



Children's Dyslexia Center – Southern Illinois
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Tips for Parents
and Families
of Children
with Dyslexia

Reproduced in collaboration
with International Dyslexia Association

Tips for Parents and Families of Children with Dyslexia

This is a list of practical tips from the International Dyslexia Association. Please note that these tips supplement – not replace – multisensory structured learning (MSL) programs and procedures to teach dyslexic children to read. Also, please remember the list is an “a la carte” menu – you can pick and choose things to try. Not every suggestion is necessary or appropriate for every child. The Children’s Dyslexia Center of Southern Illinois hopes that sharing ideas will help parents and teachers assist their children with dyslexia.

Note: To avoid the awkward “his or her”, the masculine and feminine pronouns are used interchangeably throughout this booklet.

19. Give lecture notes to your child before the class so he can highlight them beforehand. Then he can work on listening instead of concentrating on the note taking itself.
20. Send homework and instructions by email.
21. Allow extra time to complete projects, term papers, book reports, etc.
22. Allow extra time to complete a test.
23. Allow your child to dictate test answers.
24. Allow the test to be read to the child.
25. Allow your child to give oral answers to essay questions.
26. Allow rephrasing of test questions.
27. Allow use of electronic dictionaries, books on tape, spellchecker, etc.
28. Allow student to observe others before attempting a new task.
29. When you ask the child a question in front of the class, say his name first so that he knows the question is coming up.

Remember, every child and teacher is different.
Explore the possibilities.



Annex 1

Special Procedures

Things you may want to discuss with your child's teachers or school:

1. Allow use of a pocket calculator to assist with basic calculations as your child learns higher level math concepts.
2. Allow your child to count on fingers while doing math and or sub vocalize while reading.
3. Partial credit if your child's mathematical procedures were correct, but he answer was incorrect due to errors in computations.
4. Do not require them to always show their work.
5. Read word problems aloud.
6. Minimize drill, repetition, and rote memorization.
7. Minimize timed tests.
8. Give your child advance notice so that he can practice at home or after school before being called on to read aloud in class; or not requiring your child to read aloud.
9. Shorten assignments to focus on mastery of key concepts.
10. Shorten spelling tests to focus on mastering the most functional words.
11. Provide alternatives for written assignments (posters, oral/taped or video presentations, projects, collages, etc.).
12. Seat student close to the teacher in order to monitor understanding.
13. Provide a print outline with videotapes and filmstrips.
14. Grade only for content, not spelling or handwriting, give more weight to content than format.
15. Allow student to use a keyboard if handwriting is poor.
16. Allow student to dictate answers to essay questions.
17. Reduce copying tasks.
18. Give your child a written copy of homework instructions.



1. Encourage All Kinds of Reading

- a. Encourage the reading of all kinds of materials, including a variety of difficulty levels and topics (e.g. comic books, graphic novels, subtitles in Japanese cartoons, sports or car magazines, tabloids, etc.)
- b. Choose books for your child to read to herself that are below her grade or age level. This helps build confidence and allows her to enjoy reading. However, read books to your child that are higher than her grade level. Look in the back of the book for the grade level.
- c. Read books by Dr. Seuss. Children with dyslexia have difficulty with rhyming words and these books will give them practice.

2. Audio Books

- a. Encourage your child to listen to audio books for pleasure.
- b. Have your child read along while listening to an audio book.
- c. Choose audio books for your child that are higher than his grade level.
- d. Load audio books onto his iPod.
- e. Listen to audio books together in the car on commutes and family vacations.
- f. Have your child listen to audio book versions of assigned school books during the preceding summer.
- g. Join Learning Ally (formally Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic) at www.learningally.org for recorded books including certain textbooks.
- h. Download audio books from the public library.
- i. Download free public domain audio books from the following websites:
 - i. <http://www.booksshouldbefree.com/>
 - ii. <http://librophile.com/>
 - iii. <http://voicesinthedark.com/>

- iv. <https://librivox.org/>
- v. <http://www.openculture.com/freeaudiobooks>
- vi. <http://www.audiobooksforfree.com/home>
- vii. <http://freeclassicaudiobooks.com/>
- viii. <http://www.audiobooks.org/>
- ix. <http://www.learnoutloud.com/Audio-Books>

3. Reading Tips

- a. Have your child read aloud to herself.
- b. Put a ruler or bookmark under the text, or use a clear ruler with a “reading window,” to follow the lines of type when reading.
- c. Highlight every other line of text to follow the lines of type when reading.
- d. Read aloud to your child and point to the words as you read to her. Have your child follow the movement of your finger.
- e. Have two copies of the book so you can read side-by-side with your child.

