

Study tips for Students with Dyslexia:

Dyslexia may mean that you learn in a different way. While dyslexia may affect your reading, writing and spelling, you may also find it hard to remember new information or to be organised. While working harder than others in the class, it may be a struggle to get good results. You may know more than you can put down on paper. The assessment shows learning strengths and weaknesses. Using your strengths, it is possible to find alternative ways to learn. Find out what works for you when accessing information, storing it in memory and showing what you know. Pick out what will work for you from the tips below.

Your teachers are there to support you. Ask them for help and advice. There is a form called 'Asking for Help' which is in the information for students' section on the website: www.dyslexia.ie. This helps you pinpoint exactly what supports would help in the classroom.

Organisation

Put into place routines that help with organisation.

- Study at a desk/table with plenty of room and with shelves for files and books with all necessary equipment present, such as staplers, highlighters, colour pens, etc.
- Take small breaks during the study period.
- Colour code files and copies for different subjects, such as yellow for English.
- Have a 'housekeeping' day once a week where bags are cleared and notes are filed. If necessary include your locker in school.
- Always put the subject, date and topic as a heading on notes.
- Have no distractions in study area such as TV or mobile.
- A calendar on the wall, with all key dates for exams, school assignments, sports and social life.
- Study/revision timetable on the wall. This needs to be one that you can keep to and not just aspire to.
- Use the homework journal to take down homework and to pack the bag for the next day.

Motivation

- Same time, same place as much as possible so a routine is established.
- Tidy and organised study area helps you settle. It also avoids wasted time looking for items.
- Have a 'to do' list on the wall, so if you think of something, you can write it down. Have a revision plan detailing all topics for revision for an exam. Mark off what you achieve and see your progress.
- Motivation grows on success, so planning and meeting targets will encourage you.
- Use multi-sensory methods to learn. This means activities such as writing, highlighting, talking or making mind maps. It is harder for the mind to drift off if learning is activity based.
- Set clear goals. Long term goals are key life objectives such as getting the points for the chosen course in college. Medium term goals are the stages in getting to that point such as results in house exams. Short term goals are for this evening's study period. SMART goals help in study time in the most effective way.
- Build in rewards for meeting goals, such as small treats like a small break or cup of coffee.

SMART Goals

SMART goals are

- **Specified:** Sets out exactly what is to be done and when.
- **Measurable:** Criteria for knowing you have achieved the goal.
- **Action based:** What exactly do you have to do.
- **Realistic:** It is possible for you to achieve the result within the time.
- **Time-based:** Sets the time frame to achieve the goal.

Instead of a very general goal such as 'To read over the chapter on the Reformation three times' SMART goals could be expressed as:

- To learn 15 new words in French, their gender and spelling. (20 minutes)
- To learn 5 reasons for the Reformation, 6 key facts about Luther's life and 5 key beliefs he had. (25 minutes)
- To draw a picture of a microscope and label the ten key parts of it. (25 minutes)

Reading

Reading is a key skill for second level and for college.

- Reading improves, the more you read. Try to read for pleasure to develop reading stamina, speed and comprehension. Read for 20 minutes a day as a routine. Find reading material that you are interested in whether it is newspapers, magazines or books.
- Have a dictionary to help with new vocabulary. Put a tab for each section beginning with a new letter and have a bookmark with an alphabet on it so you can find words easily.
- If it helps, use a ruler to keep your eye on the line of text. Have a pen or highlighter in your hand.
- If the white paper is hard on your eyes, use a colour overlay to reduce glare.
- It reduces errors in reading if you subvocalise by saying the words quietly to yourself. This way you see and hear the words on the page.
- Ask for advice if you are given lengthy reading lists so you can identify the key texts to read.
- Get tapes of English texts so you can listen as well as read the text.
- Use a reading method for texts such as SQ3R.

SQ3R Reading method

SQ3R stands for Survey, Question, Read, Recite and Review and involves the following steps.

- Survey the text by looking at the title, headings, pictures, opening and closing paragraph.
- Ask questions about what you expect to know after reading the text.
- Read actively looking for answers to your questions.
- Recite. Ask yourself to answer the questions raised. The more senses involved in reciting, the more likely the learning is to stick. Triple strength learning involves seeing, saying and hearing. Quadruple strength learning involves the addition of writing.
- Review. In the days and weeks following, check you can still answer the questions.

Note Taking

- Revision books can help if you find it difficult to summarise textbooks.
- Can you bypass taking notes in class so you can concentrate on understanding what is being said? This can be done by photocopying the notes of another student.
- When taking notes, mark words you cannot spell and move on. Ask the teacher later.
- Go over the notes that night, and redo them if legibility is a problem.
- Ask for time to take notes/diagrams down in class
- Use plenty of space, headings, colour and bullet points when making notes.
- Take time to make good notes/ mind maps as they can help in structuring answers.

Learning

- Material/notes need to go from short term into long term memory. This involves hard work to make the material your own. This does not happen by reading alone. It means changing the channel by talking, listening, debating, drawing, visualising, writing, making mind maps or flashcards.
- You need to understand what you are learning as rote learning is not likely to work for you.
- If there are specific facts, dates, definitions of words to be learnt, make study cards with the new word on one side and the explanation on the other side. Keep them in a box and test yourself often.
- Mnemonics are devices for helping to memorise key facts. An example is **FATDAD** for the 6 counties of Northern Ireland or **Richard of York gave battle in vain** for the colours of the rainbow.
- Visualisation means making a mental image of a text, making pictures in your mind's eye.
- It is only possible to memorise a limited number of unrelated facts, so organising a list of facts into groups helps.

Writing

Writing involves so many tasks, which the student with dyslexia finds difficult, that there is often a mismatch between oral and written work. Written answers may be too short, lack fluency and spontaneity or do not answer the question asked. When you concentrate on the writing conventions such as spelling, handwriting and punctuation, ideas suffer. When you are thinking and making interesting connections, the writing skills suffer. Divide the task into five stages.

1. **Understanding the question.** Take time to analyse the question and understand what is being asked. This is important. Very often students with dyslexia write everything they know about a subject down, rather than using their information to answer the question being asked.
2. **Brainstorm.** With an empty sheet of paper, put down all ideas that come into your head with your mind running free and making associations.
3. **Planning.** Using the brainstorm, select and connect ideas. Plan and structure the answer. The plan will display the pattern of the essay as a whole, and where different points are linked. It is easy to see the balance and sequence of the essay. Include references and points to be made.
4. Now that thinking has been done, the task is to write. The comprehensive plan will keep writing to the point. Use signposts for the reader to understand the structure such as words like 'however', 'finally'. Don't stop for spelling at this stage. Get your ideas down on the page
5. Proofread three times, once for spelling, once for punctuation and paragraphing, and once to check the content is to the point and well structured.

Revision

- Students with dyslexia do not cram for exams well. A good revision programme avoids the feeling of being overwhelmed.
- The first step is to know what is coming up in the exam. Ask teachers for the topics which are to be examined. Check you have the necessary sets of notes, textbooks and revision books. Make out a master sheet of what has to be done in each subject. Mark off topics as you revise and you see the progress you are making.
- Make out a revision timetable showing each day of the week and the time allocated to study. Then allocate subjects to these times. Ensure that you have time for all your subjects over the week.
- Get up early the morning of an exam and revise from 6.00 am to 8.00 am. It means the information is fresh in your mind.
- Revision is an active process and involves hard work. The multi-sensory methods of seeing, hearing, listening and writing all help the retention of material learnt.
- Be familiar with past examination papers and how questions are framed. Practice answering questions.