

Problems: Dyslexia



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Disclaimer: I am not a health professional, so I am not qualified to diagnose Dyslexia. This material is drawn from personal observation and research. For a formal diagnosis, you will need to be guided by someone qualified to deliver such a diagnosis.

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What is Dyslexia?

The term Dyslexia means "trouble with language". These days, it has turned into what I call a "contagious" disease - everybody has it.

First I'd like to point out that dyslexia is not a problem caused by lack of intelligence, and it is not a sign of laziness. Also, students who have dyslexia are usually of average to above average intelligence; dyslexia is not a symptom of a mental or academic disability.

The core of the problem is that these students have not made the connection between the sounds and the letters. And as the foundation of written English is the link between sounds and letters, that is a serious stumbling block. That's why dyslexia is a language problem - not a brain damage problem.

How can you tell if someone has Dyslexia?

I can't give you a diagnosis; I'm not qualified to do so. I call dyslexia "contagious", because it is so widespread, and many of these symptoms are seen in people who can read and write perfectly well.

I see many of the dyslexic symptoms listed below minimise or disappear totally once students have learnt to read. I put this down to two things:

- Students are now linking the sounds of English to its letters; and
- Students are no longer suffering from a high stress level, which was brought on by being ashamed they couldn't read, and being told they were not trying/were stupid, and being in a stressful environment day after day, where they were guaranteed to fail.

In many cases, you don't have to get rid of many of the symptoms in order to "cure" dyslexia. The items written in bold in the lists below are directly related to poor literacy teaching. My comments are in brackets. You'll notice that I've divided these symptoms of dyslexia into groups.

It's said that if you have quite a few of the following problems, you have/might have dyslexia (so you probably can't be taught to read and write):

Aural (Hearing/listening) problems

- gets motion sickness easily;
- limited understanding of verbal communication - easily overwhelmed by too many words;
- may have trouble speaking clearly (sometimes this is age-related; or may have a hearing problem and can't hear the word accurately);
- trouble saying a few tricky words: e.g. spaghetti, hospital, animal, asked;

(If still having lots of trouble by the year before reaching school age, contact a speech therapist.)

Co-ordination problems

- bumps into things;
- difficulty hopping, skipping with a rope;
- didn't crawl (but may have walked early);
- difficulty dressing: puts clothes on the wrong way round, puts shoes on wrong feet, trouble tying shoe laces, trouble doing buttons up;
- falls over things;
- poor ball skills;
- rests head on desk/hands/arms on one side while working;

Hand skill difficulties

- can't clap a rhythm;
- **handwriting: illegible, letters are wrong height, sloppy, words don't sit on line, have wrong spacing between words, reverses letters and numbers;**
- **holds pencil oddly;**
- **pages show lots of crossing out;**

Health problems

- bedwetter until a very late age (stress-related?);
- extremely tired (due to huge effort being put into concentrating, or dealing with stress);
- prone to ear infections and/or allergies;

Mathematics problems

- can add and subtract but **fails word problems** (probably because he/she can't read!);
- difficulty counting money;
- **reverses numbers;**
- trouble remembering basic mathematics facts and procedures (Could be due to sheer exhaustion);

Memory problems

- can't remember more than one (or two) instructions at a time;
- easily confused, distracted;
- **forgets to use common, basic punctuation: capital at the beginning of a sentence, full stop/period at the end, etc.;**
- good long-term memory for: events, experiences, faces and pictures;
- short concentration span;
- trouble learning things off by heart (especially things that don't make sense on their own (e.g. alphabet, addresses, days of week, months of year, nursery rhymes);

Multi-sensory learner

- a doing/active person, rather than a "sit still" person;
- creative;
- doesn't learn well by listening/sitting still doing lots of worksheets;
- learns better through doing: e.g. drawing, hand movements e.g. learning which way letter C faces by making the left hand into a C shape and saying *clamp*, or writing a very large C in texta on the whiteboard, or learning by experiencing or seeing a demonstration or diagrams/pictures;

Organisational problems

- **able to answer orally, but has trouble getting thoughts down on paper;**
- sets out work poorly;**
- trouble planning longer written work;**

Orientation confusion

- **confuses similar letters and/or other signs**
e.g. + and -;
- if eyes closed and turned around, loses balance easily;
- gets motion sickness;
- keeps place better when reading, if pointing at work/underlining work with ruler, or covering up words not currently being read;
- **mixes up letters (might be better off learning unconnected cursive letters);**
- **reverses letters and numbers;**

Personality differences

- behaviour: is the class clown/disruptive/withdrawn;
- complains of illness on school days, but recovers miraculously later on;
- easily distracted;

