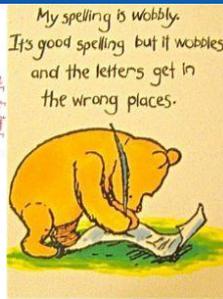
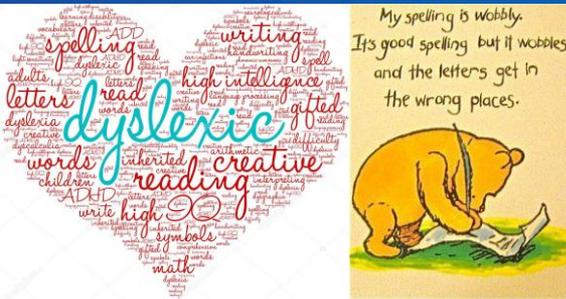


# Supporting Students with Dyslexia: Strategies and Best Practices Beyond Reading and Spelling

Dr Hélène Cohen, Real Training Tutor,  
Educational Consultant, INSET provider

27th November 2025



# Introductions

- 40 years teaching experience: Nursery to Masters and everything in-between!
- Mum and Bubbe
- Tutor on postgraduate iSENCO and NASENCO courses
- SENCO
- English teacher/lead
- Senior leader
- Consultant/INSET provider
- Author of S.E.N.D. Help – book of strategies
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Dan Black Belt TKD



Dr Hélène Cohen

# Dyslexia – simple definition



Greek: **dys** - difficulty with  
**lexis** - words

...difficulty with words read, words spelt, words pronounced, words written and association of meanings with words.

(Day to Day Dyslexia in the Classroom - Joy Pollock & Elisabeth Waller)

"I have **dyslexia**" was extremely hard for me to say to anyone. It was like saying, "I am stupid, I didn't believe that I am stupid. I didn't know if the person I was telling understood what it means to have **dyslexia**. I once told a close friend and her response was "I didn't know you weren't normal."

Spelling is....

~~Difficult~~  
~~Challenging~~  
Hard.

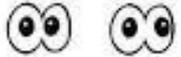
*"We all see things the same way."  
We see words in groups or phrases."*

A child that sees like this can pass a vision screening.

This is 20/30 vision

E  
FP  
TO Z  
LPED

A child that sees like this can pass a vision screening.



A child that sees like this can pass a vision screening.



A child that sees like this can pass a vision screening.



So, is it any wonder why your child can't sit still for 20 minutes to do homework?



© 2012 Carolanne Beech, OD www.BrainAndEyeConnection.com

# Dyslexia – the new Delphi definition



“

Dyslexia is a set of processing difficulties that affect the acquisition of reading and spelling.

The most commonly observed cognitive impairment in dyslexia is a difficulty in phonological processing (i.e. in phonological awareness, phonological processing speed or phonological memory).

However, phonological difficulties do not fully explain the variability that is observed.

Working memory, processing speed and orthographic skills can contribute to the impact of dyslexia.

(<https://dyslexiaaction.org.uk/2024/12/the-delphi-study-a-new-definition-of-dyslexia/>)

# Dyslexia: Does it count as a disability?



“A child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.” (DfE/DoH, 2015, p.15)

“A child of compulsory school age or a young person has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she:

- has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or
- has a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions” (DfE/DoH, 2015, pp.15-16)

“You’re disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.” (Gov UK, no date, no page)

# Dyslexia



It's hard too itunbrestnad, it isn't?

If you're not wun ov the 10 to 51 percent the ov populashn with dyslexia, it's reelee hard to it's understand like what.

It's eesy to think that it's a sacmpit a of. That if poeple with bislexia workeb harba, nad rily themselves aqqlid, they coob "get it over." But that's not the case.

Life is much actually mor bifficult for peeple with pyslexia. They have brilliant minbs, but hrab they're focus.

Dyslexia is a gift—the gift of ding aple to c things from lots of biffrent pints ov vyoo, wunc at all. But the gift comes with a cruse, and crus theis that it's harb to prioritize, or make sense ov, all those prsqectifs.

Peedle with byslexia can be hard to liv with, be<sub>em</sub>se their brans wrok so biffrently to owz. Even if, the bay-to-bay living with it you love someone with byzlexia can brive you insaue. Because thing they kan forget, be<sub>lee</sub>ve they've said or bun fi<sub>ng</sub>s they haven't, dee inkrebidli messi and bisroganizeb, be nd lss sosilly aware other than qeql, yet hav hi emashnl inteligents.

The dest thig you can do is to und<sub>em</sub>nd mor adot dyslexia, so you're lessexasperated and more simphtic.

This is an inste into how their mins work.

# Dyslexia



It's hard to understand it, isn't it?

If you're not one of the ten to fifteen percent of the population with dyslexia, it's really hard to understand what it's like.

