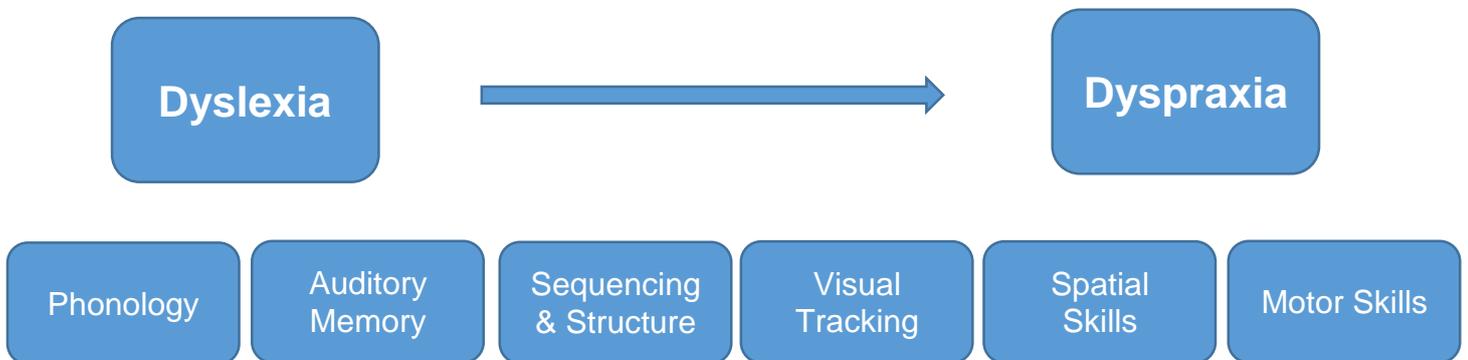


## Guidance for academic staff supporting students with dyslexia

You will probably already have been approached by students who tell you that they have dyslexic or dyspraxic difficulties and that they need extra support. You may feel unclear about the exact nature of the problems experienced by these students and about what you can do to help.

Dyslexia has nothing to do with the person's level of intelligence.

Dyslexic and dyspraxic difficulties are on a continuum so there is no clear dividing line between them.



Students with dyslexia certainly have weaknesses in phonology and auditory memory. They probably also have difficulty with the skills shown in **the middle three areas** but not necessarily with spatial and motor skills.

Students with dyspraxia certainly have weaknesses in spatial and motor skills. They probably also have difficulty with the skills shown in the **middle three areas**, but not necessarily with auditory memory or phonology.

Most students will have a mixture of all of these difficulties.

**Study problems associated with each of the different elements of dyslexic difficulties:**

<b>Dyslexia Difficulty</b>	<b>Associated Study Problems</b>
Phonology (especially sequencing sounds)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accuracy in reading and spelling</li> <li>- Pronouncing long words</li> <li>- Slowness in reading</li> </ul>
Auditory Memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Following instructions and explanations</li> <li>- Note-taking in lectures</li> <li>- Reading comprehension</li> </ul>
Sequencing and Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Structuring an essay</li> <li>- Speaking logically and succinctly</li> <li>- Organisational skills</li> </ul>
Visual Tracking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reading and spelling long words and numbers</li> <li>- Keeping place in page of text</li> </ul>
Visual Memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Remembering irregular spellings</li> <li>- Recalling where they put things</li> </ul>
Spatial Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dealing with data presented in charts, tables, graphs etc.</li> <li>- Finding their way about</li> </ul>
Motor Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Poor handwriting</li> <li>- Clumsiness in handling laboratory equipment</li> </ul>

## **Ways to help**

### **Adopt a sympathetic attitude:**

You will be aware that one of the main characteristics of dyslexic students is that they tend to take longer than their non-dyslexic peers to do things, whether this is reading, writing, understanding what is said to them or formulating their own thoughts.

If you are a quick-thinking, rapid-talking sort of person, it is easy to feel impatient with a dyslexic student who seems to be lagging behind you all the time. However, any show of impatience is certain to make the situation worse as it will make the student anxious, and that anxiety will increase the student's difficulties.

You may need to be particularly sensitive to this difficulty in a seminar. A dyslexic student may feel nervous about speaking or perhaps begin to speak and then fluff what they're trying to say and dry up.

So, some gentle encouragement to help them express their thoughts is helpful, rather than just passing on to another speaker. If you become aware that some dyslexic students never speak in a seminar, you might want to try to find ways to help them get started. Perhaps you could ask them to present a very short talk on a topic for just five minutes or so, and to practise this on you first.

An opposite problem can also occur. Dyslexic students can, through nervousness, talk too much; they may get involved in long rambling sentences or they may lose the thread of what they are saying. It may be clear that they have knowledge about the subject but cannot present this knowledge in a succinct way. In this case it may be useful to ask prompt questions so that the student can present their material in a series of brief answers.

It's also important generally to keep an eye on dyslexic students to see how well they are keeping up with course requirements. Some students are articulate, even vociferous, about their difficulties and will tell you if they feel overwhelmed with work. Other students may retreat into themselves feeling they are responsible for their difficulties and do not ask for help. With these students the danger is that their problems will go unrecognised until the situation reaches crisis point and the student leaves the course.

## Ways to help - continued

### Reading:

One of the main problems which dyslexic students face is the large amount of reading they have to do. So, if you give your students a reading list, **it is useful to have a starring system for items to indicate which books or articles are most valuable or urgent to read.** Tell them about review articles so that they can get an overview of their subject.

It is not advisable to ask dyslexic students to read out loud at any time.

Also be aware that dyslexic students may have difficulty in quickly reading things you've written on a blackboard or whiteboard. They will therefore be unable to note them down.

### Absorbing information:

If students need to copy down or take your dictation, instructions for essay topics or other course requirements, don't assume that dyslexic students will have taken these down correctly.

It's always best to give them instructions in writing. When talking to dyslexic students, try to speak fairly slowly, to repeat things as necessary and to check back for understanding.

Dyslexic students will have particular difficulty with note taking in lectures. You could help them by providing them in advance with an outline of your lecture and by allowing them to tape the lecture. It would also be helpful to leave five minutes or so at the end of a lecture so that students can check with you any queries they have.

### Writing:

Dyslexic students are likely to make mistakes with spelling, punctuation and grammar. They also have difficulty with the presentation of their work.

So, as far as is possible, rate their work on content rather than form.

Also, be aware that students will be slow in doing written work, and consider extending deadlines for essays.

It's important to be sure students understand what is required by an essay question. You may be able to give some help in structuring their essay. For example, you could ask them to make notes in preparation for their essay and then look over them to ensure they are on the right track. In general, students benefit very much from understanding how to structure their ideas; otherwise they tend to get lost in detail and lose the thread of their argument.

## **Ways to help – continued**

### **Organisation:**

Difficulties with structure impact on general organisational skills. So you could give students help with scheduling their work. For example; helping them estimate how much time they need for researching, planning and writing an essay. Similarly, you could keep an eye on their general study and revision schedules.

### **Motor skills:**

Students with poor motor skills will probably have slow and untidy handwriting, so you could make allowances for this and allow them to type their work. They may be able to use a word processor in their examinations.

If you have science students who have to do laboratory work which requires good manual skills, then you may need to observe how they are doing things and perhaps suggest better methods. If manual difficulties are causing a real problem you could suggest a referral to an occupational therapist.

You need to strike a balance between giving students enough help to put them on a level playing field with their non-dyslexic peers but not so much help that they don't learn how to do things themselves. They need to become confident about working independently in preparation for moving on to employment, where they are unlikely to find the same level of support as they do at college.