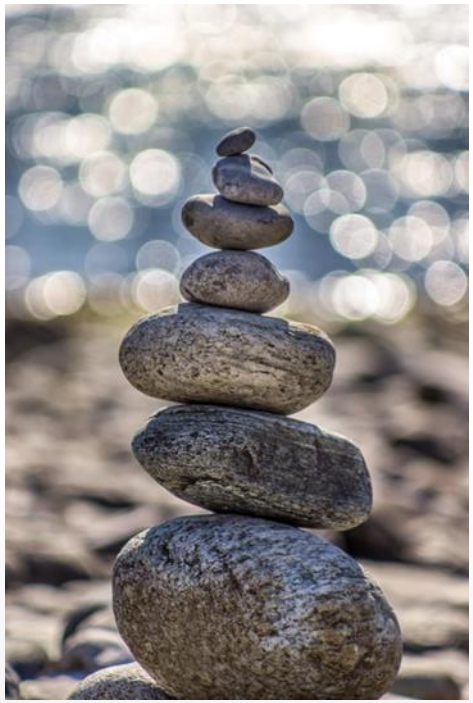
In a balanced approach to literacy instruction
basic skills instruction
is integrated with
authentic reading and writing experiences.

Learners with dyslexia need to increase their reading mileage and develop an interest in reading to counter the **Matthew effect** which causes the widening gap between good and poor readers (Dymock & Nicholson, 2012, p. 15). They need lots of reading and writing practice, combined with basic skills instruction, in order to catch up.



Adopt a suitable teaching approach

A balanced approach

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If you are teaching a vocational course the course material will provide plenty of opportunity for authentic reading and writing experiences. *Authentic* means reading and writing for real purposes and audiences. It is like the reading and writing people do in their everyday lives, so it is meaningful and relevant.

Basic skills need to be taught in a **direct**, **structured**, **explicit** way.
For more information on how to teach these basic skills, see our resource:
Meeting the needs of learners with dyslexia: Links and references

(Pressley, 2006)

Adopt a suitable teaching approach

Multisensory teaching

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Dr Sally Shaywitz said that a person can be a "brilliant thinker and hopelessly slow reader – all in the same person" (Shaywitz, 2003, p. 162).

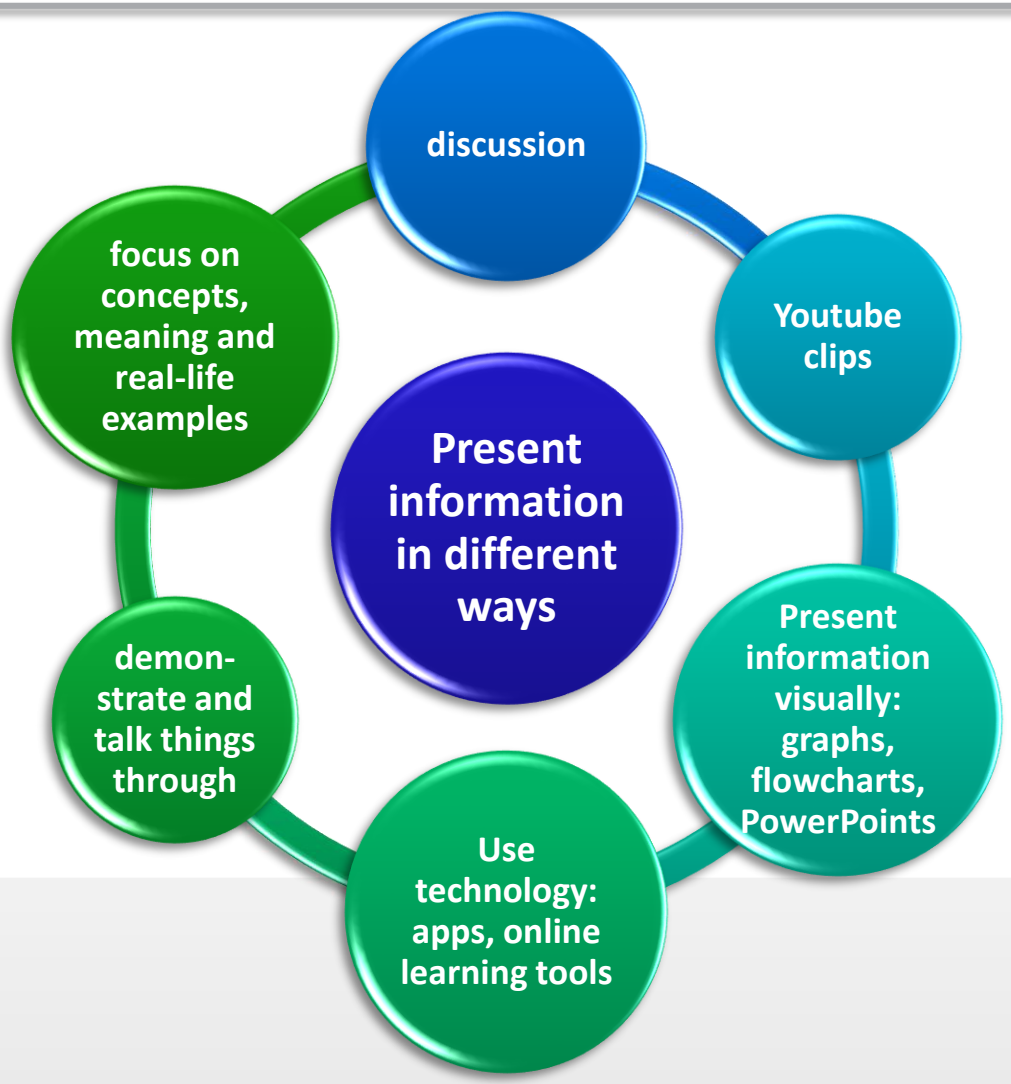
In our resource What is dyslexia? we saw that people with dyslexia have many strengths. We can help them employ their strengths by adopting a multisensory approach to teaching.