- **emotional about literacy subjects;**
- has good and bad days (which can be taken as implying that sometimes he/she isn't trying – but could be for other reasons);
- lacks confidence in his own abilities;
- low self esteem (can be literacy related);
- **much smarter than shown by written work;**
- not aware of time passing (might just have fantastic concentration);
- pain tolerance - very low or exceptionally high;
- perfectionist;
- sensitive;
- strong ideas about right and wrong (Probably needs to work to make sense of the world, and complains when it doesn't!);
- talented in: art, building things, business, drama/storytelling, music, sport;
- thinks in pictures and/or feelings, rather than words (ie. doesn't talk him/herself through a problem and has trouble talking you through what he/she is doing. Can sometimes manage it if allowed to use drawings, hands, other objects, pictures to help explain.);
- sometimes: careless, day dreamy, developmentally delayed, forgetful, immature, inattentive, lacking in motivation, lazy, has behavioural problems (illiteracy is often a stress factor);
- very light or very heavy sleeper;

Phonemic Awareness problems

- **can't hear some sounds e.g. difference between *binned* and *bend*;**
- **can't hear syllables in words;**
- may have trouble saying some words (Remember, this is sometimes just age-related);

Phonics problems

- **can't read a single word;**
- **can't take good notes because he can't listen and write at the same time (this can be because recalling how to write the word uses all the working memory capacity – because phonics has not been automated);**
- **looks at the first letter and guesses the rest of the word (Whole Word students are told this is how we read, so that's why they read this way!);**
- **no word attack skills for working with unknown/forgotten words (Whole Word students are not taught word attack skills such as sounding out);**
- **oral ability much greater than written work indicates;**
- **reads but doesn't comprehend (usually this is because recalling the meaning of the word uses all the working memory capacity - because phonics has not been automated;**
- **reads just a few lines before stopping (mental exhaustion);**

- **reads words backwards** e.g. was/saw (has trained to read words as Whole Words instead of being sounded out from left to right);
- **spells "semi-phonetically" using some letter names and some sounds** e.g. nd = end;
- **spells the same word several different ways;**
- **switches letters around within a word** e.g. quite/quiet;
- **trouble copying from the board (or a book) (eye problem?);**
- trouble learning to read or spell;**
- **when reading: guesses words, inserts words, mangles words, omits /reverses words, substitutes words;**
- **when reading, relies on: pictures, and the shape of words;**

Speech problems

- poor enunciation;
- may have spoken late;
- slow to name things when asked;

Stress problems

These symptoms could be caused by stress and/or exhaustion, and/or poor nutrition or underlying illness

- appears stressed/traumatised;
- avoids work: sharpens pencil repeatedly, walks around, bothers classmates, loses things;
- behaviour: is the class clown, disruptive, shy, or withdrawn;
- easily confused;
- easily distracted;
- gets motion sickness;
- many of the other symptoms on this list;

According to this list, everyone I know has dyslexia!

Exactly. That's why I call dyslexia "contagious" - because the way it's defined, everyone's bound to have it! If everyone has it, then it's a miracle anyone can be taught to read! So becoming literate is no longer an expectation for everyone - including the person you're worried about!

This list of dyslexia symptoms reminds me of the list compiled hundreds of years ago to help investigators work out whether or not someone was a witch.

By definition, a witch had one or more of the following characteristics: birthmarks, boils, dark freckles, eczema, flaps of skin, moles, piles, spots, tumours, ulcers or warts. Again, everybody has some of these problems - so, according to this definition everyone's a witch.

I think "contagious" type definitions are "hocus pocus" - meaning jargon designed to deceive.

Make no mistake, I'm not saying students are NEVER at fault - sometimes they have major behavioural problems that need to be addressed, but if there is a behavioural problem, fix it - don't use it as an excuse for failing to teach literacy.

And I'm not saying that there are no real reading problems. Many students have weaknesses in one or more segments of the complex process that makes up reading e.g. a weakness in the links between the part of the brain that recognises sounds and the part that recognises letters. That means they have trouble learning the sound/letter links - the very building blocks of written English. But many of these problems can be avoided or solved by re-wiring the brain through proper teaching methods.

Most students with reading difficulties need a moderate amount of help; some need a significant amount of help. Only a very, very few students are truly incapable of learning literacy. Let's have a look at some numbers.

How many students have Dyslexia?

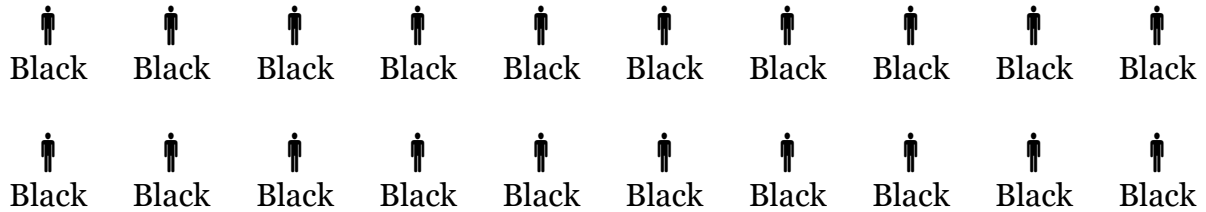
[This article was originally written in 2015, but little appears to have changed. I think things have got worse, but rather than rewriting the article, I've chosen to reproduce it here, with very few changes. These US figures, are relevant to all English-speaking countries.]