4. It is not really a big deal if your child cannot:

- a. Erase pencil marking cleanly and completely
- b. Use scissors
- c. Color inside the lines
- d. Proofread his papers efficiently
- e. Spell consistently

Children with dyslexia often have difficulty with these tasks which, while seemingly important in my school, may have far less significance to them in the “real world”. Remember spelling and good handwriting are not moral virtues.



- b. Give your child time, every day, to do whatever he does best – running, skating, drawing, singing, etc. Don’t prohibit your child from doing a fun activity as punishment for poor academic success.
- c. Encourage your child to keep private journals – to express herself without being graded or judged. If your child dislikes writing, she could record a journal orally.
- d. Look for the gifts in your child – his dyslexia is a “weakness in a sea of strengths.”
- e. Don’t fixate on fears of your child being “labeled” as dyslexic. It is often a great relief for a child to finally have a name for their situation and to realize it is shared with many other people.
- f. Say “I love you” every day – Often children with dyslexia are singled out daily. Many are laughed at for making mistakes or being “stupid”. Those three words of comfort should come from those who love them unconditionally.

29. Thoughts for Parents

- a. Trust your instincts – you know your child best.
- b. Get over it – it’s about them, not you.



23. Consider attending conferences and symposia to listen to experts and learn about new ideas and cutting edge techniques.

- a. International Dyslexia Association annual conference - <http://www.interdys.org/AnnualConference.htm>
- b. Brain and Learning Conference - <http://www.learningandthebrain.com/>

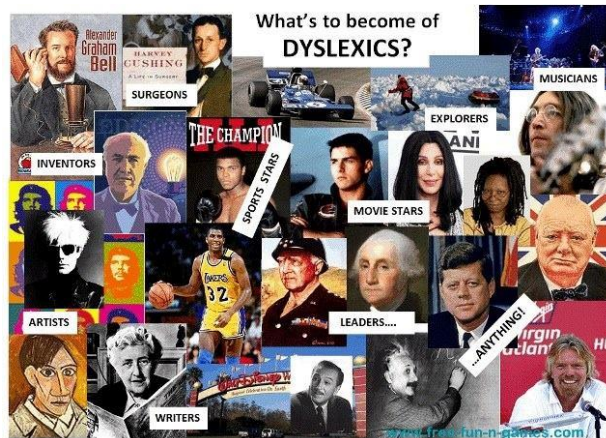
24. Dyslexia Simulations

- a. Attend a Dyslexia Simulations Workshop. With more insight into the challenges your child faces, you may be better able to assist her in finding “work-arounds” for her difficulties.
- b. See the simulation located at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/misunderstoodminds/readingdiffs.html>

25. Watch the film, *Journey Into Dyslexia* (HBO Presentation)

26. Join or form a parent support group to encourage each other, and share information and experiences

27. Identify famous people with dyslexia; expose your child to role models



28. Focus on your child’s social-emotional health

- a. Take a “mental health day.” Kickback and have fun with your child after a difficult part of the quarter or term.

5. It is not cheating to:

- a. Use an electronic dictionary
- b. Use phonetic dictionaries such as *Gabby’s Wordspeller*
- c. Use a calculator
- d. Use a spellchecker
- e. Type papers for your child
- f. Ask teachers for written notes and PowerPoint presentations for lectures in advance (to follow along with the lecture)
- g. Ask teachers for help (See Annex 1 for possible strategies)

These types of tools and strategies are used by adults daily. It often takes children with dyslexia longer to complete school assignments. Using such tools and strategies can free up time and preserve energy for other substantive aspects of education.

