

# How to Tell if a Primary School Student may have Dyslexia

Research tells us that approximately 1 child in 20 has dyslexia. This means that there is likely to be at least one student in every class who displays the pattern of strengths and weaknesses characteristic of dyslexia. Do you have a student who puzzles you, displaying well-developed skills and abilities in some areas and unexpected difficulties in others? Complete this checklist to determine if that student could be dyslexic.

<p><b>BACKGROUND</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> family history of literacy learning problems</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> seems bright and capable but not making expected progress</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> may excel in drama, art, sport, technology or computing</li></ul> <p>Compared to their age peers dyslexic students often display difficulties in the following areas:</p> <p><b>READING DIFFICULTIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> lacks awareness of the sounds in words, sound order, rhymes or sequences of syllables (e.g., what is the last sound in the words 'bus', 'game', 'sun'?)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> trouble learning and remembering letter sounds</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> difficulty catching on to phonics (letter-sound rules)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> hesitant and laboured reader, especially when reading aloud</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> relies on a visual 'look and say' approach to reading</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> uses the context of the story and picture cues to identify words</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> difficulty decoding unfamiliar words via letter-sound rules</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> tends to confuse words that look alike (e.g., was/saw, for/from, the/that, place/palace)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> mis-reads or omits small words (for, of, with, an, the) and word endings (-ing, -ed, -ly)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> is persistently confused by letters which look similar</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> tends to lose his/her place when reading</li></ul>	<p><b>SPELLING AND WRITING DIFFICULTIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> trouble getting thoughts down on paper</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> poor standard of written work compared with oral ability</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> limited spelling vocabulary – tendency to use only those words they know how to spell</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> unusual spellings in which the target word is difficult to decipher (e.g., traffic/tapt, adventure/aferch)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> upper primary students tend to spell words phonetically (e.g., traffic/trafick, adventure/advencher)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> wrong choice of letters due to poor auditory discrimination, particularly between vowel sounds and some consonant sounds (e.g., p/b, t/d)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> leaves letters out of words when spelling (e.g., 'moring' for 'morning')</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> is-sequences the letters in words (e.g., friend/freind)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> spells the same word in several different ways without recognising the correct version (e.g., spelling 'said' as 'sed', 'siad', and 'sede' within the same piece of work)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> inappropriate use of uppercase letters usually because the child feels more secure with the capital form (e.g., raBBit, Dog, etc.)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> produces untidy work with many cross outs and words tried several times</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> difficulty reading back own written work</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> difficulty copying accurately from the blackboard, particularly when under time pressure</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> slow handwriting speed</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> surprises you by the amount of effort put into their work and the little they have to show for it</li></ul> <p><b>MEMORY DIFFICULTIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> finds it hard to remember instructions</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> overwhelmed by large volumes of verbal information</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> trouble with long-term verbal learning (e.g., memorising the months of the year, multiplication tables, etc.)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> slow or poor recall of maths facts</li></ul>
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<p><b>SPEECH DIFFICULTIES</b> Dyslexic children typically have well-developed oral language skills but display specific speech problems, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> word finding problems – has trouble finding the exact words wanted and so uses non-specific words (e.g., thing, stuff, junk, etc.)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> difficulty pronouncing multi-syllable words (e.g., says ‘callapitter’ for ‘caterpillar’)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> makes speech errors (e.g., says ‘pacific’ for ‘specific’)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> easily confused by tongue twisters (e.g., She sells sea shells . . .)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> shows persistent articulation errors</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> trouble with long-term verbal learning (e.g., memorising the months of the year, multiplication tables, etc.)</li> </ul>	<p><b>ATTENTION PROBLEMS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> has trouble sustaining attention on schoolwork</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> tires easily because of the amount of concentration and effort required to cope</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> requires assistance from teacher to complete tasks</li> </ul> <p><b>SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> displays frustration</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> employs work avoidance tactics such as sharpening pencils, looking for books or offering to ‘help’</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> becomes withdrawn and isolated, sitting at the back and not participating</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> acts as the class clown or is disruptive to mask difficulty coping with schoolwork</li> </ul> <p><b>ADDITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> has difficulty with organization (eg, story writing, books and belongings, homework)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> has obvious good and bad days with no apparent reason</li> </ul> <p><i>Students with dyslexia may also display the following:</i></p>
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A student who appears bright and capable and displays many of these difficulties may have dyslexia. If you have concerns about a student who is not progressing as well as expected a good starting point is a comprehensive assessment with an educational psychologist. This will provide information about the student’s learning strengths and weaknesses and ascertain whether they have dyslexia. The earlier a student is diagnosed and remedial teaching begins, the better are the results that can be achieved.