Dyslexia is being used as a blanket term, and it's often used as an excuse to sideline students - and then ignore them. Often, nothing really EFFECTIVE is being done to solve dyslexics' literacy problems.

The Statistics

Let's look at some statistics about illiteracy and dyslexia. I'll insert a quote, then illustrate it with a graphic.

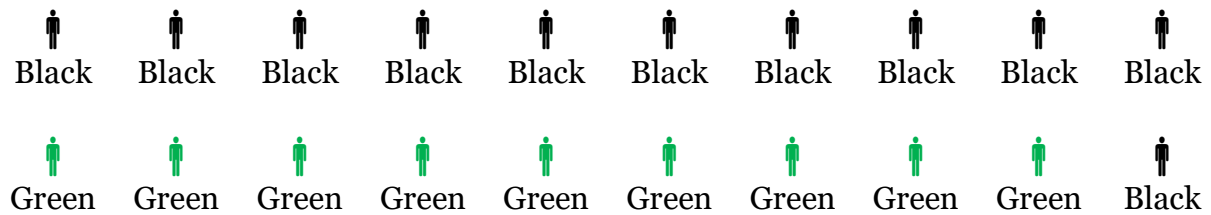
Think about the last 20 adults (people 16 and over) you walked past in the street.



Nearly half of America's adults are poor readers, or "functionally illiterate." They can't carry out simple tasks like balancing check books, reading drug labels or writing essays for a job.

National Adult Literacy Survey of 1993

[Black = Literate, Green = Poor reader]

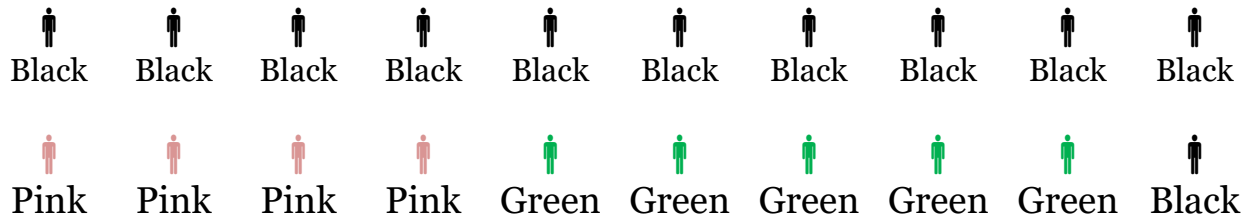


Dyslexia affects one out of every five children - ten million in America alone.

Sally Shaywitz, M.D., 2004

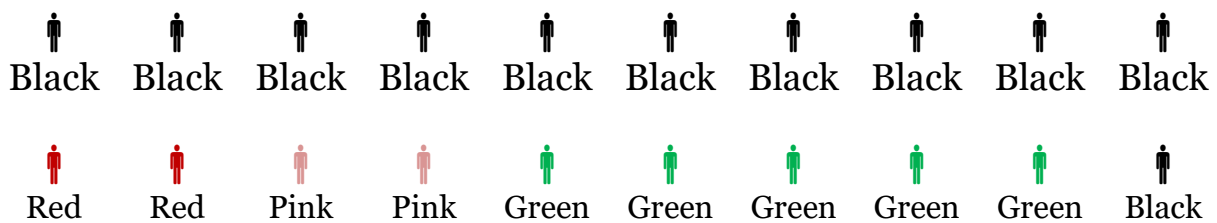
[And what is so for children, is so for adults.]

[Black = Literate, Green = Poor reader, Pink = Dyslexic]



[Remembering that there are varying degrees of any problem, of those four people with dyslexia, one or two will be severely dyslexic, and the others will be less affected.]

[Black = Literate, Green = Poor reader, Pink = Dyslexic, Red = Severely Dyslexic]



Specific word reading difficulty, commonly termed ‘developmental dyslexia’, refers to the low end of the word reading skill distribution but is frequently considered to be a neurodevelopmental disorder.

This term implies that brain development is thought to be disrupted, resulting in an abnormal and dysfunctional brain.

We take issue with this view, pointing out that there is no evidence of any obvious neurological abnormality in the vast majority of cases of word reading difficulty cases.

We suggest that dyslexia is best viewed as one of many expressions of ordinary ubiquitous individual differences in normal developmental outcomes.

Thus, terms such as “dysfunctional” or “abnormal” are not justified when referring to the brains of persons with dyslexia.