It's easy to think that it's a bit of a scam. That if people with dyslexia worked harder, and really applied themselves, they could "get over it." But that's not the case.

Life is actually much more difficult for people with dyslexia. They have brilliant minds, but they're hard to focus.

# Both and gift and a curse



Dyslexia is a gift - the gift of being able to see things from lots of different points of view, all at once. But the gift comes with a curse, and the curse is that it's hard to prioritise, or make sense of, all those perspectives.

People with dyslexia can be hard to live with because their brains work so differently to ours. Even if you love someone with dyslexia, the day-to-day living with it can drive you insane. Because they can forget things, believe they've said or done things they haven't, be incredibly messy and disorganised, and be less socially aware than other people, yet have high emotional intelligence.

The best thing you can do is to understand more about dyslexia, so you're less exasperated and more sympathetic.

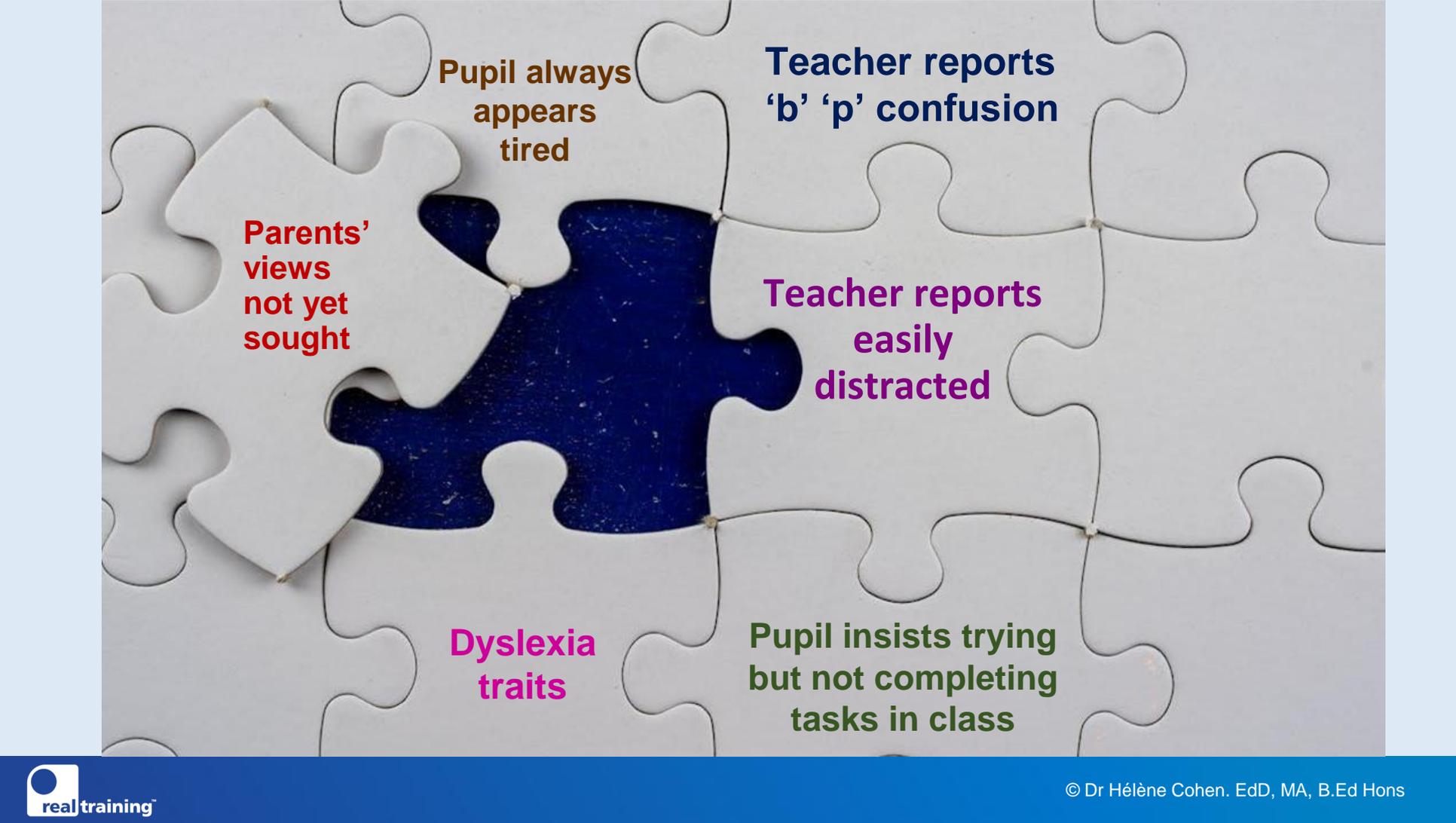
This is an insight into how their minds work.