This means differentiating the way your present information. For example, when teaching your students how to mix chemicals, you can describe, demonstrate, provide visuals and hands-on practice, so that you engage more than one sense at a time. By engaging with the material in more than one way learners will better understand and retain the information.

Multisensory teaching is useful for all, and essential for dyslexic learners.

Adopt a suitable teaching approach

Multisensory teaching



Example: When you hand out a written factsheet, you can also talk it through with your students, use highlighters for key words, draw a diagram on the board, show a relevant clip and activate learners' background knowledge in a class discussion.

Adopt a suitable teaching approach

Multisensory teaching

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Learners with dyslexia can find it hard to decode and spell words. Looking at words from different angles and engaging all the senses will help your learner to read and spell the words.

For the learner with dyslexia:

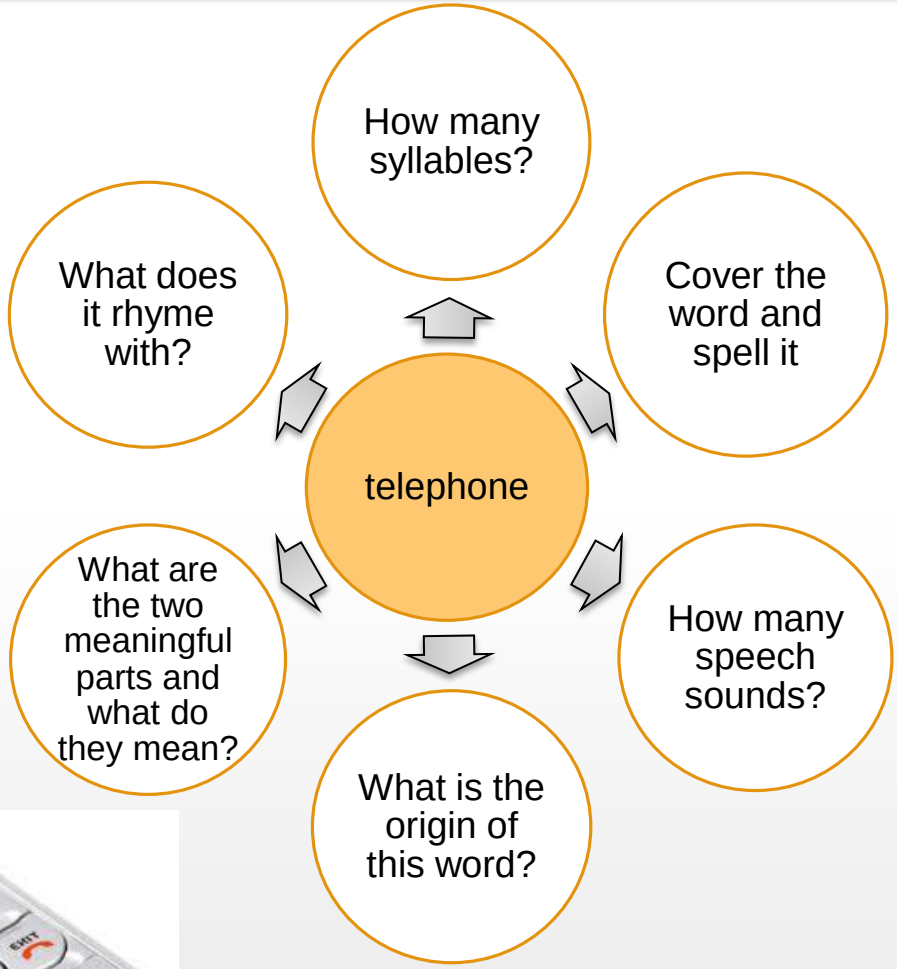
Words need to be seen and read, heard and spelled

Walker, 2000, p. 102

This makes the words 'come alive' and it will create an interest in words.

Adopt a suitable teaching approach

Multisensory teaching



Example:
Telephone is a familiar word, but it may not be easy to decode or spell. By looking at the word from different angles, learners will use their senses to explore the word: they will write it, read it, hear it and say it.

Adopt a suitable teaching approach

Differentiation

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The objective is to extend all learners to the best of their ability, but when we have a classroom of learners to teach and a curriculum to follow, how can we cater for individual needs?