Click the link below to read the complete article:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5924397/>

For more recent statistics, go to:

<https://www.apmresearchlab.org/10x-adult-literacy>

What do these Statistics Mean?

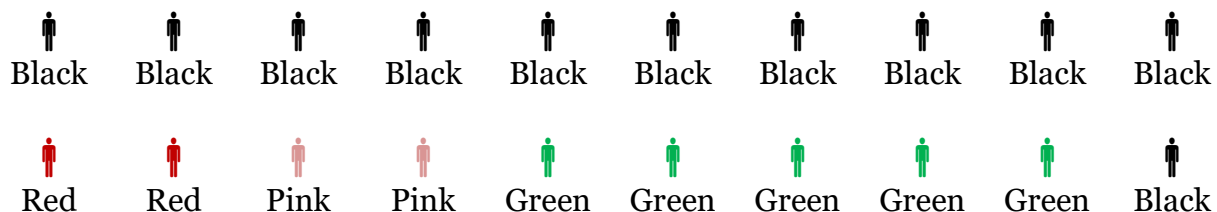
What these numbers mean is that of those 9 people who can't read, according to our current knowledge, it's likely that:

- all fall within the usual (wide) range of normal;
- there is no evidence of brain abnormality [though some specialists would disagree with that]; &
- we need to be wary of blaming students' literacy problems on ADD, etc., or behavioral difficulties.

If we started off with appropriate teaching methods and curriculum, then very few students would fail to read at least adequately. We could then focus our resources on providing intervention to those who really needed it.

The bottom line is that it's not right to lump all the people who can't read properly into the 'must have dyslexia, so won't be able to learn to read - so don't bother trying to teach them properly' category.

[Black = Literate, Green = Poor reader, Pink = Dyslexic, Red = Severely Dyslexic]



What does this mean for literacy?

What this means for the literacy level in the English-speaking world, is that there should be no more than 5-10% of people who are illiterate, or who have very low literacy. And, with the right help, nearly all people in the lowest 5-10% should be able to learn to read.

It means that we should teach EVERYONE to read in as near a fail-proof way as possible. Then, whether or not they have a problem, they've been presented with the truth about how sounds and letters work, and have been shown how written English makes sense. This gives them the best start possible.

What does this mean to you as you think about teaching someone to read? It means there's HOPE that you can solve your student's problem either totally, or enough to make a major difference.

If you feel that having a diagnosis of dyslexia would be of help to your student, go ahead and apply to have testing done, but don't delay and waste time waiting for a diagnosis before doing something. Act Now!

How can a Diagnosis of Dyslexia Help?

A diagnosis of dyslexia might be useful for things like getting extra time for tests, etc., but often, nothing else useful comes of having a diagnosis. Often, it's just a label. It usually doesn't result in the student receiving effective remedial help. It's likely you'll have to look after that yourself.

What do we Really know about Dyslexia?

We are still learning about the brain, and about dyslexia. It was thought at one stage that dyslexia might be caused by the brain being too "right-brained". But many very right-brained people read perfectly well.

It appears now that dyslexia might be caused by the brain wiring going a bit wrong - but brains can be re-wired, because that's what brains are for – being wired and re-wired!

The problem is that Whole Word methods of teaching literacy actually train the brain to wire wrongly for written English, so Whole Word methods can CAUSE dyslexia in a brain that wasn't naturally dyslexic.

It's thought that right-brained people are more likely to be dyslexic, but half the population is born right-brained - so being right-brained can't be a DEFECT.

But if someone was born right-brained, and then had their brain wired wrongly for written English by being taught the Whole Word method, then that wrong wiring might be enough to tip them into the dyslexic category.

If this is the case for your child or student, you and the brain's owner are going to have to turn into brain electricians - and do some re-wiring. This is because some skills are left-brain based, and some are right-brain based. Written English is a left-brained, analytical skill (like mathematics); art is a right-brained, creative skill.

Remember - there's nothing wrong with being right-brained! Right-brained people see things a bit differently than left-brained people, that's all. Left-brained people see things a bit differently than right-brained people. One is not better than the other. We need both types.

In an ideal world, we would all be both-brained. Then we'd ALL be using both sides of our brains well, and we'd ALL be BRILLIANT!

You, a non-teacher and non-specialist, can help with literacy and brain re-wiring. You can make a difference. Don't rely on others to put your child or student first; it's unlikely to happen.

What should I do next?

While I recommend that you try my Course, starting with the FREE *How Do I Start Teaching Phonics at Home* ebook (available on my website), if you strongly suspect that your student is not just someone who hasn't been taught properly, but is someone who falls into the red or pink categories of people who might (for any reason) be less capable of learning to read at the moment, I recommend you keep reading.

But whatever you do, take sensible action! (Don't just race around like a headless chook, wasting time and energy.) Find something useful, then move forward each day, little by little.

Don't aim for perfection; aim for improvement. Small improvements, day after day, add up to major improvements in a surprisingly short time. And most importantly, never, NEVER give up!