# Where would you place the below student?

- Working memory - **13th %ile**
- Processing speed - **30th %ile – simple symbol search average, coding involved, very weak.**
- Reading single words in own time, accuracy - **55th %ile**
- Decoding nonwords at speed - **4th %ile**
- Reading passage accuracy - **85th %ile**
- Writing speed - **16th %ile**
- Copy writing speed - **5th %ile**
- Academic writing: summarising text read - **below the scale**
- Typing - **25th %ile**
- Spelling - **45th %ile**
- Rapid naming of digits and pictures - **stressful – restarted, below cut off point for scoring**
- Spoonerisms - **accuracy 75th %ile rate - below the scale**

- Intellect exceptional - 99.8<sup>th</sup> %ile
- Working memory - 13<sup>th</sup> %ile
- Processing speed - 30<sup>th</sup> %ile – simple symbol search average, coding involved, very weak.
- Reading single words in own time, accuracy - 55<sup>th</sup> %ile
- Reading speed single words – no context 1<sup>st</sup> %ile
- Decoding nonwords at speed – 4<sup>th</sup> %ile
- Reading passage – accuracy 85<sup>th</sup> %ile speed 5<sup>th</sup> %ile
- Writing speed – 16<sup>th</sup> %ile
- Copy writing speed – 5<sup>th</sup> %ile
- Academic writing – summarising text read – below the scale
- Typing 25<sup>th</sup> %ile
- Spelling 45<sup>th</sup> %ile
- Rapid naming of digits and pictures, stressful – restarted, below cut off point for scoring
- Spoonerisms - accuracy 75<sup>th</sup> %ile





**Pupil always  
appears  
tired**

**Teacher reports  
'b' 'p' confusion**

**Parents'  
views  
not yet  
sought**

**Teacher reports  
easily  
distracted**

**Dyslexia  
traits**

**Pupil insists trying  
but not completing  
tasks in class**

Pupil always  
appears  
tired

Teacher reports  
'b' 'p' confusion

Parents explain  
hearing loss on  
maternal  
side

Teacher reports  
easily  
distracted

SENCO  
notes 'g' 'k',  
'f' 'v' & 'b' 'p'  
confusion

Hearing loss  
traits

Pupil insists trying  
but not completing  
tasks in class



# Dyslexia

Reading around the class **while reading appears**  
comprehension lost while reading appears to be accurate



My brain gets tired when I read and write



## Vortex of dyslexia



Triggers can be:

- Reading aloud
- Timed test
- Homework
- Writing assignment
- Practice assignment
- Judgemental teacher

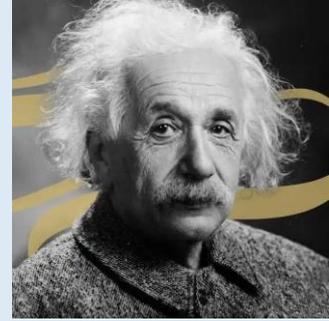
# The pupil may have difficulty with....



- Handwriting and presentation – technology – what matters more, presentation or content?
- Learning to read – decoding and not comprehending; and spell - dumbing down vocabulary
- Thairs mor too spelling van geting it rite
- The pupil may reverse the order of letters, numbers and words, or the orientation of letters
- The pupil's written work may not reflect the intelligence and understanding shown in discussion. **Chocolate houses!**

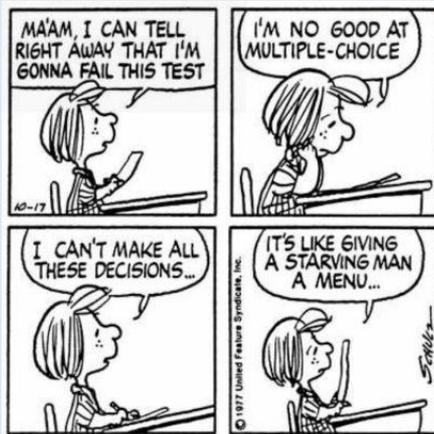


# The way we benchmark achievement is flawed



People with dyslexia are just as intelligent as the rest of you. We're fully aware that other people can read and write much more easily than we can.

“Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life thinking it's stupid.”