6. Play word games and activities

- a. Play Pig, Horse, etc. in basketball. Use words your child has trouble learning.
- b. Play games like *Bananagrams* (like *Scrabble* but done as a team instead of individually) or *Hangman*.
- c. Play with objects such as clay, Legos, or sand to form new words.
- d. Play *Jeopardy-like* games (using multiplication tables, names/capitols of states, etc.) or rhyming games on car rides. Start when your child is very young and he won’t realize he is studying.
- e. Make up songs, poems, or dances to remember needed information. Multiplication tables or addresses can be sung; spelling of needed words can be made into a poem; the meaning of Latin roots can be expressed in a dance.



7. Getting Organized

- a. Show your child systems to:
 - i. Keep track of homework assignments, tests, and project due dates.
 - ii. File notes, completed assignments, etc.
 - iii. Quickly distinguish (in her folder) completed homework and other materials that have to be turned into the teacher.
 - iv. Use an appointment calendar or day planner.
- b. Use colors to organize as much as possible (e.g. color post-its and folders).
- c. Get your child a laptop and help her organize a filing system for all assignments (keeps everything in one place).
- d. Display a laminated picture of how her desk is supposed to look when it is clean and organized, instead of repeatedly saying “clean your desk.”
- e. Display a laminated picture of a proper table setting instead of repeatedly saying “the fork goes on the left.”
- f. Give instructions in writing in the form of a checklist.
- g. Teach your child to take step-by-step lists of tasks (e.g. brush your teeth, feed the dogs, put lunch money in wallet, etc.) Keep the lists in the same place.
- h. Teach your child to remind herself about the things by promptly leaving voicemails or sending herself emails.
- i. Give your child options and let her decide which systems work best.

8. Textbooks

- a. Get two sets of textbooks. Leave one set at school to take to class, and one set at home for studying and homework. This eliminates all sorts of “forgetting” problems. Some schools will loan extra books, but hold you responsible for lost or damaged books.

22. Check out these websites with information on Dyslexia, Reading Difficulties, Learning Disabilities, etc.:

- a. <http://www.interdys.org/> - International Dyslexia Association website
- b. <http://www.ldonline.org/> - Comprehensive website sponsored by WETA (public broadcasting), Washington D.C., in association with the Coordinated Campaign for Learning Disabilities.
- c. <http://ld.org/> - National Center for Learning Disabilities
- d. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/misunderstoodminds/> - Collaborative effort between PBS and WGBH Education Foundation, presenting some of Mel Levine’s work in ways easy to comprehend
- e. <http://allkindsofminds.org/> - Mel Levine’s website on understanding learning problems and identifying relevant interventions.
- f. http://schwabfoundation.org/files/pdf/life_success.pdf - A Parent’s guide for children with dyslexia.
- g. <http://www.decodingdyslexia.net/info.html> - Decoding Dyslexia is a network of parent-led grassroots movements across the country concerned with the limited access to educational interventions for dyslexia within the public education system.
- h. <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/learning/> - The NICHD is one of many NIH institutes and other federal agencies investigating the causes of these disabilities (including those that might be genetic and neurological), studying methods for evaluating children who may have the disabilities, and developing strategies to address these issues.
- i. <http://www.cec.sped.org/> - Council for Exceptional Children: Special Education (generic) website
- j. <http://childrenofthecode.org/> - Website addressing “the code and the challenge of learning to read”

- i. “If you never learn to read or write you will never make it.”
- j. First ask the question, and then call her name for a response. (i.e., don’t catch her by surprise)

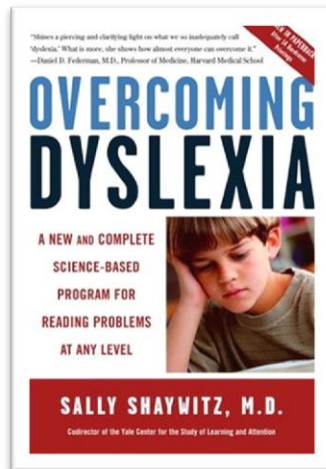
20. Transitions

- a. Plan for transitions (especially for entry into middle school, high school, or college).
- b. If needed, take off the first week of each school year to help your child transition into his classes.
- c. Growth spurts, hormonal and other changes can create temporary “set-backs” in things like organization skills. Take a deep breath and start again – your child will get back on track.