There are some other programs that might help

First, I recommend you look at my *Phonemic Awareness Course*, which parents and tutors can use to teach essential pre-reading skills such as:

- separating words in a sentence;
- separating the sounds in a word; and
- blending.

If you think your student might be lacking those skills, it would be a good idea to start there. To find out more about that Course, click [here](#), or go to my website: www.teachreadingathome.com

NOTE: The links below are not affiliate links. I receive no compensation for mentioning these programs. These programs particularly suit students who need some pre-reading re-wiring, so their brain is prepared to succeed at reading. Click a link below to learn more about it.

[EDUBLOX](#)

[FASTFORWORD](#)

For more information about literacy statistics, go to:
www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/

Why the focus on Dyslexia, rather than teaching phonics?

Because it's a lot easier to point and yell, "Look over there!", "It's the student's fault - he's got dyslexia!", "She could do better!", "They come from a deprived background", "He has ADHD!", "His parents both work", "She isn't read to at home!", and so on... rather than admitting the errors of the past and working to solve the problem.

By the way, I'm not blaming the teachers - it's the people who trained them who caused the problem, and the bureaucracies that insist they use these faulty methods who perpetuate the problem. The teachers are teaching the way they were taught to teach. And if teachers work out that what they were taught isn't working and start teaching full phonics, I have teachers receive an ultimatum, "Stop! Or find another job!"

One reason teachers use my Courses is because each lesson can be taught as a mini-lesson of about 10 minutes at a time - so the fact they're teaching full phonics can be hidden - while they continue to teach Whole Word methods as required. (Something appears on the radar when the students results are higher than expected, but, perhaps, this teacher is just exceptional!)

This is not ideal, but who lives in a perfect world?

So, what now?

Basically, the problem stops with you. What are you going to do for your students? Are you going to teach them yourself, or see that someone else tutors them properly? Will your students end up reading fantastically well? I don't know, but they'll read a lot better than they would have if you hadn't taken action.

To be honest with you, there are a few students I have found, who are unable to learn to read. They were so mentally disabled that they were unable to indicate, "Yes" or "No". I didn't try to teach them to read, because I realised I would be unable to work out whether or not they had understood a question - let alone work out whether they had answered the question accurately.

But there were other students the schools said could not be taught to read:
- a small boy no-one had ever tried to teach literacy before:

He couldn't talk. At all. But he was normal in every other way, and could very clearly (and emphatically) indicate "Yes" and "No"! I have no idea why he couldn't speak, but I was able to teach him to read, and write very well before he reached school age; and

- a couple of mentally disabled students in mainstream school:

No attempt had been made to teach these children to read, even though they could speak reasonably clearly. I managed to teach both to read at a good standard - the older one to low secondary level, and the younger one, to just below grade level. Their handwriting was never very good, so I found it better to teach them to type.

What's the most important thing to remember?

The most important thing you have to remember is that the basic idea you're wanting students to grasp is that this **sound** is shown by that **letter**. It isn't that hard to do, as long as it's done in a sensible step-by-step way.

Take note that students are usually not illiterate because their teachers have tried to teach full phonics, and failed. Students are usually illiterate because teachers haven't taught full phonics!

What do I mean by Full Phonics? I mean all but the most rare sound/letter combinations, the rules (or patterns, if that's what you prefer to call them), sounding out, blending, basic punctuation signs, and sufficient practice to be able to apply what they've learnt in real time with ease and confidence.

Phonemic Awareness

Keep in mind that some true dyslexics and people with moderate hearing loss can find it very difficult to learn anything from hearing alone. When you try to teach them the sounds, you will notice the problem very quickly.

So, I tend to recommend that with all students, you begin with the *How Do I Start Teaching Phonics at Home* article. This is the easiest way to begin for both tutor and students, because it provides everything necessary for teaching the first 90 words in my Course.

By the time you and your student have progressed that far, you will both know if my Course suits you, and will have learnt all the real basics, so that if my Course doesn't suit you, you'll know enough to be able to choose an excellent course for yourselves.

What should I do?

Remember, you're in charge of your own students. If you see a student in difficulty, work out what the problem is and take action. Never delay hoping the student will "grow out of it" (which is unlikely unless they're two or three years old) - they'll just fall more and more behind. So it will get harder and harder for them to catch up.

Keep in mind that when students have serious weaknesses, you need to concentrate on using the student's stronger learning styles to help them learn. Everybody has a stronger learning style; most good courses teach using at least two learning styles, so all students can learn well.

Learning Styles

The three basic learning styles are: hearing, seeing and doing. For example, if your students can't hear sounds in words, then teach using the letters themselves, and show students your lips while you say the sounds. Let them see their lips while they say the sounds, and find pictures online that show the position of the mouth parts for the sounds they find difficult.

