How do I know if my learner has dyslexia?

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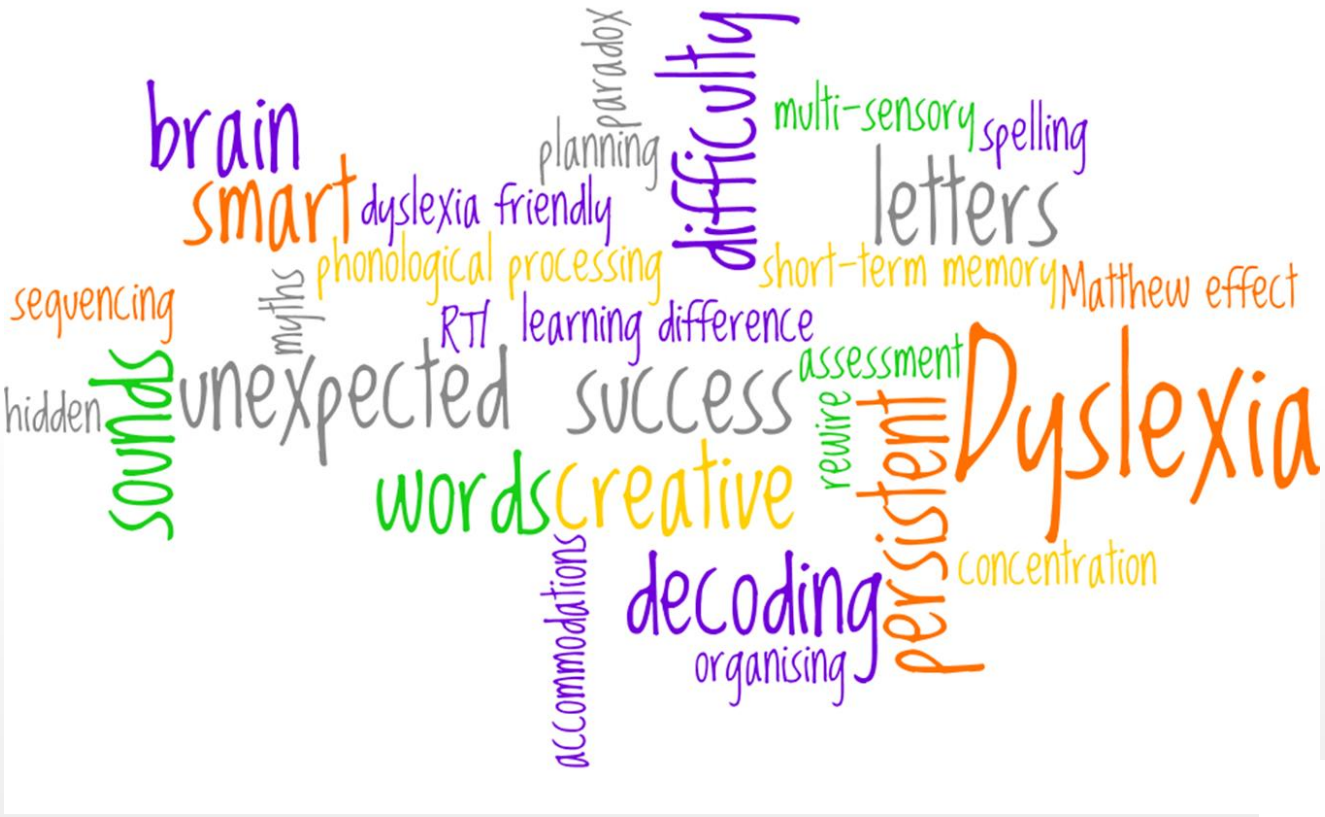

Introduction

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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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Dyslexia is often misunderstood

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- Dyslexia is often misunderstood, not just by educators, parents and other family members, but by the children and adults who have dyslexia.