“*I'll be a nothing*  
A comment made by a child in Year 6,

(Reay & Wiliam, 1999)

# Alternative approaches

	WPM	No of Errors	% accuracy	phonetic	close phonic	visual	omission	addition	reversals	other	language	composition	vocabulary	grammar	punctuation	notes
pupil																
	8.5	34	74	15	8	1	4	0	3	3	super				sound	
	7.5	25	66	8	11	1	3	2	0	0						12 errors we
	9.1	21	77	11	2	7	1	0	0	0	super				sound	still has some
	5.4	12	78	3	1	3	4	0	1	0	sound	sound	sound	sound	none	g/d reversal:
	7.3	6	92	5	0	0	1	0	0	0	super	super	super	sound	good	Needs to pur
	5.1	5	90	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	super	super	super	good	sound	Poetical writi
	2.5	7	72	6	0	0	1	0	0	0	sound	sound	sound	sound	none	Attempted to
	3.5	9	74	4	1	0	2	0	0	2	sound	sound	sound	sound	simple	Very hard to
	3.3	5	85	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	sound	sound	sound	sound	simple	
	2.5.	6	76	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	simple	sound	sound	sound	simple	To use a lapt
	4.9	18	63	7	4	0	6	0	1	0	simple	simple	sound	simple	simple	commas in li
	4.1	3	98	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	simple	simple	simple	simple	simple	Strange piece
	2.5	1	96	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	sound	sound	sound	sound	simple	has commas
	7.1	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	sound	sound	sound	sound	simple	
	3.7	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	sound	sound	sound	sound	simple	basic sentenc
	0.4	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a				n/a	Extremely dis
	7.9	17	78	10	6	0	1	0	0	0	sound				simple	not told of tir
	4	9	78	5	3	0	0	0	1	0	sound				simple	typed
	3.8	11	71	4	2	1	2	2	0	0	sound	sound	sound	sound	sound	2 phonic and
	10.6	23	78	18	0	0	2	0	3	0	sound	sound	sound	sound	simple	Word 'too' si

(Cohen, 2014)

# Alternative approaches

	WPM	No of Errors	% accuracy	phonetic	close phonetic	visual	omission	addition	reversals	other
pupil										
	8.5	34	74	15	8	1	4	0	3	3
	7.5	25	66	8	11	1	3	2	0	0
	9.1	21	77	11	2	7	1	0	0	0
	5.4	12	78	3	1	3	4	0	1	0
	7.3	6	92	5	0	0	1	0	0	0
	5.1	5	90	2	1	0	0	2	0	0
	2.5	7	72	6	0	0	1	0	0	0
	3.5	9	74	4	1	0	2	0	0	2
	3.3	5	85	4	0	0	0	0	1	0
	2.5.	6	76	2	0	0	2	0	0	2
	4.9	18	63	7	4	0	6	0	1	0
	4.1	3	98	1	0	0	2	0	0	0
	2.5	1	96	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	7.1	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	3.7	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0.4	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	7.9	17	78	10	6	0	1	0	0	0
	4	9	78	5	3	0	0	0	1	0

(Cohen, 2014)

# Alternative approaches

language	composition	vocabulary	grammar	punctuation	notes		
super				sound			
					12 errors were repeated errors over 4 words		
super				sound	still has some capitals where not needed. 3 poems!		
sound	sound	sound	sound	none	g/d reversal spent time doing pictures		
super	super	super	sound	good	Needs to punctate speech within the speech marks used		
super	super	super	good	sound	Poetical writing. Mature style.		
sound	sound	sound	sound	none	Attempted to spell incubator, so not put off by spelling.		
sound	sound	sound	sound	simple	Very hard to read		
sound	sound	sound	sound	simple			
simple	sound	sound	sound	simple	To use a laptop in class for longer tasks		
simple	simple	sound	simple	simple	commas in list - otherwise no punctuation		
simple	simple	simple	simple	simple	Strange piece about numbers. Used spell check for the start of this pie		
sound	sound	sound	sound	simple	has commas in list, no full stops		
sound	sound	sound	sound	simple			
sound	sound	sound	sound	simple	basic sentence demacation ok. / and () correctly used. No capitals for		

(Cohen, 2014)

# Alternative approaches

## Dictation

- Spelling in real situation
- Can throw in common error words
- Addresses punctuation and grammar
- Can link to topics
- Can agree marking processes - tick each word, tick each letter etc.
- Length varies
- Discuss in real time

DIR MOMMY  
I DROO this  
PICKER  
For YOU.  
lov Kayia.



QUITE PLEASE

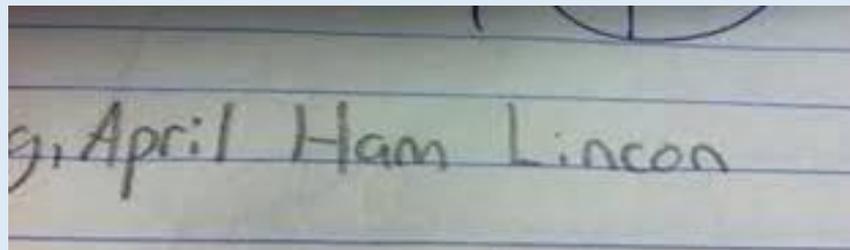
EXAMS IN  
PROGRESS



We have a big garden. We have lots of plants. I can't wait for the strawberries and the raspberries! I have my own garden. In it is beans and leeks.

Within-Word Pattern

[thomasandmama.com](http://thomasandmama.com)



Spelling is....