Adopt a suitable teaching approach

Differentiation

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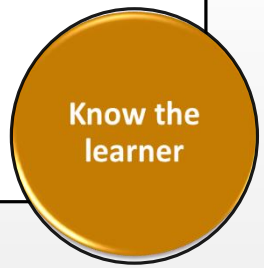
- Use observations and assessments to get to know your learners' strengths, needs and interests.
- Ensure learners can use their strengths as a means of tackling things they find hard.
- Use their interests to encourage them to focus on what they have a passion for.

Know your learner



- **Include in the ILP:**
  - learning objectives
  - strengths
  - priority areas for development
  - manageable learning steps
  - strategies for improvement
  - timeframe
- **Review the ILP** on a regular basis with your learner to monitor progress.

Individual Learning Plan

Adopt a suitable teaching approach

'Overlearning'

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Learners with dyslexia need lots of practice and revision, because they often find it hard to make skills 'automatic' and because their working memory is not so efficient.

- Recap at regular intervals
- Give discreet help, do not single them out
- Build in sufficient practice time
- Practise skills and strategies in a range of contexts, so they are reinforced and become 'transferable'
- Say what you are going to say – say it – say what you've said

Adopt a suitable teaching approach

Structure

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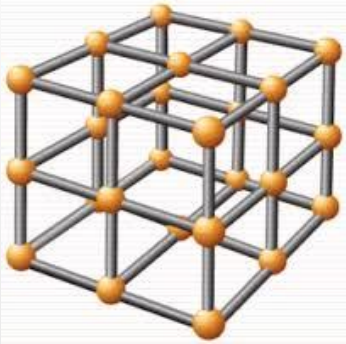
- Learners with dyslexia may not well-organised
- It helps them if you use predictable routines and structure in your teaching
- They need to master a skill before they can advance to a higher-level skill
- Use a sequential approach, where you scaffold the learning, start from the basics and systematically progress to more difficult skills, concepts and materials



Adopt a suitable teaching approach

Focus on the strengths

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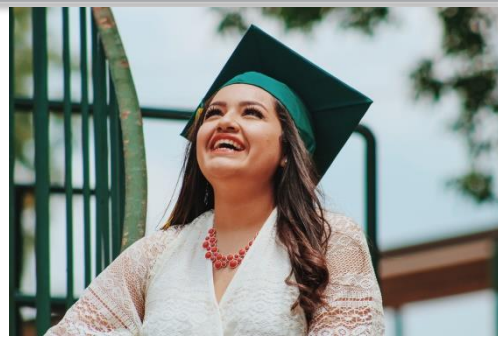
In What is dyslexia? we learnt about the *paradox of dyslexia* (Shaywitz, 2003). People with dyslexia have many strengths to draw on. We need to **identify**, **nurture** and **utilise** their strengths. A strengths-based approach works in two ways:



Use their strengths to help address their areas of need

- Use metacognition in your teaching so learners can take control of their own learning
- Provide explicit feedback, so they know what they're doing well and what they need to improve on
- Use images and visuals in your teaching

Develop a positive belief of themselves

- Record their strengths on their ILP
- Acknowledge their strengths before peers
- Celebrate success

Teach literacy and organisational skills and strategies

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Literacy skills and strategies

Embed strategies into your teaching. For example:

- Phonological awareness
- Decoding
- Fluency
- Reading comprehension
- Spelling
- Writing

For more information, see:

Meeting the needs of learners with dyslexia: Links and references

Organisational skills and strategies

Learners with dyslexia may need help with organisation and remembering information and instructions. Taking notes can be particularly hard.

- Provide notes, ask a classmate to take notes, or print smartboard notes
- Talk about what you write on the whiteboard
- Teach strategies like highlighting and using bullet points
- Use apps and organisational tools

Provide accommodations

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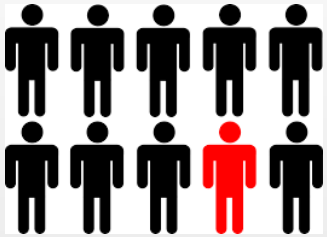
Part of a 'dual approach' (see page 6) is to provide accommodations. These can help learners to access their strengths: They can build the bridge to connect them to their strengths.

The most critical accommodation for the dyslexic reader is the provision of extra time

Shaywitz, 2003, p. 314

When providing accommodations, be discreet and don't single your learner out as having 'special needs'.



Provide accommodations

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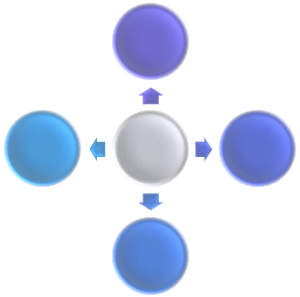
Provide a quiet environment

Use assistive technology, e.g., text-to-speech software



Use visuals: diagrams, graphs, mindmaps, maps, flowcharts etc.

Record learning materials and teaching sessions

Use organisational tools, memory aids and apps

Find alternative ways to demonstrate knowledge, e.g., oral assessments

References

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