- Educators may be puzzled, because the learner seems to be bright in some areas, and yet has difficulty in reading, writing and spelling. They can see the potential in them and yet these learners are not doing well in class. This might lead them to think the learner is not making an effort. Learners might feel they should be 'getting it' but they don't, so they must be 'dumb'.

- This can cause frustration for everyone and can lead to mislabelling and low self-esteem, or to educators lowering their expectations.

- In this resource you will find some guidelines for screening and assessment. The signs to look out for are described. In dyslexia there is often a distinctive pattern of strengths and difficulties. It is very important not to consider the signs in isolation, but to establish if a pattern exists. The pattern may vary from learner to learner

Dyslexia is often hidden

...which can hamper identification

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Some learners try and hide their difficulties by distracting behaviour

Some have developed compensatory strategies which can mask difficulties

They often seem less capable than they really are

The evaluation process

Three levels of identification

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If your learner is struggling and you suspect s/he might have dyslexia there is much that you can do to help inform your teaching.

1 **screening**

2 **assessment**

3 **diagnosis**

Generally, only an educational psychologist is qualified to diagnose dyslexia. However, educators can screen for dyslexia and administer relevant assessments. This two-fold approach can indicate the likelihood of a learner having dyslexia. Only a diagnosis can confirm it.

Screening

Ways of screening for dyslexia

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- The learner interview at the start of the course can highlight any issues or a family history. The Starting Points Assessment Guide (TEC, 2010) provides useful guidelines, survey questions (TEC, 2010, Appendix A.1), and eliminating questions (TEC, 2010, Appendix A.2).
- Observe your learner in the classroom and check their work. In this resource you will learn what signs to look for.
- Use a screening checklist – these are NOT diagnostic tests.

Here are some screening checklists you can use with your learners:

http://www.lucid-research.com/p/124/lads-plus

http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/common/ckeditor/filemanager/userfiles/Adult-Checklist.pdf

http://www.pearsonclinical.co.uk/Psychology/AdultCognitionNeuropsychologyandLanguage/AdultLanguage/DyslexiaAdultScreeningTest%28DAST%29/DyslexiaAdultScreeningTest%28DAST%29.aspx

http://beta.dyslexia-international.org/content/Checklists/ADO%20checklist%20.pdf

Assessment

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- The Starting Points Assessment Guide (TEC, 2010) contains a number of assessments for syllable, onset-rime and phonemic awareness, decoding, spelling, sight word recognition etc. On page 17 of this resource there are links to clips on some of these assessments.

- The Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool (LNAAT) provides a suite of assessments, including reading, writing, vocabulary, and numeracy. The online Starting Points reading assessment may be particularly relevant.

Don't 'over-assess'. For adults with dyslexia the main assessments to focus on are reading comprehension, listening comprehension and decoding.

Looking for clues
Things to keep in mind

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- Does the learner's profile of difficulties and strengths fit the definition of dyslexia?
- Is there a discrepancy between how they express themselves verbally and in writing?
- Is there a discrepancy between how they understand spoken language and written language?
- In adults with dyslexia we often see slow reading combined with poor spelling.
- Is there a persistence of difficulties over time?
- Can other potential causes of reading difficulty be ruled out?

Early predictors of dyslexia

Early identification can make all the difference

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Even before children learn to read and write some early signs can indicate the possibility of dyslexia. The sooner it is identified and the sooner an intervention is in place, the better their chances of succeeding at school and in the workplace.

