
Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability characterised by a persistent problem in learning to read and/or spell accurately and fluently at word level, which is not the result of environmental factors and/or a physical, neurological or general intellectual disability (Dyslexia Foundation Netherlands, 2016). When dyslexia is recognised (classification), the following questions need to be answered:

1. Is there a significant backlog in reading and/or spelling?
2. Is there a persistent backlog and didactic resistance?
3. Are there exclusion factors, i.e. to what extent can backlog and resistance be explained by environmental factors or more general individual factors?

Characteristics

Every student, including every student with dyslexia, is different. Preferences in learning style, intelligence, age, character etc. influence whether the characteristics below are expressed in someone with dyslexia.

Positive characteristics

- Great insight into the subject matter: thinking from an overview rather than from details.
- Thoroughly absorbing information and applying it.
- Visually oriented.
- Logical (systems) thinking skills.
- Creative thinking.
- Practical problem-solving skills.

Impairing characteristics

- Problems with technical reading:
- Reading requires a lot of time and attention.
- Difficulty focusing attention on meaningful content.
- Difficulty reading information and difficult words accurately.

Problems with writing:

- Writing requires a lot of time and attention.
- Difficulty listening and taking notes at the same time.
- Difficulty concentrating on content, style and spelling simultaneously.
- Difficulty organizing written information.
- Difficulty working under time pressure.

Associated with dyslexia:

- Difficulty summarising.
- Difficulty remembering terms.
- Lack of attention and concentration.
- Fluctuating results.
- Negative emotions.

Tips

It is not so much about the characteristics, but about the extent to which the student experiences obstacles during the study. Below, some tips are listed per educational activity that can help students with dyslexia. Students with other disabilities or support needs may experience similar obstacles and also benefit from the tips. Talk to the student to find out what helps or works best.

Contact hours

(lectures, working groups, etc.)

- Provide a point-by-point summary handout.
- Use visual support where possible (e.g. picture, graph).
- Record the lecture and put it online.
- Allow the use of a laptop.
- Offer support in planning study activities.
- Provide a separate room for quiet reading.
- Have a fellow student read aloud.

Assessing and examining

- Choose a sans serif font (e.g. Verdana) of at least font size 12 and use a line spacing of at least 1.5.
- Allow extra time to read the information properly and to formulate answers.
- Allow the use of an (empty) laptop (without internet).
- Do not count spelling and grammatical mistakes if they are not part of the examination.
- Offer an alternative to a written test (e.g. verbally).
- Allow the use of speech or reading software.
- Allow the use of a piece of scrap paper.
- Avoid complex sentences with a lot of information and interrelationships, double negatives and long introductory texts.

Independent study tasks

- Provide support in planning study activities.
- Provide an overview of contents and study tasks, including important names and terms.
- Allow written work to be checked by others (if it is not part of the learning objectives).
- Allow the use of voice or reading software.

Internship and graduation projects/theses

- Discuss in advance how the student can deal with dyslexia during the internship.
- Find a suitable work placement in relation to the student's obstacles and the objectives to be achieved.
- Have written work checked by others (provided it is not part of the learning objectives).

Note: this overview is not complete.

More information

- **ECIO, expert centre on inclusive education**
- **Hogeronderwijstoegankelijk.nl/en**
- **Tips From Students (Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity)**
- **British Dyslexia Association**
- **Masterplan Dyslexiecentraal (Dutch)**
- **Protocol Dyslexie Hoger Onderwijs (Dutch)**
- **Verborggen Schatten (Dutch)**
- **Vereniging Onbeperkt Lezen (Dutch)**
- Hofmeester, N. (2014). Studeren met dyslexie / Leerroutes dyslexie. Apeldoorn: Garant Uitgevers (Dutch)