Dyspraxia (Developmental Coordination Disorder): Fact Sheet for Studying at Home

For a person with dyspraxia, also called developmental coordination disorder (DCD), 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

DCD is a condition affecting movement and coordination. Learning and carrying out physical skills is harder than expected, with no other medical cause (CanChild, 2025). Health professionals prefer the term DCD, though many people use “dyspraxia” (NHS, 2023). DCD lasts into adulthood. People do not grow out of it (CanChild, 2025). It does not affect intelligence, but it makes learning harder (NHS, 2023).

In study, this shows up as:

- **Slow or tiring handwriting and typing.**
- **Difficulty with fine physical tasks:** using a mouse precisely, practical tasks, lab work, cooking or trade skills.
- **Planning and sequencing difficulty.** Working out the order of steps in a task, physical or written.
- **Organisation difficulty.** Keeping track of materials, files, deadlines and appointments.
- **Fatigue.** Physical tasks take more energy, so the person tires sooner.
- **Written work** which gets harder over time as courses ask for more of it (NHS, 2023).
- **Lower confidence** from years of being seen as clumsy.

DCD often occurs with ADHD, specific learning disabilities and speech or language difficulties (CanChild, 2025).

Strengths to build on

- Intelligence is usually average or above (CanChild, 2025).
- Strong verbal skills and ideas.
- Creative and strategic thinking, often developed from finding other ways to do things.
- Determination.

Use them: speak instead of writing, plan visually, and find alternative methods for physical tasks.

Setting up to study at home

- **Comfortable, stable workspace:** a chair at the right height, the desk at elbow height, a large mouse or trackpad.
- **Dictation software** in Word, Google Docs, Windows or Mac (University College Dublin [UCD], 2025).
- **Typing tutor software** to build keyboard speed (UCD, 2025).
- **One place for everything.** Labelled folders on the computer and on the desk.
- **Calendar with alarms** for every deadline and appointment, so nothing relies on memory (UCD, 2025).
- **Weekly and daily plans.** Make a weekly plan each weekend and a daily plan each night (UCD, 2025).
- **Mind-mapping software** for organising ideas visually (UCD, 2025).
- **Note-taking software** which records audio alongside notes (UCD, 2025).
- **Regular breaks** for physical fatigue.

Doing an assignment, step by step

1. **List every task for the whole term** as soon as the course starts, with due dates (UCD, 2025).
2. **Break each assignment into small steps**, each with its own date.
3. **Set a specific goal before each session,** such as “write the introduction” or “read pages 10 to 20” (UCD, 2025).
4. **Plan with a mind map.** Arrange ideas visually before writing.
5. **Ask for examples.** Request a sample essay, report or project from the teacher, to see the expected layout (UCD, 2025).
6. **Draft with dictation** to avoid slow typing or handwriting.
7. **Use templates** for formatting, so layout does not take extra effort.
8. **Edit in a separate session.**
9. **Submit early.**

Practical and hands-on tasks

- Ask to see the task demonstrated, then practise it in small steps.
- Break each physical movement into parts and practise each one (NHS, 2023).
- Use adapted tools such as pen grips, larger handles or non-slip mats (NHS, 2023).
- Practise the real task, not separate drills. Practising real everyday activities is the recommended approach for DCD (Blank et al., 2019).

Doing an assessment or exam at home

Before

- Arrange adjustments: extra time, typing or dictation instead of handwriting, an alternative location (UCD, 2025).
- Practise with the same equipment and software.
- Check the exam platform works with your mouse, keyboard and assistive software.

During

- Plan answers before typing.
- Take short physical breaks if allowed.
- Leave time at the end to check for typing errors.

After

- Rest. Physical and mental fatigue builds during long assessments.

When the person is stuck

What you notice	What to try	Why it helps
Typing or writing is too slow to keep up	Switch to dictation.	Removes the physical bottleneck.
Cannot find files, notes or materials	Set up one labelled folder per subject. Put things back at the end of each session.	One system replaces memory.
Unsure what order to do things in	Write the steps in order as a numbered list before starting.	Planning and sequencing is a core difficulty. A list holds the order.
Struggling with a physical or practical task	Ask for a demonstration. Break it into single movements. Practise each one,	Small steps are the main approach for building movement skills (NHS, 2023).

	then combine.	
Exhausted partway through a session	Stop and rest. Plan shorter sessions with physical breaks.	Physical tasks use more energy with DCD.
Forgot a deadline or appointment	Add it to the calendar with two reminders. Contact the provider straight away.	External reminders replace memory.
Frustrated by repeated mistakes	Look at what has improved. Change the method, not the effort level.	Confidence matters. A different method often works better than more effort.
Overwhelmed by the term’s workload	Write every task on one list with dates, then plan only this week.	Seeing everything once, then focusing on the week, reduces overload.

Tools which help

- Dictation (speech-to-text).
- Typing tutor programs.
- Mind-mapping software.
- Note-taking software with audio recording.
- Calendar apps with alarms and reminders.
- Pomodoro timer for structured work sessions (UCD, 2025).
- Accessible formats for readings, such as audio (UCD, 2025).
- Pen grips and ergonomic equipment.

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 DCD include (UCD, 2025; NHS, 2023):

- Extra time in exams and timed tasks.
- Typed answers or dictation instead of handwriting.
- An alternative exam location.
- Assistive technology in assessments.
- Copies of notes and slides.
- Demonstrations and extra practice time for practical tasks.
- Adapted equipment for practical work.
- Example assignments to show the expected layout.

How a support person at home helps

- Help set up the calendar, folders and planning system at the start of the course.
- Demonstrate physical tasks slowly, one step at a time.
- Allow extra time without rushing.
- Help check the plan each week.
- Praise problem solving and progress.

Avoid

- Calling the person clumsy or careless.

- Rushing physical tasks.
- Several physical instructions given at once.
- Handwritten-only tasks with no alternative.
- Time pressure in practical work.

Sources

Blank, R., Barnett, A. L., Cairney, J., Green, D., Kirby, A., Polatajko, H., Rosenblum, S., Smits-Engelsman, B., Sugden, D., Wilson, P., & Vinçon, S. (2019). International clinical practice recommendations on the definition, diagnosis, assessment, intervention, and psychosocial aspects of developmental coordination disorder. *Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology, 61*(3), 242-285. https://doi.org/10.1111/dmcn.14132

CanChild. (2025). *Developmental coordination disorder*. McMaster University. https://canchild.ca/en/diagnoses/developmental-coordination-disorder

Department of Education. (n.d.). *Disability Standards for Education 2005*. Australian Government. https://www.education.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005

NHS. (2023). *Developmental co-ordination disorder (dyspraxia) in children*.