

## Dyslexia in the Workplace

Dyslexia may continue to be an issue with individuals after they leave formal education and enter the workplace. They may still have specific difficulties with reading, spelling and writing, but also with remembering instructions, addresses or appointments. They may have difficulties in such tasks as copying information or recording it accurately, retrieving files or sequencing them in the correct order, reading maps or distinguishing between left and right. In addition, because people with dyslexia usually take more time to process information, they may feel overwhelmed by incoming information, whether it is written or spoken. This may cause problems taking in long reports or following lengthy discussions. They may also have difficulty in transmitting information clearly and succinctly to others through speech or writing. The individual knows what they want to say yet may become confused, especially if working to a deadline.

Dyslexic difficulties, however, can be alleviated, managed, and accommodated in the workplace. The first essential step is to recognise them for what they are. In practice, they often go unrecognised because dyslexia is still often regarded as principally a reading difficulty. Many adults with dyslexia through a combination of family and school support and their own self-determination have learned to read with reasonable competence, yet continue to have problems in related language areas such as writing, memory and organisational skills.

When entering the workforce from school, it would be useful for the guidance counsellor and/or the pupil's year-head/tutor to spend time helping the pupil with dyslexia to identify strengths that could be exploited in employment and identifying specific characteristics that may cause difficulties.

Many of the difficulties associated with dyslexia are situational so the work context is of crucial importance. Difficulties can vary depending on the workplace. It is important to consider job requirements and the difficulties experienced by the individual and to attempt to match these two factors. In the end, monitoring and 'trouble shooting' may be more effective than continual intensive support.

For example, before applying for a job, an individual needs to find out what literacy skills will be required and how willing the employer would be in supporting an employee with dyslexia. Information might also be sought about the employer's degree of understanding about the consequences of dyslexia for the specific individual.

Adults with dyslexia in the workplace will benefit from:

1. Structured support to improve their literacy skills, e.g., reading for comprehension, planning and organisation of written work.
2. Structured support to help them compensate for specific difficulties such as poor memory,

organisational skills, sequencing skills and hand-eye co-ordination

3. The use of structured, multisensory teaching during pre-employment or on the job training
4. Relaxation training to help them approach difficult tasks in a calm manner, thereby improving his efficiency.
5. Assertiveness training to develop self-confidence and to enable them to seek support from their employer and co-workers as needed. Support should also focus on the development of self esteem and self confidence in the workplace.

With appropriate support, the adult with dyslexia can increase confidence and eventually self-manage the dyslexia. Hopefully, abilities and talents previously obscured by the confusion of the dyslexic difficulties will have a chance to emerge.

Many people with dyslexia excel, for instance, in lateral or holistic thinking; they may be creative and innovative, and are aware of links and associations that may escape the more linear or analytic thinker; they often have good powers of visualisation, excellent practical skills and an untaught intuitive understanding of how systems work.

The enriched contribution of the employee with dyslexia in the workplace usually leads to an improvement in her/his relationship with co-workers. This can also improve their own chances of promotion, and make them a more valuable asset to the employer.

**Individuals can begin to self-manage their dyslexic difficulties in the workplace.**

**Workplace difficulties caused by a poor short term memory may include:**

- taking notes in meetings
- following discussions
- following oral instructions
- taking telephone messages

*To self-manage short term memory difficulties:*

- break numbers and words into chunks
- read sentences slowly and methodically
- try to identify the central theme of each paragraph you read
- request repeats or written back-up for instructions
- ask for instructions to be given in visual form, e.g. flow charts
- use set formats for telephone messages
- use visual symbols, mind maps or pictures as cues and reminders
- tape record instructions / lectures / meeting

- take regular rest breaks
- do relaxation exercises
- use coloured highlighters to track important information or note deadlines
- use technology to assist with planning, organising and writing tasks

**Workplace difficulties caused by poor sequencing and structuring may include:**

- filing documents / retrieving files
- following work protocols
- writing letters and memos
- structuring reports
- presenting ideas clearly in oral interactions / presentations
- carrying out tasks in an efficient, logical way
- dealing with a varied workload
- getting the times and places of meetings wrong
- missing appointments
- failing to prioritise / missing deadlines
- never having the right papers

**To self-manage the difficulties caused by poor sequencing and structure:**

- read words and sentences bit by bit
- skim text to get an overview before reading for detail
- use alphabet cards
- colour code columns and rows of figures
- colour code instructions / protocols
- colour code files and filing trays, e.g., use red for urgent work
- clearly label files and filing trays
- keep workspace tidy
- plan daily, weekly and monthly action lists
- keeping a calendar in sight

- leave some time each day to deal with emergencies / unexpected tasks
- at the beginning of each day review the action plan for that day
- at the end of each day check what has / hasn't been done
- pre-plan essays and reports
- pre-plan oral interactions / presentations
- pre-plan tasks, and split them into sections / stages
- work one step at a time

**Workplace difficulties caused by perceptual and movement problems may include:**

- using machines such as photocopiers, faxes
- entering data on a computer / calculator
- copying down figures correctly and in the proper columns
- remembering where things have been put
- taking messages
- using a date stamp
- keeping papers in order
- carrying trays, e.g., of coffee mugs

**To self-manage the difficulties caused by perceptual and movement problems by:**

- use a ruler to keep place on page
- photocopy text onto coloured paper
- colour-mark layout of tables of numbers
- systematically scan each part of graphs, charts, tables of numbers
- keep operating instructions for fax machine, etc. by the machine
- use an ergonomic keyboard
- use keyboard shortcuts / slow down the mouse
- plan a daily, weekly and monthly work schedule
- carefully pre-plan before going to a new place

- use upside-down maps
- make a note of routes, e.g., to photocopying room
- request a quiet workspace
- use a keyboard instead of handwriting

## **Emotions**

People with dyslexia are increasingly encouraged to view their difference in a positive light. However, many are affected emotionally by their difficulties. Many find they feel confused and embarrassed by their dyslexia. Many lack confidence and suffer from low self-esteem. Often they may experience frustration, anger, anxiety and/or fear.

However, recognition, understanding and appropriate support from the employer can provide relief, determination and hope for them

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