

Reading Centre

making a difference

Dyslexia

Making meaning from written texts

Readers make meaning from written text when they are able to accurately and fluently translate print into spoken language that they can understand. This simple view of reading says that reading involves two components:

- 1) *word recognition*, the ability to translate printed text into pronounceable words; and
- 2) *listening comprehension*, the ability to understand text if it is heard instead of read.

Many studies have shown that word recognition and listening comprehension are relatively independent of each other, but both contribute significantly to students' overall reading ability.

What is dyslexia?

A specific learning disorder with impairment in reading — dyslexia — may be found in children across a range of intellectual abilities. Dyslexia is estimated to affect 10% of the Australian population.

Dyslexia is a *word-level reading disability*. Children with dyslexia experience difficulties with accurate and fluent word recognition and spelling. They may have poor skills for correctly sounding out unknown words and have difficulty establishing automatic recognition of sight words. While dyslexia is not a comprehension difficulty, poor word recognition has two significant effects.

Firstly, the effort required to decode text at the letter and word level limits a student's ability to attend to important aspects of comprehension.

Secondly, students with dyslexia tend to read less than typically developing readers. This limits the important opportunities for language development — deep and rich vocabularies associated with content area knowledge — that extensive reading provides.

Early predictors for literacy outcomes are spoken language, awareness of how print works in written text, early writing skills and phonological processing. Phonological processing refers to the ability to hear speech, process it and act on it. *It is widely accepted that the cause of dyslexia is found at the level of phonological processing*. The key skills in phonological processing are:

- phonological awareness ➤ Phonological awareness is the ability to reflect on the sounds in words separate from the meanings of words. For example, breaking words into syllables, detecting rhyme.
- phonological short term memory ➤ Phonological memory refers to the processing and storing of phonological information (how words sound) in short term memory.
- phonological retrieval ➤ Children with dyslexia have been found to be slower at tasks involving naming a limited set of items such as objects, colours, numbers or letters as quickly (*Rapid Automatic Naming*) as children with normally developing reading ability.
- phonological representations ➤ Phonological representations refers to the storage of phonological information about words in long-term memory.



What are some of the early indicators that a young child may be at-risk for dyslexia?

- Family history of reading or language impairment
- Problems with accurate pronunciation of sounds and multisyllabic words
- Problems with rhyming words and learning rhymes
- Difficulty with learning shapes, colours and how to write their own name
- Difficulty with retelling a story in the right order of events
- Difficulty learning letter names and sounds

How might a student with dyslexia present in the classroom?

Reading:

- Difficulty distinguishing sounds in words
- Omission of words when reading
- Reading comprehension difficulties due to focussing on individual words or reading inaccurately
- Regularly writes words backwards, such as writing 'pit' when the word 'tip' was intended
- Problems with grammar, such as learning prefixes or suffixes
- Tries to avoid reading aloud in class
- Reads below their expected level

Writing and Spelling:

- Spelling words exactly as they are heard
- Using the correct letters but in jumbled or incorrect order
- Spelling the same word different ways, even within the same paragraph or assignment.
- May be able to memorise spelling for spelling tests, but spontaneous spelling may contain many errors
- Poor or illegible handwriting
- Difficulty organising and summarising written information

Verifying dyslexia

Dyslexia is viewed as a lifelong disability that often does not respond as expected to best-practice evidence-based classroom methods for teaching reading.

Diagnosing dyslexia is a complex process that involves a range of assessments undertaken by a multidisciplinary team. Professionals that may be involved in the diagnostic process include specialist teachers, speech pathologists, psychologists and occupational therapists.

Schools do not need a formal diagnosis of a learning disorder to provide students with [support](#).

Supporting all students, including students with dyslexia

Early reading instruction for individuals with dyslexia should be multi-sensory and phonologically based. Students with dyslexia require explicit instruction in phonological awareness, a strong focus on segmenting and blending sounds within words and representing parts within words such as syllables and onsets and rimes, supported and independent reading of progressively more difficult texts, and practice of comprehension strategies while reading texts.

The Australian Curriculum: English (version 8.1) provides a detailed, sequential progression of learning in phonological and phonemic awareness and alphabet and phonic knowledge.

All students, including students with dyslexia, benefit from teaching that is targeted to specific learning needs, is cumulative and sequential, is implemented in small, clearly-supported steps and provides time to build automaticity through practice and review.

Schools support students by using differentiated teaching practices and where necessary focused and intensive teaching. Using assistive technology is a pedagogical decision that teachers can make in order to support students to access texts that develop the conceptual understandings contained in the Australian Curriculum.