~~Difficult~~

~~Challenging~~

Hard.

# Signs and subtitles

This sign was outside Tesco – I couldn't read it. What was going on?



I really want to watch Shtisel – but I can't. My Dad and I can't read the news ribbon.

**REMEMBER** – all things heightened when tired or stressed!

Single fares from £110.50

**0417**  
Wed 6 Dec 2015  
Bristol Temple Meads to London Paddington

Standard    1st class

07:40 - 09:54	12:00	17:45
08:00 - 09:54	17:35	17:45
08:06 - 09:43	17:25	17:45
08:10 - 10:06	17:00	17:50

**057009**  
Fri 8 Dec 2015  
London Paddington to Bristol Temple Meads

Standard    1st class

10:00 - 17:34	17:30	17:50
16:18 - 17:59	17:35	17:50
16:28 - 18:00	17:30	17:50
16:48 - 18:26	17:30	17:50

**Checked** Return fares from £210.00

**08 Peak Return**  
Buy off-peak from Paddington to Bristol

from £100.00



# Co-existence of needs - comorbidity

Labels lead to assumptions – helpful or hindrance?



How do we get the child's true voice?



ADD/ADHD

AS

SEMH

Dyscalculia

SLCN

Situational Mutism

Dyspraxia



How can we best support?

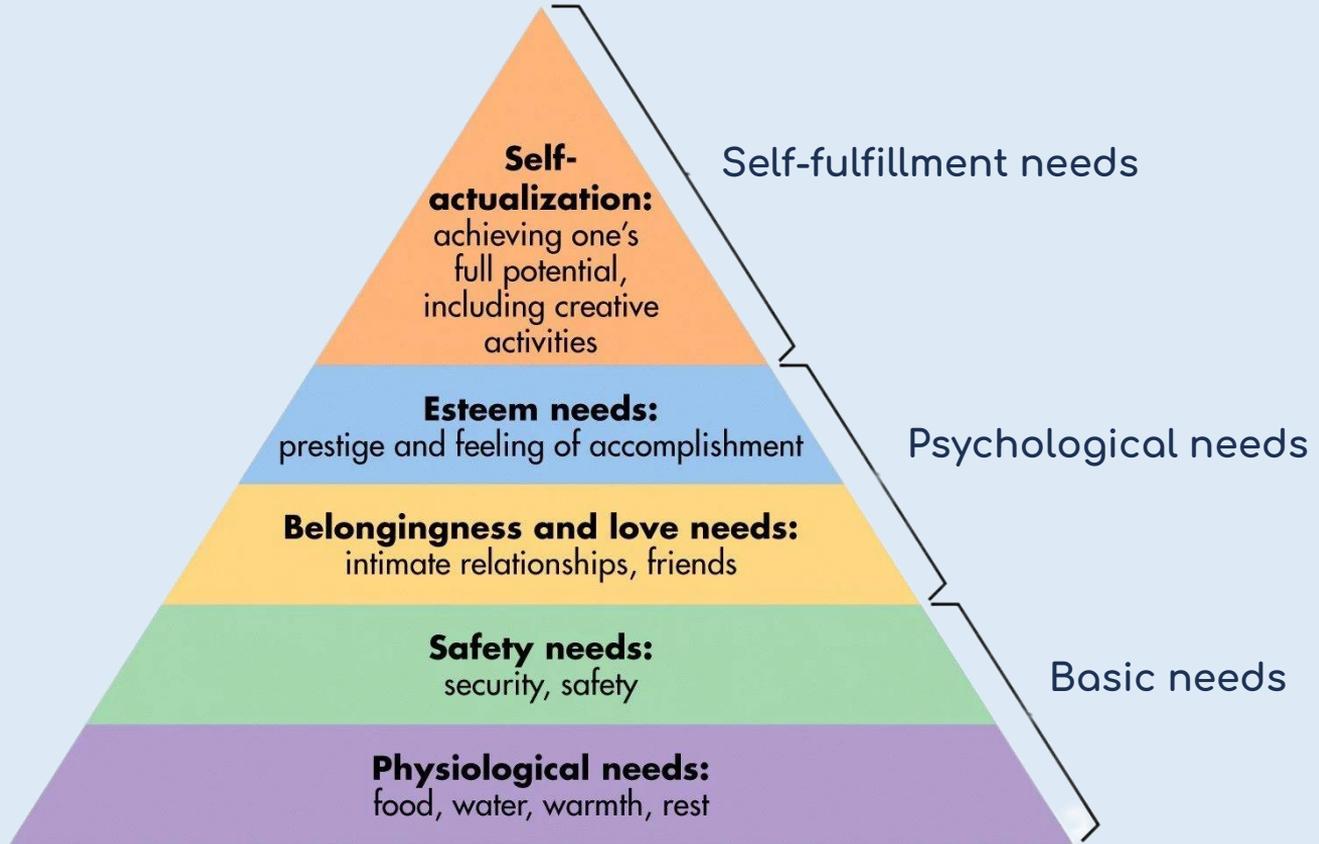


**REMEMBER** – all things heightened when tired or stressed!

# Maslow's hierarchy of needs

1943 A Theory of Human Motivation

Learning Support input vital here for higher levels of development



# The pupil may have difficulty with:



- Colouring neatly and using scissors
- Remembering sequences, for example the alphabet, days of the week and months of the year, as well as dates in History for example
- Time, both in telling the time and knowing which part of the day it is.
- Following the timetable and being in the right place – didn't even know there was one!
- Concentrating, remembering messages and following instructions



Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Warning bell 8.49				
Registration 8.54 – 9.00				
Period 1 9.00 – 10.00				
Period 2 10.00 – 11.00				
Interval 11.00 – 11.10				
Period 3 11.10 – 12.10				
Period 4 12.10 – 13.10				
Lunch 13.10 – 13.55				
Period 5 13.55 – 14.55				
Period 6 14.55 – 15.55				

### My Timetable

	1	2	3	4	5
Monday	10	b2	11	24	10
Tuesday	56	AT3	T1	AT5	10
Wednesday	11	L3	54	24	Lib
Thursday	54	11	10	10	A6
Friday	11	T2	10	E8	T1

# What are the surrounding issues and how can we support?



- Short-term and working memory – chunk it
- Sequencing – writing frames
- Self-esteem – targeted, deserved praise.
- Time given for a task – additional time, shorter tasks
- Processing information – multi-sensory, lists
- Putting names to things or people – all those different teachers!
- Focus – chunk it, change tasks, alternative ways, allow to doodle, movement can help
- Remembering their answer by the time it's their turn to speak – jot down a reminder

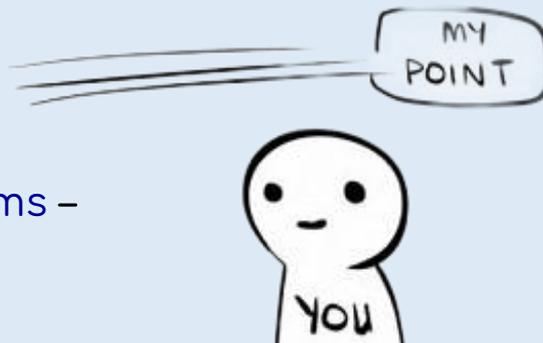


# How those needs might present – what we can do?

May completely miss the point at times – patient explanations

Not necessarily understand idioms – check for understanding

Careful with questions:  
To change centimetres to metres you...?  
Take out 'centi'



Comorbidity of need - other specific learning difficulties eg dyspraxia, ADHD, speech and language, high functioning autism, sensory needs. All can lead to SEMH needs and low self-esteem



# What are the surrounding issues and how can we support?

Hands up if you think in words

How else do you think? Pictures? Concepts?

We assume our reality is the norm

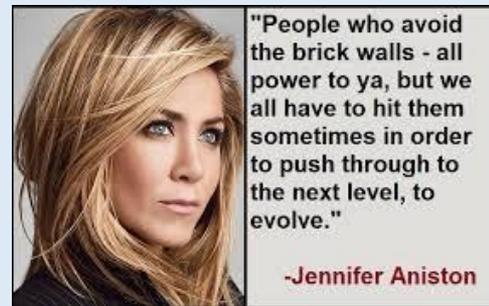
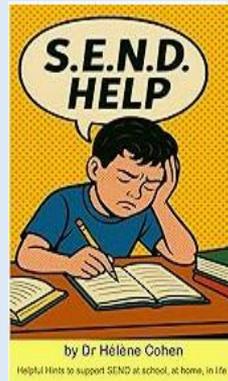


If you think other than in words, it affects processing and getting ideas to paper.

Not surprisingly, we tend to be highly visual, think in pictures, and utilise visual aids to help us plan and organise our lives. Rather than using self-talk, our thought processes are more subliminal. Most people with dyslexia are not even aware that they do this.

