

Dysgraphia: Fact Sheet for Studying at Home

For a person with dysgraphia 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

Dysgraphia is a specific learning disability affecting written expression. It involves ongoing difficulty with handwriting, spelling, putting ideas into written sentences, or a mix of these (SPELD SA, 2024). It has a neurological basis, and the difficulty is unexpected given the person's other abilities. It often occurs alongside dyslexia (SPELD SA, 2024).

There are two main types (Department for Education South Australia, n.d.):

- **Motor-based.** The physical act of writing is hard. Handwriting is slow, tiring, untidy or painful.
- **Language-based.** Turning ideas into ordered written sentences is hard. Written work falls well below what the person says out loud. Handwriting itself might be fine.

In study, this shows up as:

- A large gap between spoken ideas and written work.
- Slow writing, and running out of time in written tasks.
- Hand fatigue or pain.
- Untidy or hard-to-read handwriting, uneven spacing and letter size.
- Spelling errors: added, missing or swapped letters.
- Several grammar and punctuation errors in each sentence.
- Paragraphs which jump between ideas.
- Avoiding writing, and anxiety about written tasks.
- Low confidence (Department for Education South Australia, n.d.; SPELD SA, 2024).

Slow or untidy writing does not mean the person is not trying. Writing draws on complex movement and language skills at the same time (Department for Education South Australia, n.d.).

Strengths to build on

- Ideas and understanding are often strong, especially when spoken.
- Good verbal explanation and discussion.
- Creative thinking.

Use them: let the person talk before they write, record spoken answers, and judge ideas separately from spelling.

Setting up to study at home

- **Keyboard instead of handwriting** wherever possible.
- **Speech-to-text (dictation)** for drafting (Department for Education South Australia, n.d.).
- **Word prediction and talking spellcheck** tools (SPELD SA, 2024).
- **Templates** for common assignment types: essay plan, report headings, paragraph frames (SPELD SA, 2024).
- **Graphic organisers** such as mind maps and planning grids.

- **A word bank** for each topic: key terms spelled correctly, ready to copy (SPELD SA, 2024).
- **Sentence starters** printed and kept beside the work.
- **Ergonomic set-up** if handwriting is needed: comfortable chair, pen grips, regular hand breaks.

Doing an assignment, step by step

1. **Talk it first.** Explain the answer out loud to a person or a voice recorder before writing anything. Talking ideas through before writing is a recommended approach (SPELD SA, 2024).
2. **Plan with a graphic organiser.** One box per main point, with notes in single words or phrases.
3. **Choose a template.** Use a paragraph structure such as TEEL: Topic sentence, Explanation, Evidence, Link (Department for Education South Australia, n.d.).
4. **Draft with dictation.** Speak each paragraph. Do not fix anything yet.
5. **Revise for ideas.** Is each point clear? Is anything missing?
6. **Edit for spelling and grammar** in a separate session, with spellcheck and grammar tools. Use a checklist such as COPS: Capitals, Organisation, Punctuation, Spelling (Department for Education South Australia, n.d.).
7. **Listen back.** Have text-to-speech read the work aloud to catch errors.
8. **Final copy and submit.**

This follows the structured writing process taught for dysgraphia: plan, draft, revise, edit, final copy (SPELD SA, 2024).

Doing an assessment or exam at home

Before

- Arrange adjustments: typed answers, spellcheck, extra time, a scribe or oral answers (Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training [ADCET], n.d.-b).
- Practise with the exact tools allowed in the exam.
- Prepare templates and sentence starters to memorise, if notes are not allowed.

During

- Plan every long answer as a list of points first.
- Use the same paragraph structure in every answer.
- Keep sentences short.
- Leave time to check answers.
- Rest the hand at set points if handwriting is required.

After

- Note which tools and structures helped most.

When the person is stuck

What you notice	What to try	Why it helps
Staring at a blank page	Ask the person to explain the answer out loud. Record it. Turn the recording into the first draft.	Separates thinking from writing.
Hand is sore or tired	Stop. Switch to keyboard or dictation.	Pushing through pain worsens writing and confidence.

Ideas are there but come out jumbled	Use a graphic organiser. One box per point, then number the boxes in order.	Gives a visual order before sentences are formed.
Does not know how to start a paragraph	Use a sentence starter: "One reason is...", "This shows...", "In contrast...".	Removes the hardest part of starting.
Spelling keeps interrupting the flow	Dictate. Use the word bank. Fix spelling at the end.	Keeps ideas flowing.
Writing is far shorter than what the person knows	Offer an oral or recorded alternative if the course allows. Otherwise, dictate.	Lets the person show what they know.
Avoiding the assignment entirely	Break it into one small step: "Tell me your three main points."	A spoken first step feels possible.
Many errors in the final draft	Listen to the work read aloud, then use the COPS checklist.	Hearing catches errors reading misses.

Tools which help

- Speech-to-text, built into Word, Google Docs, Windows, Mac and phones.
- Word prediction software.
- Talking spellcheck and grammar tools.
- Text-to-speech for proofreading.
- Mind-mapping and graphic organiser apps.
- Writing templates and paragraph frames.
- Recordings and audiobooks to reduce note-taking (Department for Education South Australia, n.d.).

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 dysgraphia include (Department for Education South Australia, n.d.; SPELD SA, 2024; ADCET, n.d.-b):

- Content knowledge marked separately from spelling.
- Typed work with spellcheck in all tasks and exams.
- Speech-to-text or a scribe.
- Oral, recorded, illustrated or multiple-choice alternatives to long written tasks.
- Extra time in written assessments.
- Copies of notes and slides, to reduce copying.
- Templates, word banks and topic glossaries.
- Instructions given one or two steps at a time.

A diagnosis is not needed before a teacher uses these strategies (Department for Education South Australia, n.d.).

How a support person at home helps

- Listen to the person explain ideas before writing.
- Act as a scribe for planning.
- Help set up dictation and templates.
- Comment on ideas first, spelling last.

- Praise content and effort, not neatness.

Avoid

- Judging understanding by handwriting or spelling.
- Making the person copy notes by hand.
- Red-pen corrections on every error.
- “Write it neater” or “slow down and try harder”.
- Long written tasks with no alternative format.

Sources

Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training. (n.d.-b). *Inclusive teaching: Specific learning disability*. University of Tasmania. <https://www.adcet.edu.au/inclusive-teaching/specific-disabilities/specific-learning-disability>

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