If your students don't make much progress with that, they are **doing** people - they learn best when they have to do something physical! For doing people, I like to use hand signs that show the shape of the letter.

I like to use hand signs rather than pictures because we might not always have the pictures with us - but we always carry our hands around!

For example, you could help a doing person learn letter C by showing them how to form their left hand into a C shape and say /k/ and the word *clamp*. And if they are learning /f/, teach them to flop their left hand over at the wrist and say /f/ *fly* *swat*. It's important students use the correct hand when making hand signs, because otherwise they'll become confused about which way the letter faces.

In my *Learn to Read at Home Course*, I use a picture and a hand sign to teach each sound and its letter – that means that tutors don't have to come up with this information for themselves.

Teaching a Dyslexic/semi-Dyslexic

When you teach someone who has had trouble learning to read and spell, you will be dealing with several problems:

- The students' idea that they're stupid. Because of this assumption - many stop trying to learn literacy. You'll have to convince them that it's not their fault they haven't learnt to read; and that the problem was caused by the way they were taught;
- Teaching the information they don't know is essential, and teaching it so thoroughly that it becomes automatic is part of that. You'll have difficulty with this because they'll say: "I already know that!" But they don't. They only know it sometimes. We don't KNOW anything until we know it on demand; and
- A big part of teaching someone who has been taught by Whole Word methods is re-training their brain. Whole Word trains the brain to process words the wrong way.

So, for these students, it's not just a matter of learning the information; it's a matter of re-wiring their brain. It's hard work for a brain to have to learn to process something a different way. Breaking a bad habit is hard, but it can be done with patience on your part, and patience on the part of the brain's owner - the student. For more information about how the brain learns, go to my website and read the FREE Brain ebook.

And now we come to the crux of the matter; the reason why so many people can't read. The major invisible component in the dyslexia debate. The one that is consistently ignored.

If the problem isn't Dyslexia, what is it?

In the remainder of this ebook, I have included information from:

Why Our Children Can't Read, and What We Can Do About It
by Diane McGuinness, Ph.D.

Recall the list of symptoms that is supposed to show that someone is dyslexic (and, therefore, incapable of learning to read).

Can you see that it doesn't make sense to say that people are illiterate because they:

- forget to use punctuation,
- guess,
- have handwriting problems,
- have poor comprehension,
- have poor written organisational skills,
- have poor phonemic awareness,
- have poor word attack skills,
- reverse or mix up letters and numbers, or
- are unable to read!

People aren't illiterate because they have Dyslexia

If people who are taught the literacy skills listed above become able to read (ie. these "symptoms" disappear!), then they weren't illiterate because they had Dyslexia, they were illiterate because they hadn't been taught how to be literate!

Your students reverse letters b and d? That's because they haven't been taught to recognise the letters correctly, or to write them correctly, and haven't been given sufficient practice to automate that information.

Your students guess? That's because they've been taught that's how you read; they have been told NOT to sound out the words! (No kidding!)

You get the idea; I won't go through the other symptoms.

Three reasons why people are illiterate:

- 1) They can have a low in-built ability in the "sounds and letters" parts of the brain - and they were not taught in a way that helped them overcome this problem;
- 2) They have not been taught literacy "sounds & rules"; and
- 3) They have been taught the phonetic rules - but they were not given enough practice to be able to "automate" what they'd been taught.

Let's go through those three reasons one at a time:

Reason One: Low ability to link sounds and letters

It appears that about 5% of people have a weak link between the parts of the brain that deal with perceiving individual sounds, and/or relating a sound to its relevant letter.

Now, don't despair about the weakness in the brain business. Everyone has brain weaknesses of one sort or other - these weaknesses cause inconvenience, but they don't stop us doing things we want to do. And that's what counts.

Most of these people will have mild to average difficulty, but with a full phonics-based course and some extra effort, they will learn to read and write well - because phonics courses build that link, then exercise it!

If they concentrate on dealing with the problem in the way you eat an elephant (one little bite at a time), they can solve the problem - at least enough to get on with life the way they want.

A few of these students with sound/letter brain weaknesses will be very seriously afflicted. These people are the true dyslexics. They just don't seem to be able to correlate sounds and letters. They will never find literacy easy. No, they are not dumb; in fact, the opposite is true - they are usually exceptionally gifted. And that's a good thing because they're going to need to use their areas of gifting to compensate for this weakness, in order to become literate.

True Dyslexics need Full Phonics instruction

With true dyslexics, it's very important that they are taught literacy according to their stronger learning style, because they can't learn the sound/letter combinations by being **told** them. But they will be able to learn them another way - perhaps through using pictures, or through hand signs/forming letters in clay, etc.

These students still need to do a full phonics course, but they also need to learn a compensatory skill or two so that they link the sound to the letter. Using a compensatory skill means they will follow a **two**-step process to make the connection, rather than a **one**-step process.

