

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD): Fact Sheet for Studying at Home

For a person with developmental language disorder 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

Developmental language disorder (DLD) is a lifelong condition affecting a person's ability to understand language, use language, or both (Children's Health Queensland, 2023). It was once called specific language impairment. It is often hidden, and mistaken for poor attention, low effort or behaviour problems (Children's Health Queensland, 2023). It is not caused by parenting, and it occurs without another known cause such as brain injury or autism (Speech Pathology Australia, n.d.).

DLD affects spoken language first, but study runs on language, so it reaches every subject.

Understanding language

- Following instructions, especially long ones.
- Understanding subject vocabulary and question words.
- Answering questions accurately.
- Following lectures, videos and discussions.
- Remembering what was said (Children's Health Queensland, 2023; Speech Pathology Australia, n.d.).

Using language

- Finding the right word.
- Building correct sentences and using grammar.
- Organising thoughts into a clear order.
- Explaining ideas and telling events in sequence (Speech Pathology Australia, n.d.).

Knock-on effects

- Reading, spelling, writing and maths are often affected.
- Listening and attention are harder.
- Friendships, group work and confidence suffer. People with DLD are at higher risk of anxiety and low self-esteem (Speech Pathology Australia, n.d.).

Strengths to build on

- Understanding often improves strongly with pictures, demonstrations and examples.
- Practical, hands-on learning.
- Visual memory.
- Effort and persistence.

Use them: get a picture, diagram or example for every new idea, and learn by doing.

Setting up to study at home

- **Visual supports for everything:** diagrams, pictures, flowcharts and videos with captions (Children's

Health Queensland, 2023).

- **A personal vocabulary book** for each subject: the word, a plain meaning, a picture, and an example sentence.
- **A list of question words** with their meaning: “describe” means say what it looks like, “explain” means say why or how, “compare” means say what is the same and different.
- **Written copies of every instruction.**
- **Captions on all videos and recorded lectures**, with the option to pause and replay.
- **Templates and sentence starters** for writing.
- **Quiet space.** Background noise makes language harder to process.

Doing an assignment, step by step

1. **Get the task in writing and with an example.** Ask the teacher for a sample answer or a model.
2. **Break the instructions into short steps.** Write each step on its own line (Children’s Health Queensland, 2023).
3. **Check every word in the question.** Look up unfamiliar words and question words. Add them to the vocabulary book.
4. **Explain the task back.** Tell a support person or record a voice note: “This task wants me to...”. If the explanation is unclear, ask the teacher.
5. **Collect key words first.** Before writing, list the topic words needed, spelled correctly.
6. **Plan with a picture.** Use a mind map or flowchart to put ideas in order.
7. **Write with sentence starters and a template.** One idea per sentence. Short sentences are better than long, unclear ones.
8. **Read back or listen back** with text-to-speech to check the meaning is clear.
9. **Ask for feedback on a draft** where allowed.

Doing an assessment or exam at home

Before

- Ask about adjustments: questions read aloud, plain-language wording of questions, extra time, a glossary of question words.
- Practise with past papers, focusing on what each question type asks for.
- Learn the common question words and what each one wants.

During

- Read each question twice, or listen to it.
- Underline the question word and the topic word.
- Say the question in your own words before answering.
- Answer with short, clear sentences.
- Use the same answer structure each time, such as point, example, explanation.

After

- Note which question words or terms caused confusion, and add them to the vocabulary book.

When the person is stuck

What you notice	What to try	Why it helps
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Does not understand the question	Rephrase it in simpler words. Give an example of a good answer. Show a picture or diagram.	Simpler language and visuals make the meaning clear without changing the content.
Started the task but did it differently from what was asked	Ask the person to explain the task back before starting. Compare with the instructions.	Catches misunderstanding early.
Cannot think of the word	Accept a description, gesture, drawing or a similar word. Look it up together.	Word-finding is a core difficulty. Workarounds keep thinking going (Children's Health Queensland, 2023).
Ideas are there but the answer comes out muddled	Use a template: point, example, explanation. Put ideas in order on a flowchart first.	Structure supports organising language.
Lost track during a lecture or video	Pause, replay with captions, and write one sentence summarising each section.	Gives processing time.
Slow to respond when asked something	Wait. Give time to answer without rushing or finishing the sentence for them (Children's Health Queensland, 2023).	Processing language takes longer.
Long instructions are forgotten	Give one or two steps at a time, then repeat and explain (Children's Health Queensland, 2023).	Short chunks fit working memory.
Avoiding group discussions	Offer written contributions to discussion boards, prepared in advance.	Removes real-time language pressure.
Upset or embarrassed about language	Focus on ideas and effort. DLD is not about intelligence.	Confidence is at risk with DLD (Speech Pathology Australia, n.d.).

Tools which help

- Captioned videos and lecture transcripts.
- Text-to-speech for reading back.
- Visual dictionaries and picture glossaries.
- Mind-mapping and flowchart tools.
- Writing templates and sentence starters.
- Grammar checking tools.
- Voice notes for checking understanding.

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 to discuss for DLD:

- All instructions written, short and in plain language.
- Examples or models of good answers.
- A glossary of subject terms and question words.
- Questions read aloud in assessments.
- Plain-language wording of exam questions, testing the same content.
- Extra time for reading and writing.
- Captions and transcripts for all recorded material.
- Written alternatives to spoken participation.
- Support from a speech pathologist, who diagnoses DLD and recommends specific strategies (Speech

How a support person at home helps

Children's Health Queensland (2023) recommends:

- Use pictures, actions and demonstrations to support understanding.
- Sit face to face to gain and hold attention.
- Use simple language and give time to respond.
- Give short instructions, then repeat and explain them.
- Accept gestures, pointing and facial expressions alongside speech.
- Tell teachers about DLD so they adjust their support.

Avoid

- Long, complex instructions given once.
- Rushing for an answer or finishing the person's sentences.
- Assuming silence means not knowing.
- Labelling the person lazy or inattentive.
- Unexplained jargon.

Sources

Children's Health Queensland. (2023). *Developmental language disorder* [Fact sheet].
<https://childrens.health.qld.gov.au/fact-sheet-developmental-language-disorder>

Department of Education. (n.d.). *Disability Standards for Education 2005*. Australian Government.
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Speech Pathology Australia. (n.d.). *Developmental language disorder* [Fact sheet]. Communication Hub.
<https://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/CommunicationHub/Fact-Sheets/Development%20Language%20Disorder%20FINAL.pdf>

All web sources accessed 12 October 2026.

Note: this sheet draws on two specialist sources. Study-specific strategies for adults with DLD have less published guidance than other profiles. Several strategies here apply general language-support principles from these sources to home study.