

**Frequently Asked Questions About Dyslexia**

**What is dyslexia?**Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability. Dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, which result in people having difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading. Students with dyslexia usually experience difficulties with other language skills such as spelling, writing, and pronouncing words. Dyslexia affects individuals throughout their lives; however, its impact can change at different stages in a person’s life. It is referred to as a learning disability because dyslexia can make it very difficult for a student to succeed academically in the typical instructional environment, and in its more severe forms, will qualify a student for special education, special accommodations, or extra support services.

**What causes dyslexia?**The exact causes of dyslexia are still not completely clear, but anatomical and brain imagery studies show differences in the way the brain of a dyslexic person develops and functions. Moreover, most people with dyslexia have been found to have problems with identifying the separate speech sounds within a word and/or learning how letters represent those sounds, a key factor in their reading difficulties. Dyslexia is not due to either lack of intelligence or desire to learn; with appropriate teaching methods, dyslexics can learn successfully.

**What are the effects of dyslexia?**The impact that dyslexia has is different for each person and depends on the severity of the condition and the effectiveness of instruction or remediation. The core difficulty is with word recognition and reading fluency, spelling, and writing. Some dyslexics manage to learn early reading and spelling tasks, especially with excellent instruction, but later experience their most debilitating problems when more complex language skills are required, such as grammar, understanding textbook material, and writing essays.

People with dyslexia can also have problems with spoken language, even after they have been exposed to good language models in their homes and good language instruction in school. They may find it difficult to express themselves clearly, or to fully comprehend what others mean when they speak. Such language problems are often difficult to recognize, but they can lead to major problems in school, in the workplace, and in relating to other people. The effects of dyslexia reach well beyond the classroom.

Dyslexia can also affect a person’s self-image. Students with dyslexia often end up feeling “dumb” and less capable than they actually are. After experiencing a great deal of stress due to academic problems, a student may become discouraged about continuing in school.

Click any of these subjects for more information on a specific topic:

* [**What is dyslexia?**](http://www.interdys.org/FAQWhatIs.htm) (formal definition)
* [**Common signs of dyslexia**](http://www.interdys.org/SignsofDyslexiaCombined.htm)
* [**Are there other learning disabilities besides dyslexia?**](http://www.interdys.org/FAQAreThereOtherLD.htm)
* [**Are Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) learning disabilities?**](http://www.interdys.org/FAQAreADDand%20ADHD.htm)
* [**How common are language-based learning disabilities?**](http://www.interdys.org/FAQHowCommon.htm)
* [**Can individuals who are dyslexic learn to read?**](http://www.interdys.org/FAQLearnToRead.htm)
* [**How do people get dyslexia?**](http://www.interdys.org/FAQHowDoPeopleGet.htm)
* [**Is there a cure for dyslexia?**](http://www.interdys.org/FAQIsThereACure.htm)
* [**Are there specific professions people with dyslexia should pursue?**](http://www.interdys.org/FAQSpecificProfessions.htm)
* [**How do I know if a person is dyslexic?**](http://www.interdys.org/FAQHowDoIKnow.htm)

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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Q:  What Is Dyslexia?**  **A:  Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin.**  It is characterized 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.  Adopted by the IDA Board of Directors, Nov. 12, 2002. This Definition is also used by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).  Studies show that individuals with dyslexia process information in a different area of the brain than do non-dyslexics.  Many people who are dyslexic are of average to above average intelligence. |  | |

**What Are the Signs of Dyslexia?**

**General**

The problems displayed by individuals with dyslexia involve difficulties in acquiring and using language--reading and writing letters in the wrong order is just one manifestation of dyslexia and does not occur in all cases. Other problems experienced by dyslexics include:

* Learning to speak
* Organizing written and spoken language
* Learning letters and their sounds
* Memorizing number facts
* Spelling
* Reading
* Learning a foreign language
* Correctly doing math operations

Not all individuals who have difficulties with these skills are dyslexic. Formal testing is the only way to confirm a diagnosis of suspected dyslexia.

**Adults**

The difficulties noted below are often associated with dyslexia if they are unexpected for the individual's age, educational level, or cognitive abilities. A qualified diagnostician can test a person to determine if he or she is truly dyslexic.

* May hide reading problems
* May spell poorly; relies on others to correct spelling
* Avoids writing; may not be able to write
* Often very competent in oral language
* Relies on memory; may have an excellent memory
* Often has good "people" skills
* Often is spatially talented; professions include, but are not limited, to engineers, architects, designers, artists and craftspeople, mathematicians, physicists, physicians (esp. surgeons and orthopedists), and dentists.
* May be very good at "reading" people (intuitive)
* In jobs is often working well below their intellectual capacity
* May have difficulty with planning, organization and management of time, materials and tasks.
* Are often entrepreneurs

**Young Children**

Signs of dyslexia in young, preschool children include talking later than expected, a slowness to add new words, difficulty rhyming, and trouble following multistep directions.  After a child begins school, the signs of dyslexia include:

* Difficulty reading single words, such as a word on a flashcard
* Difficulty learning the connection between letters and sounds
* Confusing small words, such as ***at*** and ***to***
* Letter reversals, such as ***d*** for ***b***
* Word reversals, such as ***tip*** for ***pit***

Having one of these signs does not mean your child has dyslexia; many children reverse letters before the age of 7. But, if several signs exist and reading problems persist, or if you have a family history of dyslexia, you may want to have your child evaluated.

