



Indiana Definition of Dyslexia Indiana Code 20-18-2-3.5

Dyslexia involves the brain and nervous system and isn't caused by environmental or educational factors.

Dyslexia is a trait that sometimes runs in families and is caused by a difference in how the brain processes language.

How is dyslexia defined according to Indiana law?

“Dyslexia’ means a specific learning disability that:

- A. is neurological in origin and
- B. characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition; and poor spelling and decoding abilities;
- C. typically results 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;
- D. may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge;

and may require the provision of special education services after an eligibility determination is made in accordance with 511 IAC 7-40.”

Students with dyslexia may struggle to:

- Sound out words (known as decoding),
- Read words accurately,
- Read fluently, which means at an appropriate speed and with expression, and
- Develop spelling skills

While some students successfully master these skills in lower elementary, students with dyslexia may continue to struggle in this area throughout schooling.

Students with dyslexia are struggling to read words quickly and correctly, which can cause them to lose focus on the meaning of the text as a whole.

As students with dyslexia are struggling to sound words out, they may not be able to learn new vocabulary and background knowledge from reading. They'll likely be reading fewer words, in a greater amount of time, and with less understanding.

Difficulties with reading experienced by students with dyslexia may be caused by a deficit in the part of language that has to do with sounds and words.

Often, the student with dyslexia may struggle with reading but those struggles don't extend to other academic areas.

A student with dyslexia may struggle more than their peers, who are making adequate progress at grade-level and received the same instruction.





Early Intervention

Early identification of dyslexia is critical so that students are provided appropriate intervention as early as possible. Early intervention has been shown to increase both the academic and emotional well-being of people with dyslexia.⁴

Diagnosis of Dyslexia

This document aims to provide educators and caregivers with guidance on what characteristics of dyslexia can look like in children from early childhood through high school. This document was not designed to use in diagnosing an individual with dyslexia. Dyslexia requires a clinical diagnosis given by a trained professional.

Characteristics of Dyslexia

Early Childhood through Pre-Kindergarten	• May start to talk later than other children • Difficulty pronouncing words, persistent “baby talk,” such as continuing to pronounce the word spaghetti as “pasketti” • Trouble learning and remembering letter names and numbers • May not notice letter patterns similar across words, such as words that have the same beginning sound (mat, mop), or words that rhyme (mop, top) • Failure to know letters in own name • A family history of reading difficulties
Lower Elementary	• Any characteristics listed above • Struggle to associate letters with sounds, such as knowing that the letter “m” represents the /m/ sound • Failure to understand that words come apart, such as being able to separate cupcake into cup and cake • Reading errors that are disconnected to the sounds of the word, such as the word dog is read as run • Inability to sound out or read common one-syllable words, such as cat, map, top • Dislike or complain about reading • Dysfluent speech that includes frequent pauses or hesitations, such as saying “um” often while speaking • Imprecise language, such as stuff or things instead of naming an object • Confusing words that sound alike, such as section and selection • Inability to read small function words, such as in, of, an, and over • A reluctance to read and write, which for some can grow into a great fear • Problems with directionality, often getting lost • Poor spelling or messy handwriting





Upper Elementary	• Any characteristics listed above • Trouble remembering dates, names, phone numbers, random lists, etc. • Mispronunciation of unfamiliar words, often leading to omission of word parts or imprecise guesses, such as reading convertible as conible • Lack of a strategy to read unfamiliar words, often accompanied by failure to systematically sound out words • Slow to learn spelling strategies, such as learning about prefixes, suffixes, and roots • Oral reading that is: ◊ Full of substitutions, omissions, and mispronunciations ◊ Choppy and labored, and ◊ Lacking expression • Difficulty reading math word problems • Slow reading that can be exhausting • Avoidance of reading • Anger, frustration, or low self-esteem that may not be evident to others • Reading accuracy improves over time without equal growth in fluency, which means that a student may be able to read more words correctly over time, but reading may still be choppy, slow, and lack expression • Confusing math signs (+, -, x, /, =), transposing number sequences • Struggle to edit what student has written
Middle School and High School	• Any characteristics listed above • Continued difficulty with handwriting, including poor spelling and messy handwriting • May spell the same word incorrectly multiple times in multiple ways within a single piece of writing • Avoidance of writing compositions • Difficulty with summarizing texts • Continuation of previous difficulties with oral language • Mispronunciation of names of people and places, stumbling over parts of words • Difficulty remembering names of people and places • Struggle to recall words from memory; feeling that words are on the “tip of your tongue” • Difficulty learning a foreign language • Smaller speaking vocabulary than listening vocabulary, hesitation to use words that may be mispronounced • Reading accuracy improves over time but continues to be laborious • Anxiety or embarrassment when speaking or reading in public • Persistent reading difficulties that may cause extreme fatigue • Poor results on multiple-choice tests and difficulty to respond to open-ended questions • Spending unusually long hours reading work- or school-material • Prefers not to read for pleasure

Strengths

It is important to note that students with reading difficulties, including dyslexia, have many strengths in addition to the challenges they face. Reading difficulties and dyslexia can be discouraging, frustrating, and even painful. Teachers, parents, and caregivers can offer consistent, ongoing encouragement by recognizing and rejoicing in the student’s strengths.





English Learners and Reading Difficulties, Including Dyslexia

Research suggests that students who are learning English can be less likely to be identified as having reading difficulties, while at other times they can be over-identified.² Determining if a student has a language difference or a reading difficulty can be complex. A student with limited opportunity to develop English literacy and oral language proficiency may be misidentified as having a reading difficulty when they may be displaying differences due to a lack of exposure to English.¹

When determining if a student's difficulties are due to a language difference or dyslexia, consider the following variables:^{1,3}

1. Is there a family history of reading difficulties?
2. Has the student received high-quality instruction in reading and writing in their native language and in English?
3. How similar are the phonemes (sounds) and language structures in the student's native language and English?
4. How is the student's learning progressing over time, in relation to peers with similar native languages and background experiences?
5. How is the student's skill in reading and writing in their native language?
6. Are there educational, environmental, or personal factors that may be a barrier for this student in learning to read and write?

Finally, it is important to consult resources created by experts in language and reading development among English Learners before making decisions regarding the type and intensity of instruction moving forward.¹



References

¹Cardenas-Hagan, E. (2023). English learners and dyslexia. International Dyslexia Association. <https://dyslexiaida.org/english-learners-and-dyslexia/>

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³Kester, E.S. (2014). *Difference or disorder? Understanding speech and language patterns in culturally and linguistically diverse students*. Bilingualistics.

⁴Livingston, E.M., Siegel, L.S., & Ribary, U. (2018). Developmental dyslexia: Emotional impact and consequences. *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 23(2) 107-135.

⁵Shaywitz, S., & Shaywitz, J. (2005). *Overcoming dyslexia (2020 edition): The essential program for reading problems at any level (2nd ed.)*. Sheldon Press.