This will add a small amount of time to reading and writing each letter - so if you've got students with these major difficulties, don't despair! They'll just be slower readers and writers. But that doesn't matter – speed isn't everything.

Using Compensatory Skills is not a problem

You've seen compensatory skills in action before. It's what happens when you say to someone, "Turn left" and she looks at her wedding ring to check which way is left.

Having to use compensatory skills is not a disaster! She's compensated for either failing to learn left and right properly, or for having a brain weakness in that area. She's found a way around the problem - this shows she's clever!

Many of these strongly true dyslexic students find word processing/typing a huge help, but don't necessarily require them to touch type because that relies on an automatic sound/letter link, which is their weak area.

For those with major, major difficulties in spite of learning real phonics properly, there is technology that can write what they say, and then they can proofread it (or get someone else to do the proofreading or use an online tool such as Grammarly). But don't be too quick to rush to rely on technology or other people - you'll be surprised what patient "elephant eating" can achieve.

And when they can read, don't just ignore the advantages of technology. A surprising percentage of famous authors dictate their books to – a human, a recording device, or directly to their computer. So, why shouldn't your student do the same – especially with essays, etc.?

Reason Two: Have not been taught to read "with phonics rules"

There are really only three ways to teach literacy:

- 1) Full Phonics/ "with the phonics rules"/Synthetic Phonics
- 2) Whole Word Method
- 3) A mixture of the Phonics and Whole Word – Eclectic/Balanced Method

I very strongly recommend the Synthetic Phonics ("with the phonics rules") Method. I will shorten that to Phonics for the rest of this ebook - but remember that I am talking about a specific sort of Phonics. Any old sort of (semi) Phonics will not do the trick for students in difficulty.

To help you understand the relationship between Dyslexia and teaching without the "phonetic rules", I will have to lay a foundation by pointing out a few problem areas that most students have when they're taught with Whole Word and Eclectic/Balanced learn to read methods.

Problem One: The Alphabet

Most literacy courses start by teaching the alphabet letter names, but this is not a good place to start - in fact, it can cause problems because the alphabet doesn't make sense on its own. (And some people have HUGE difficulty learning something that doesn't make sense.)

NOTE: When I mean a letter, I'll say: letter d (for example).
When I mean a sound, I'll put the most common letter used to represent that sound between slash marks e.g. for /d/ in dog, I'll write: /d/.
When I mean a word, I'll put the word in italics, e.g. *dog*.

If you teach students the alphabet, they know letter d, but they don't really understand that's just the letter's name - so quite a few try to read by saying the letter names! (And spelling is nearly always taught this way - which is why it's such a disaster area.)

Also, beginning to learn literacy this way doesn't provide the very link required for English literacy - the link between the spoken sound and the letter that represents it! Without this knowledge, people 'read' by trying to recognise the shape of the word!

This doesn't work, as many words have similar shapes. And, more importantly, English was not designed to be written or read according to the shape of the word.

Whether or not the students know the letter names, they have to be taught the sound and the letter representing that sound e.g. that letter d is written to show sound /d/ e.g. in *dog*, *dimple* and *dump*.

When teaching literacy, I just find it easier to ignore the alphabet letter names, and teach the sound/letter combinations (without naming the letters). If students already know the alphabet, I tell them to ignore it for now.

I do this because my goal is to make sure students get a very firm grip on the idea that "this sound is shown by that letter". And the first step in learning which sound is being used, is being able to hear the sounds. That skill is called Phonemic Awareness.

Problem Two: Literacy is not natural

We have to use Phonics to teach literacy because reading and writing are not natural skills. Speaking and walking are natural skills; but literacy is not. If literacy was natural, every language would be written down, but even now many languages do not have a written form.

For students to learn these unnatural skills successfully, literacy has to be taught accurately - so that the information is real and is used immediately.

It has to be taught in an organised way so that the information makes sense to the students, and so that the material is cumulative - that means that what they have learnt early on is built on later (and that they start on the easy, foundational stuff and work their way up to the harder stuff).

And as they learn, they have to be given sufficient practice so that they become confident using their skills at speed and with ease. (This doesn't have to be brain-stuntingly boring, and it doesn't have to be time-wasting.)

Teaching this way requires teachers/tutors to teach, not just "facilitate" (ie. let the students discover things for themselves, which is a huge waste of time when learning basic literacy.)

This type of teaching requires concentration on the basics, rather than jumping the basics and providing "pseudo" progress (teaching sight words, which the student repeats from memory rather than understanding what the letters mean). Pseudo progress brings the student to a grinding halt sooner or later, sometimes as late as Grade 3 or 4. By that time, students' bad habits are so ingrained, it's very hard to retrain them.

Problem Three:

Hearing individual sounds in words isn't natural (once people get older)

By the time many children have reached school age, they've lost the skills of being able to hear the individual sounds in words. They had that ability as babies; that's what equipped them to learn their mother tongue. But as they got older, they lost that skill through lack of use, and as people age that skill gets even more rusty.