**Elementary Aged Children**

Does Your 1st, 2nd or 3rd-Grader:

* Remember simple sequences such as counting to 20, naming the days of the week, or reciting the alphabet?
* Have an understanding of rhyming words, such as knowing that ***fat*** rhymes with ***cat***?
* Recognize words that begin with the same sound (for example, that ***bird***, ***baby***, and ***big*** all start with ***b***)?
* Easily clap hands to the rhythm of a song?
* Frequently use specific words to name objects rather than words like “stuff” and “that thing”?
* Easily remember spoken directions?
* Remember names of places and people?
* Show understanding of right-left, up-down, front-back?
* Sit still for a reasonable period of time?
* Make and keep friends easily?

Answering “no” to some or most of these questions may indicate a learning disability. Not all students who have difficulties with these skills are dyslexic. Formal testing is the only way to confirm a diagnosis of dyslexia.

**Q:  Are There Other Learning Disabilities Besides Dyslexia?  
A:  Dyslexia is one type of learning disability.  
  
Other learning disabilities besides Dyslexia include:**

**Dyscalculia** - a mathematical disability in which a person has unusual difficulty solving arithmetic problems and grasping math concepts.

**Dysgraphia** - a neurological-based writing disability in which a person finds it hard to form letters or write within a defined space.

**Q: Are Attention- Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) Learning Disabilities?**

**A: No, they are behavioral disorders.**

An individual can have more than one learning or behavioral disability. In various studies as many as 50% of those diagnosed with a learning or reading difference have also been diagnosed with ADHD.

Although disabilities may co-occur, one is not the cause of the other.

**Q: How Common Are Language-Based Learning Disabilities?  
  
A: 15-20% of the population have a language-based learning disability.**

Of the students with specific learning disabilities receiving special education services, 70-80% have deficits in reading.

**Dyslexia** is the most common cause of reading, writing and spelling difficulties.

Dyslexia affects males and females nearly equally, and people from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds as well.

**Q:  Can Individuals Who Are Dyslexic Learn To Read?  
A:  Yes.**    
  
If children who are dyslexic get effective phonological training in Kindergarten and 1st grade, they will have significantly fewer problems in learning to read at grade level than do children who are not identified or helped until 3rd grade.

74% of the children who are poor readers in 3rd grade remain poor readers in the 9th grade. Often they can't read well as adults either.

It is never too late for individuals with dyslexia to learn to read, process and express information more efficiently. Research shows that programs utilizing multisensory structured language techniques can help children and adults learn to read.

**Q: How Do People "Get" Dyslexia?**

**A:**  The causes for dyslexia are neurobiological and genetic. Individuals inherit the genetic links for dyslexia. Chances are that one of the child's parents, grandparents, aunts, or uncles is dyslexic.

**Q:  Is There A Cure For Dyslexia?  
A:  No, dyslexia is not a disease. There is no cure.**

With proper diagnosis, appropriate instruction, hard work and support from family, teachers, friends, and others, individuals who are dyslexic can succeed in school and later as working adults.

**Q: Should People With Dyslexia Pursue Any Specific Professions?**  
**A:  No, individuals can succeed in varied fields despite their dyslexia. Examples include:**

**Ann Bancroft** - First woman in history to cross the ice to both the North and South Poles.  
Web site: [**http://www.yourexpedition.com**](http://www.yourexpedition.com/)

**David Boies** - Trial lawyer whose high-profile clients have included former U.S. Vice President Al Gore, Jr., Napster, and the U.S. Justice Dept. in its antitrust suit against Microsoft.

**Erin Brokovich** - Real-life heroine who exposed a cover-up by a major California utility that was contaminating the local water supply. Their actions had severe, even deadly consequences to the members of the community. With her help, the townspeople were awarded a $333 million settlement, the largest ever in a U.S. direct-action lawsuit. (Julia Roberts played her in the movie with the same name.)

**Stephen J. Cannell** - Author and Emmy Award-winning TV producer and writer, who has created or co-created more than 38 shows, of which he has scripted more than 350 episodes and produced or executive produced more than 1,500 episodes. His hits include "The Rockford Files," "A-Team," "21 Jump Street," "Wiseguy," "Renegade" and "Silk Stalkings."  Web site: [**http://www.cannell.com**](http://www.cannell.com/)

**Whoopi Goldberg** - Actor and comedian, winner of an Academy Award for her supporting role in "Ghost," also an Academy Award nomination for her role in "The Color Purple."  
Web site: [**http://www.whoopi.com**](http://www.whoopi.com/)   
  
[**Click here**](http://www.interdys.org/FAQOtherWellKnownDyslexics.htm)   
For a list of other well-known people thought to have dyslexia or other learning disabilities.  None of these people are letting dyslexia hold them back, and they encourage others to focus on their strengths and interests!

**Q: How Do I Know if a Person is Dyslexic?**

**A:** If a person exhibits several of the characteristics listed in "Common Signs of Dyslexia" and the difficulties are unexpected for the person's age, educational level, or cognitive abilities, the person should be tested by an educational diagnostician or a team of trained professionals.  
  
(It is important to note that the "Common Signs" are indicators, not proof of dyslexia. The only way to verify that an individual is dyslexic is through testing by a qualified examiner/s.)

**Sources**:

**Basic Facts about Dyslexia: What Every Layperson Ought to Know** - Copyright 1993, 2nd ed. 1998. The International Dyslexia Association, Baltimore, MD.  
  
**Learning Disabilities: Information, Strategies, Resources** - Copyright 2000. Coordinated Campaign for Learning Disabilities, a collaboration of the leading U.S. non-profit learning disabilities organization. Used with permission.