# How can we support?

- Name first – gets our attention
- Model it – model work and expected behaviours
- Keep calm – your stress adds to ours – we lose our words
- Tell it straight – what do you want us to actually do?
- Chunk it – give information in bite-sized chunks
- The ‘wow’ factor – let us complete it
- Colour code it; highlight it; side by side copying; signpost the work; keep your place.
- Privacy boards – help focus, remove distractions



# How can we support?

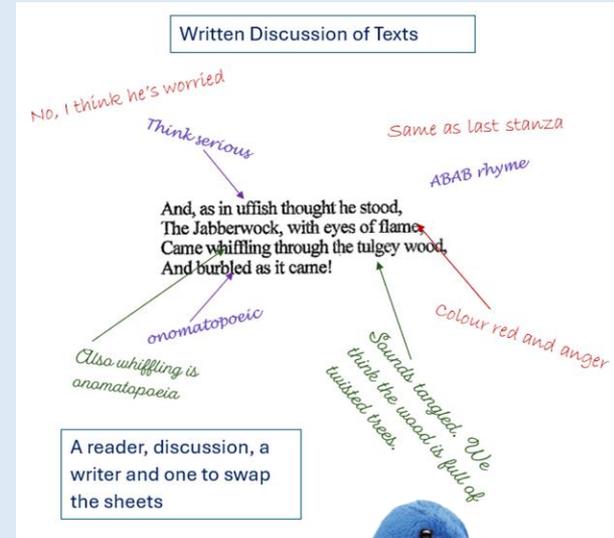
- Re-engage - bursts of exercise to re-focus
- Puppets - they break down barriers
- Written discussions of texts
- Move it - moving can help thoughts to settle
- Keep it positive – targeted, deserved praise; follow up with a positive – don't run, walk - frame things positively
- Not you – low self-esteem - blame self, even if not us, so make it clear when a 'telling off' is not aimed at us

Written Discussion of Texts

No, I think he's worried  
Think serious  
Same as last stanza  
ABAB rhyme  
Colour red and anger  
Sounds tangled. We think the wood is full of twisted trees.  
onomatopoeic  
Also whiffing is onomatopoeia

And, as in uffish thought he stood,  
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,  
Came whiffing through the tulgey wood,  
And burbled as it came!

A reader, discussion, a writer and one to swap the sheets



# Learning styles:

Auditory – learn by hearing

Visual – learn by seeing

Kinaesthetic – learn by doing

Rief (1993) emphasises that students learn and retain information from:

0% of what they read;

✓26% of what they hear;

✓30% of what they see;

✓50% of what they see and hear;

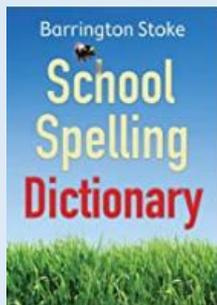
✓70% of what they say; and

✓90% of what they say and do.

**(Rief 1993)**

# How can we support?

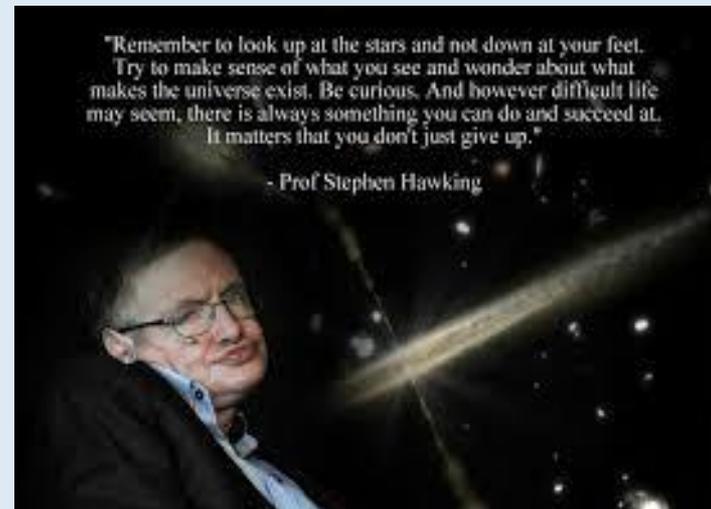
There are dictionaries that actually help us  
Barrington Stoke – School Spelling Dictionary



yuse use  
wons – once  
fone - phone

We will always have dyslexia so we need strategies for life:

- Technology – speech to type, type to speech
- Fonts – Open Dyslexic
- Paper/IWB colour – avoid black on white
- Space on the page



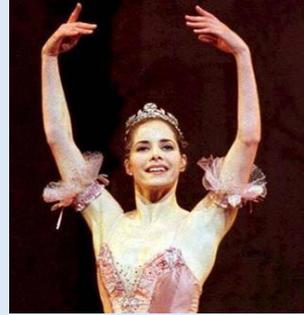
# Barriers and strengths

We are often full of contradictions. We may be highly aware of our environment, but appear lost. We may recognise, or read, a word on one page but be unable to recognise it on the next. Our brains are often very fast, but they appear slow, because we're filtering through all the possibilities that we see.

People with dyslexia are often very good at reading people and have great people skills. We usually have fantastic memories and rely on them – long-term, not working memory. We're often good at spoken language, and frequently spatially talented (think architects, engineers, artist and craftspeople). We are highly intelligent, and intuitive, with vivid imaginations, coming up with creative solutions.



# Pinning down ideas



“

Think about a pinball machine. Our ideas ping around, picking up all sorts of possibilities on the way, we just can't always get them out of our heads. It's the way our brains are wired. So we need support and encouragement.