Recognising the signs
Looking for patterns

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Difficulties	Strengths
phonological awareness	critical thinking
decoding	reasoning
spelling	vocabulary
handwriting	visualisation
reading fluency	problem solving
remembering instructions	good verbal skills: articulate
note-taking	creativity
organisation	art, design, music, drama, engineering, cooking, sports, computer science
concentration: easily distracted	

Reading difficulties

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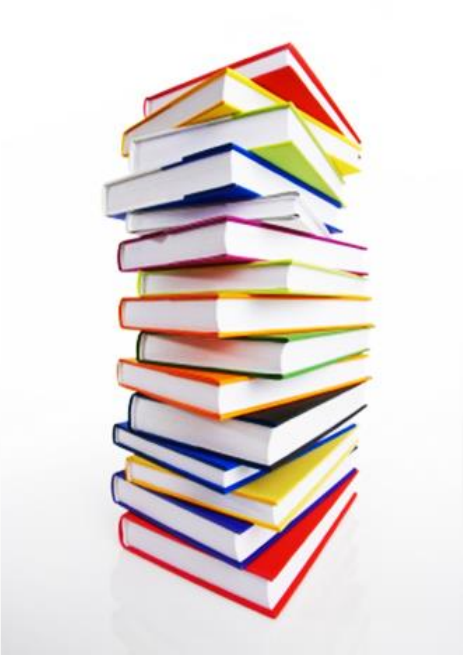
Learners with dyslexia often:

- hate reading out loud
- need to re-read to get the meaning
- find it hard to sound words out
- lose their place and stumble over longer words
- mispronounce, omit or add words when reading aloud
- read slowly
- find it hard to locate information in text
- fail to comprehend written text.



Spelling difficulties

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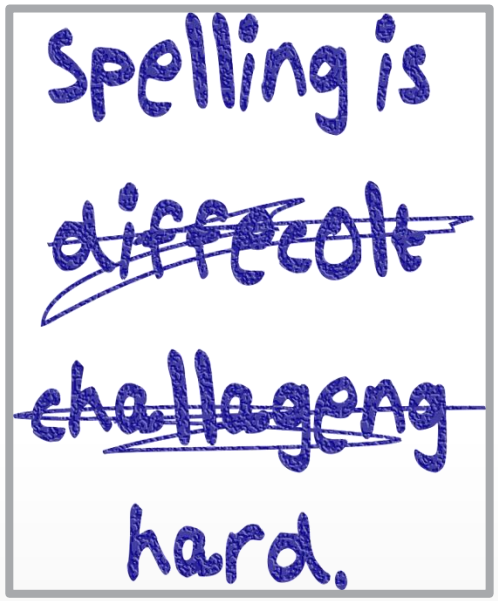
Learners with dyslexia often:

- find it hard to remember what the word looks like, even common words like 'they'
- have difficulty hearing the sounds in words, so it's harder to spell them
- have inconsistent spelling: They can spell a word correctly one day and misspell it the next or have different spellings of the same word in one text
- leave letters or syllables out in words.



Writing difficulties

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Learners with dyslexia often:

- dislike writing
- have good ideas but find it hard to put these on paper
- find it hard to plan and structure their writing
- have messy handwriting and poor letter formation
- use poor punctuation and sentence structure
- find it hard to take notes

What else can be hard for people with dyslexia?

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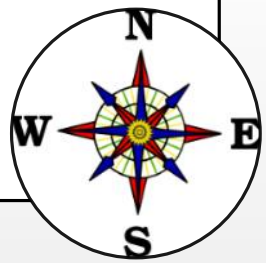
- Memorising number facts
- Learning times tables
- Remembering sequences, like the alphabet, instructions and phone numbers
- Following instructions
- Remembering names of places and people

Working memory and rote learning

- Following directions
- Telling left from right
- Telling the time
- Time management
- Keeping track of dates and appointments
- Meeting deadlines

Orientation in space and time



Dyslexia in the classroom

How can they present themselves?

