

# Employee Guide: Focus on dyslexia

What it is and how to overcome challenges in the workplace



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The brain is a complex organ and is unique in how it works to each individual, like a fingerprint. Everybody sees, understands and processes the world around them in different ways. Dyslexia is a neurological condition (often hereditary) which affects how the brain handles information it sees and hears and is thought to affect around 10% of the population, with 4% of the population at the severe end of the dyslexia spectrum. However, arguably, this is not a true representation.<sup>1</sup>

Traditionally, dyslexia was seen as a learning difference which affected somebody's reading and writing skills. As we all know, science is an evolving field and further research has highlighted dyslexics may also have difficulty processing and remembering information they see and hear. This means there will be several adults in the workforce who may have completed their early education undiagnosed.

## Signs

It's key to note that people are affected in different ways. Some may have mild problems, whilst others will have more profound difficulties across more than one area. Difficulties may be exacerbated depending on the task and also external factors such as tiredness can affect performance on a given day.

The British Dyslexia Association has outlined the following signs in adults.<sup>3</sup> Do you:

- Read/write slowly
- Find it hard to scan or skim read text
- Need to re-read paragraphs to understand them
- Confuse visually similar words
- Spell erratically
- Find it hard to listen and maintain focus
- Find it hard to concentrate if there are distractions
- Feel sensations of mental overload

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cache.org.uk/news-media/dyslexia-the-facts>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dyslexia-unlocked.com.au/davis-dyslexia-correction/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/advice/adults/am-i-dyslexic/signs-of-dyslexia>

## Types of dyslexia

- **Reading and writing.** The automatic ability to break down into sounds for reading and writing. People with dyslexia tend to think in three dimensional pictures rather than words. They often have to visualise the meaning of a word before they can recognise the word in its written form.<sup>2</sup>
- **Memory.** Dyslexic individuals often find it difficult to hold information in their short-term memory and also with retrieving it from their working memory.
- **Vision.** Individuals may experience glare from reading black on white, or blur from certain fonts.

- Have difficulty telling left from right
- Get confused when given several instructions at once
- Have difficulty organising thoughts on paper
- Often forget conversations or important dates
- Have difficulty with personal organisation, time management and prioritising tasks
- Avoid certain types of work or study
- Find some tasks really easy but unexpectedly challenged by others

Dyslexia has in the past been viewed as a negative condition and as a result, adults with dyslexia may have low self-esteem or lack confidence to perform at work. They may avoid undertaking certain tasks which are 'admin heavy' or become frustrated when they make a mistake.

The world is changing its view on neurodiversity and the skills these individuals can bring to the workplace. Research has shown that individuals with dyslexia often view ideas or problems holistically and are good at seeing the bigger picture. They are known to be good at simplifying complex ideas or concepts and interpreting patterns in data and often shine in mathematical or scientific careers. It has been found that individuals with dyslexia have high emotional intelligence, they are very good at acknowledging their own emotions as well as 'reading' them in others. They tend to be lateral thinkers and are very good at problem solving.<sup>4</sup>

## In the workplace

There are several assistive technologies which can be used to help you with challenging tasks in the workplace:

- If you find that you express yourself verbally, Microsoft office now comes equipped with voice recognition software, which will type the words as you speak them.
- By setting reminders in your phone or on a calendar can help with time management and organisation and remind you of important dates or meetings.
- If you struggle to retain information, ask in meetings if you can record the session so that you can play it back later at your own pace.
- White backgrounds can cause glare and certain fonts can appear blurry so find your own colour and font preference.

Being dyslexic is hard work and tiredness can make your dyslexic 'symptoms' more pronounced as you are not able to employ your usual coping mechanisms. Understand and utilise the time of day when you feel more awake and productive. This may be in the morning or you may come alive as the day wears on.

You will have good days as well as bad. The key is understanding your own challenges and making life easier for yourself. It's about recognising your brain simply works in a different way and comes with its own superpower.

For more information and advice on dyslexia and the assessments visit [The British Dyslexia Association](#).

<sup>4</sup> [https://assets.ey.com/content/dam/ey-sites/ey-com/en\\_uk/topics/diversity/ey-the-value-of-dyslexia-dyslexic-strengths-and-the-changing-world-of-work.pdf](https://assets.ey.com/content/dam/ey-sites/ey-com/en_uk/topics/diversity/ey-the-value-of-dyslexia-dyslexic-strengths-and-the-changing-world-of-work.pdf)

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