

Dyslexia: Fact Sheet for Studying at Home

For a person with dyslexia who studies at home: completing assignments, sitting online assessments, and working without a teacher in the room. Also for the family member or support person helping them.

What is going on

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability affecting word reading and spelling, in accuracy, speed or both. It continues even with good teaching, and it does not affect intelligence (International Dyslexia Association [IDA], 2025; NHS, 2026). The person understands ideas well. The difficulty sits in turning print into words and words into print.

In study, this shows up as:

- **Slow, tiring reading.** Every page takes more effort, so reading lists feel endless.
- **New words are hard to learn and pronounce**, especially technical terms.
- **Spelling errors**, often inconsistent: the same word spelt different ways on one page.
- **Missed or swapped words** when writing, and trouble spotting them when checking.
- **Trouble following long written instructions** and finding information in long documents.
- **Short-term memory strain**, so holding a question in mind while reading is hard.
- **Weaker reading comprehension and less reading practice** over time, as a knock-on effect (IDA, 2025).
- **Anxiety about tests and reading aloud** (Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training [ADCET], n.d.-b).
- **A gap** between strong spoken ability and weaker written results (ADCET, n.d.-b).

Strengths to build on

- Strong spoken communication and verbal reasoning (ADCET, n.d.-b).
- Big-picture thinking and making connections between ideas.
- Creativity and problem solving.
- Persistence, built from years of working harder than peers.

Use them: talk ideas through before writing, record spoken notes, and use mind maps to show connections.

Setting up to study at home

- **Text-to-speech.** Use the read-aloud feature built into phones, computers and web browsers for every reading (London School of Economics [LSE], n.d.).
- **Digital copies of readings.** Ask the course for electronic versions, so text-to-speech works.
- **Audiobooks** for set texts where available.
- **Dyslexia-friendly display** (Ako Aotearoa, 2023):
 - Sans serif font such as Arial, Verdana or Calibri, size 12 to 14 or larger.
 - Line spacing of 1.5.
 - A plain background colour. Some people find dark text on a cream or pale yellow background easier.
 - No italics or underlining. Use bold for emphasis.
 - Headings and bullet points to break up text.
- **Dictation software** for writing (LSE, n.d.).

- **Spellcheck and grammar tools** switched on.
- **A personal glossary** of course terms, with a plain meaning and a pronunciation guide for each.
- **Quiet space** with noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs (LSE, n.d.).

Doing an assignment, step by step

1. **Listen to the question.** Use text-to-speech to hear the task and the marking guide.
2. **Say the question in your own words.** Paraphrase it out loud or in a voice note before planning (LSE, n.d.).
3. **Plan before reading.** Write a basic plan with headings first. Then research. Then update the plan (LSE, n.d.).
4. **Ask which readings matter most.** Get guidance from the teacher on key texts, and read fewer texts in depth (ADCET, n.d.-b; LSE, n.d.).
5. **Read smart, not cover to cover:**
 - Read the summary or abstract first.
 - Read the headings.
 - Read the first line of each paragraph.
 - Only then read closely the sections which matter (LSE, n.d.).
6. **Take notes as voice recordings, mind maps or question-and-answer pairs** (LSE, n.d.).
7. **Draft by speaking.** Use dictation to get the ideas down without spelling slowing the thinking.
8. **Fix spelling after drafting**, not during.
9. **Proofread by listening.** Have text-to-speech read the finished work aloud, or record yourself reading it, and listen over several passes (LSE, n.d.).
10. **Ask for early feedback on a draft** if the course allows it (ADCET, n.d.-b).

Doing an assessment or exam at home

Before

- Arrange adjustments early: extra time, text-to-speech or a reader, spellcheck, a scribe (ADCET, n.d.-b).
- Practise with past papers in the same format and time limit (LSE, n.d.).
- Learn the meaning of common instruction words: “analyse”, “compare”, “evaluate”, “justify”.
- Test the text-to-speech tool on the exam platform before the day.

During

- Listen to each question, or read it twice.
- Highlight or note the key words in each question.
- Plan each long answer with a quick list of points before writing.
- Keep answers in short paragraphs.
- Leave time at the end to listen back to written answers.

After

- Note which tools worked and which slowed things down.

When the person is stuck

What you notice	What to try	Why it helps
Reading a page over and over without it	Switch to text-to-speech. Preview	Listening removes the decoding load, so

sinking in	headings and first lines before reading in full.	attention goes to meaning.
Reading list feels impossible	Ask the teacher which two or three readings matter most.	Fewer texts read well beats many texts skimmed.
Cannot find the right word when writing	Say the idea out loud and record it, or describe the word and look it up. Use a mind map.	Speaking and visual links bypass word-retrieval blocks.
Spelling worries are stopping the writing	Turn on dictation. Ignore spelling until the draft is done.	Separates thinking from spelling, so ideas flow.
Lost place on the page	Use a reading ruler, or a line-focus tool, or increase line spacing.	Reduces visual crowding.
Missing words or errors in finished work	Listen to the work read aloud.	Ears catch errors eyes skip over.
Unfamiliar technical terms	Add each to the personal glossary with a plain meaning and pronunciation.	Builds the vocabulary one term at a time.
Tired and headachy from reading	Stop. Short break. Return with audio instead of text.	Reading with dyslexia takes more energy. Fatigue increases errors.
Anxious before an exam	Confirm adjustments are in place. Practise with the exact tools and format.	Familiarity lowers anxiety.

Tools which help

- Text-to-speech: built into Windows, Mac, iPhone, Android and most browsers.
- Dictation: built into Word, Google Docs, Windows and Mac. Dedicated programs for higher accuracy (LSE, n.d.).
- Mind-mapping software.
- Reading pens which scan and read printed text (Healthdirect Australia, 2025).
- Spellcheck and grammar checkers.
- Reading rulers and line-focus tools.
- Audiobooks.

Adjustments to ask your course provider for

In Australia, the Disability Standards for Education 2005 apply to schools, TAFE, universities and training providers. Providers must consult with the student and make reasonable adjustments (Department of Education, n.d.). Adjustments used for dyslexia include (ADCET, n.d.-b; Healthdirect Australia, 2025):

- Reading lists provided early, with key texts identified.
- Digital copies of all readings.
- Instructions given both spoken and written.
- A glossary of technical terms at the start of the course.
- Extra time in exams.
- A reader or text-to-speech in exams.
- A scribe, or typed answers with spellcheck.
- A quiet exam room.
- Oral assessment as an alternative, where suitable.
- Short-answer questions instead of multiple choice, where suitable.
- Assignment extensions and feedback on early drafts.
- Feedback given orally as well as in writing.

How a support person at home helps

- Read questions, instructions or readings aloud when asked.
- Act as a scribe for planning: the person talks, you write.
- Talk ideas through before writing starts.
- Do not correct spelling during drafting.
- Help set up text-to-speech and dictation tools.
- Praise ideas and understanding, not only spelling and neatness.

Avoid

- Asking the person to read aloud unexpectedly.
- Judging intelligence by spelling or reading speed.
- Long blocks of dense text with no headings.
- Italics, underlining, and all-capital text.
- Correcting every spelling error in feedback on ideas.

Sources

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