But learning to read an alphabetical language such as English, means this skill has to be revived. People can revive a skill e.g. when we haven't ridden a bike for years, we can hop on a bike, and we spend a bit of time weaving around and wobbling, but then our brain remembers how to ride - and off we go.

It's the same for people who can speak reasonably well; they struggle for a few days, and then their brain "tunes back into sounds" and they've refreshed that skill. This is because this skill was learnt by the language part of the brain when we were babies. (Remember that true dyslexics often find it easier to re-learn this skill while learning one letter at a time. That's why the Learn to Read at Home Course teaches one sound/letter combination at a time.)

Reason Three:

Insufficient time was given to "automation"

Repetition while paying full attention is the only way to reinforce what has been learnt. Automation is what the brain uses to strengthen our 'mental muscles' – the links in the brain.

Just as pushups and laps are not entertaining, so the practice that automates students' recall of sounds, letters and rules is not necessarily fun - but it builds a firm foundation for fluent reading skills.

It's only when a task is learnt to 'automatic level' that the brain is really ready to advance to more complex material. In order to be really ready to move on to the next stage, students need to be able to show they've become reasonably consistently competent.

As a rule, I would regard this level as being reached if a student can get 80% of the answers correct at the first attempt. Don't aim for perfection; it slows students down too much - and it's amazing how often you can learn more from making a few mistakes (and working out where you went wrong and fixing the problem), than you can by getting everything right!

Summary

Before we go on, just let me summarise the three areas that cause students problems when they are taught literacy with non-full phonics methods.

Students think we use letter names and word shapes

Teaching the alphabet without teaching the sounds those letters represent causes many students to believe they should read by using the names of the letters, or the shapes of the words.

Phonemic Awareness is not taught

Assuming that reading and writing are natural skills, means that we neglect to teach students what they need to know to succeed.

And one of the crucial things we fail to teach is the foundational skill of Phonemic Awareness - the skill to hear the individual sounds in words.

We neglect sufficient practice

And then, we have to automate - to make sure students can recall that knowledge quickly and easily.

Thank you for your patience. Now, let's see how these problems are directly related to dyslexia.

So, how is all this info related to Dyslexia?

Although dyslexia means "trouble with language", being told someone has Dyslexia doesn't mean that the specialist necessarily knows what is wrong and how to fix it. Often, all you get is the diagnosis, and nothing else happens.

Sorry, something else usually **does** happen – usually, a significant amount of money changes hands. But often nothing else **useful** happens.

Lots of Other Diagnostic Terms are also used

Maybe your student was diagnosed with [feel free to skip this list]: Auditory Discrimination Problems, Auditory Processing Disorder, Central Auditory Processing Disorder, Orthographic Deficit, Dysgraphia, Dysnomia, Dysphonetic Deficit, Phonemic Awareness Deficit, Reading Disability, Reading Fluency problems, Short-term or Long-term Memory Deficit, Specific Language Disability, Visual Processing Disorder, Visual-Motor Integration Disorder, Visual Memory Disorder, Visual Convergence Problems, Word Retrieval Deficit, or Written Language Disorder - or something along these lines. I call these part of the contagious dyslexia list. So, to keep things simple, we'll just call them Dyslexia.

Let me summarise the dyslexic problem areas directly related to literacy. To be regarded as dyslexic, students must have several of the following symptoms:

- forget to use punctuation;
- guess;
- have handwriting problems;
- have poor comprehension;
- have poor written organisational skills;
- have poor phonemic awareness;
- have poor word attack skills;
- reverse or mix up letters and numbers; and/or
- be unable to read!

The most common underlying causes of these difficulties are that the students have not been clearly and explicitly taught:

- phonemic awareness;
- the links between each sound and its letter/s;
- in a way they understood; and/or
- in a way that includes sufficient practice to automate their basic literacy skills.

Even students with specific brain weaknesses are likely to be able to learn to at least what I call a “survival level” if these underlying causes are dealt with.

That's right! It's the teaching method!

Whole Word, or whatever else you want to call it, does not improve literacy levels to anywhere near where they should be. Instead, these methods handicap students by giving them a false idea about how sounds and letters work.

The only way to successfully teach written English is to teach it according to the way it was designed to be read and written. (Yes, it was designed; it didn't just appear out of nowhere.)

It was designed to be read aloud from left to right, one letter at a time - with every letter representing a sound. And it was designed to be written down from left to right, one letter at a time - with every sound represented by a letter.

Yes, we've messed with it significantly since then, but nowhere near as much as we've been lead to believe. Over 85% of words obey the sound/letter rules and a few other rules.

For more information on literacy related topics, and to access the Phonemic Awareness Course, and the Learn to Read at Home Course, go to:

Teachreadingathome.com