

What is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with reading and spelling, particularly in developing connections between letters and sounds, as a result of a weakness in distinguishing the sounds of language (phonological awareness). These difficulties may lead to problems with vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and written expression

Common Characteristics of Dyslexia

Younger Students:

- Reading errors exhibit no connection to the sounds of the letters on the page
- Does not understand that words come apart
- Complains about how hard reading is, or “disappears” when it is time to read
- Does not associate letters with sounds, such as the letter b with the /b/ sound
- The ability to figure things out
- Eager embrace of new ideas
- Gets “the gist” of things
- A good understanding of new concepts
- A large vocabulary for the age group
- Excellent comprehension of stories read aloud

Older Students:

- Very slow to acquire reading skills; reading is slow and awkward
- Trouble reading unfamiliar words, often making wild guesses because he/she cannot sound out the word
- Doesn’t seem to have a strategy for reading new words
- Confuses words that sound alike, such as saying “tornado” for “volcano,” substituting “lotion” for “ocean”
- Excellent thinking skills: conceptualization, reasoning, imagination, abstraction
- Learning that is accomplished best through meaning rather than rote memorization
- Ability to get the “big picture”

The Role of Structured, Multisensory Instruction

The best literacy instruction is explicit, systematic, cumulative, and multisensory. It should integrate the teaching of listening, speaking, reading, spelling, vocabulary, fluency, handwriting, and written expression. There should be an emphasis on the structure of language: phonology, orthography, morphology, syntax, and semantics. This form of instruction not only helps students with dyslexia or characteristics of dyslexia, but creates strong foundations for all students.