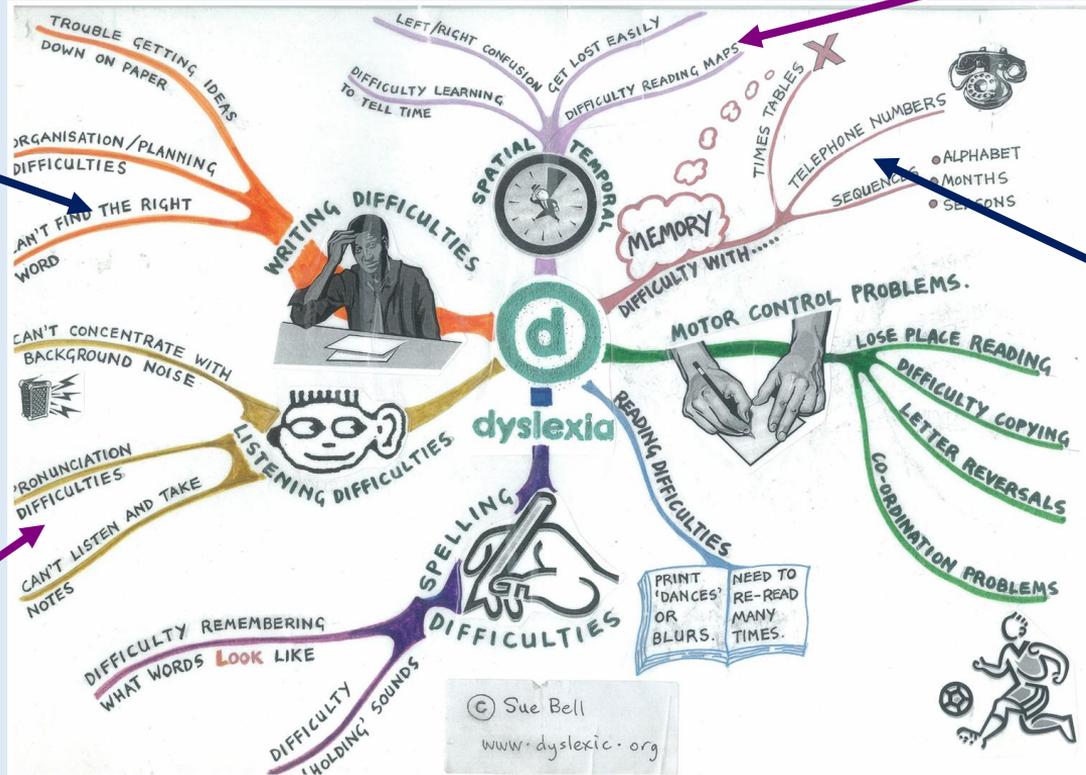
(Power and Forsyth, 2018, p.25).

Mind maps and other ways to make notes can really help.



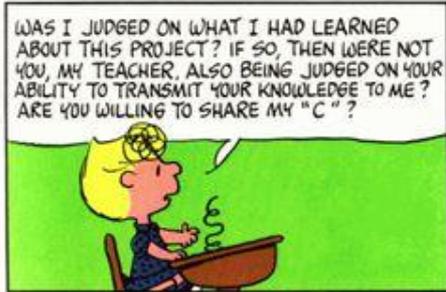
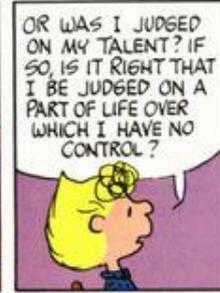
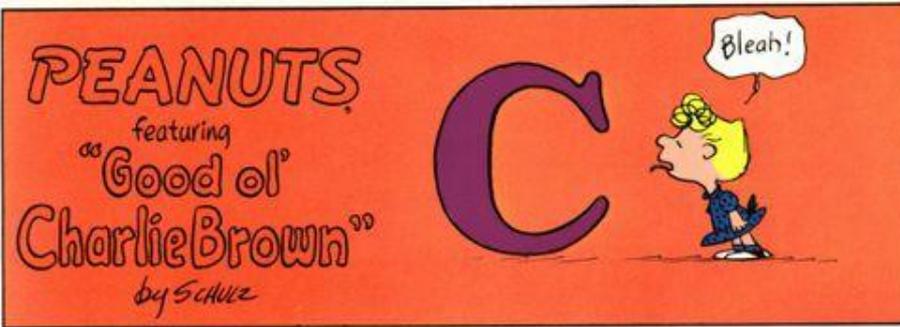
# A mind map of dyslexia difficulties

The “shsher”  
(the thing to drain the  
veggies in.)



What a  
difference  
Satsnav makes!

Masking each  
number, or all the  
right numbers,  
but not in the  
right order  
Morecombe  
and Wise!



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