

What is Dyslexia?

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 International Dyslexia Association Board of Directors, November 12, 2002)

“We know why dyslexics, no matter how bright and motivated, experience reading difficulties. Dyslexia is a complex problem that has its roots in the very basic brain systems that allow man to understand and express language. By discovering how a disruption in these fundamental neural circuits for coding language gives rise to a reading impairment, we have been able to understand how the tentacles of the disorder reach out from deep within the brain and affect not only how a person reads but surprisingly, a range of other important functions as well, including the ability to spell words, to retrieve words, to articulate words, and to remember certain facts.”

[\(Overcoming Dyslexia, Sally Shaywitz\)](#)

“Research pinpoints the weakness at the lowest level of the language system. The phoneme is the fundamental element of the language system, the essential building block of all spoken and written words...the smallest unit of speech that distinguishes one word from another...In children with dyslexia, the phonemes are less well developed...Dyslexic children...have difficulty developing an awareness that spoken and written words are comprised of these phonemes or building blocks.” (Sally Shaywitz)

“One of the most enduring misconceptions is that dyslexic children see letters and words backwards and that reversals (writing letters and words backward) are an invariable sign...there is no such evidence...” (Sally Shaywitz)