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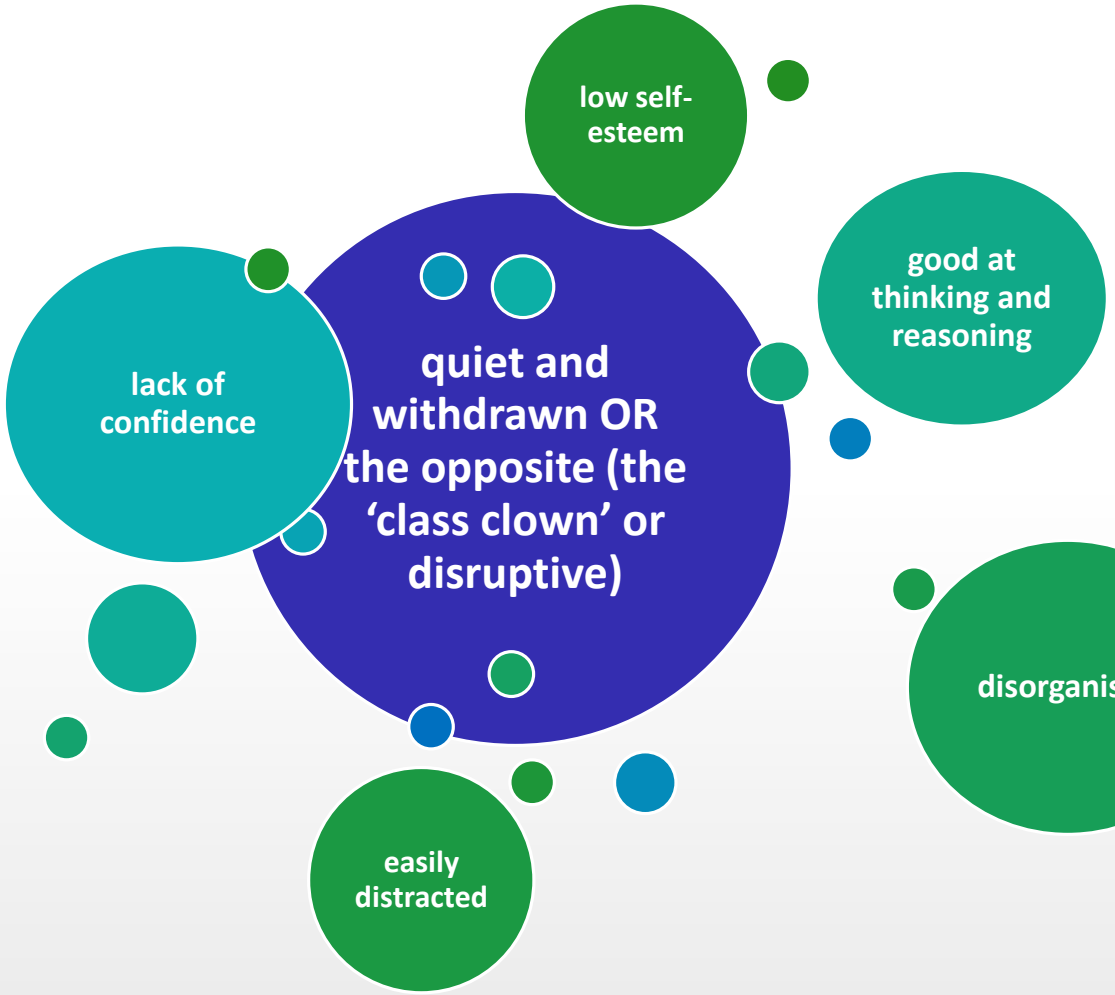

..but keep in mind that not all people with dyslexia are the same. There will be individual differences but recognisable patterns

References and links

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Shaywitz, S. (2003). *Overcoming dyslexia*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). (2010). *Starting Points: Assessment guide. W*ellington, New Zealand: Tertiary Education Commission.

Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool (LNAAT): http://www.literacyandnumeracyforadults.com/resources/355041

Clips

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This interactive clip 'Diagnosing dyslexia' is part of our suite of resources on dyslexia

A number of clips on using the Starting Points assessments: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLVqlPS2O0VVMl1rnYDJk4DG9VwnMVClXQ