21. Read *Proust and the Squid* by Maryanne Wolf, *Overcoming Dyslexia* by Sally Shaywitz, and *The Dyslexic Advantage* by Brock Eide, and other books recommended by the international dyslexia association at:

<http://www.interdys.org/ewebeditpro5/upload/recommendedreadingforparents.pdf>

Many of the books listed on the Recommended Reading for Parents may be borrowed from the Children’s Dyslexia Center – Southern Illinois library.



- b. Break up textbooks and rebind them by chapters to make them less intimidating.
- c. Color code textbooks to match notebooks and folders.
- d. Join *Bookshare* at www.bookshare.org (for scanned books – including certain textbooks) in connection with a text-to-speech program such as *Kurzweil* or *Read & Write Gold*.
- e. Use audio versions of textbooks (see website for *Learning Ally* at www.learningally.org).

9. Homework

- a. Purchase an assignment notebook. Your child should use it to write down each assignment for each class each day. If there is no assignment, then he should write “No Homework”.
- b. In school, find a study buddy. Help each other by studying together and exchanging classroom notes with one another.
- c. Ask the teacher to give assignments in writing (not to be copied from a chalk/writing board).
- d. Have your child use his cell phone to take a picture of assignment written on chalk/writing board.
- e. Break down long term projects or lengthy readings into smaller, more manageable tasks.
- f. Have your child repeat the instructions out loud before he begins his assignment.
- g. If your child has to write an assignment, have him dictate it to you. Then he can recopy it.
- h. If your child has to write an essay and do a related PowerPoint presentation, have him do the PowerPoint first (it can act as an outline for the essay).
- i. If your child has to write an essay, have him use a graphic organizer such as can be made using *Kidspiration* or *Inspiration* software. Go to www.inspiration.com; it helps organize ideas and details, and generates an outline.

- j. If your child has problems keeping arithmetic columns in a line, use graph paper. If graph paper is not available, turn lined paper sideways.
- k. If your child asks how to spell a word, spell it for him, or get him a phonetic and/or electronic dictionary.
- l. For long reading assignments, consider audiobook sources, or other scanned books together with text-to-speech software such as *Kurzweil* or *Read & Write Gold*. Even if your child uses recordings, make certain that he reads along with the text. The next option is for someone to read it to him. The third option is to take turns reading one paragraph or page at a time. However, sometimes when students read out loud their energy goes into decoding words and very little room is left for comprehension. Reading aloud can also slow the process down.
- m. There are also many apps available that convert text to speech. In fact, the iPad has a built in text-to-speech option located in the settings.
- n. Teach your child that homework is not complete until your child puts everything into his backpack ready for school the next morning, and then turns it into the teacher.

10. Computers

- a. Get your child a laptop and help her organize a filing system for all assignments (keep everything in one place)
- b. Have your child learn to type at an early age. Be sure they learn full finger typing, not hunt-and-peck. Try computer games for very young children that teach basics of typing, and Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing.
- c. Try using larger fonts or increase point size when reading or typing text.
- d. If she is interested, encourage her to learn a computer language (many individuals with dyslexia are great at this).

17. Take a workshop on Learning Disabilities

Currently the Department of Education (DOE) assesses for “specific learning disabilities,” which includes dyslexia. Small group sessions and larger educational workshops help parents of children with special needs to learn about their child’s disability, understand laws supportive to children with disabilities, and prepare for Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings with your child’s school under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. You can also view webinars on sites like <https://www.learningally.org/>.

18. Speech Therapy

Check with the public school system, even if your child is pre-school age, he may be eligible for testing and the school district would in turn provide needed services. You can also apply for an assessment and services from the University of Southern Illinois Edwardsville at <http://www.siu.edu/community/slhclinic.shtml>. Another possibility might include services for very young children (Birth through 3 years old) from the Department of Public Health.

19. Things not to say or do:

- a. “This is easy.”
- b. Put unhappy faces on her paper.
- c. “Get your act together and learn to do it right.”
- d. “You’re just not applying yourself.”
- e. “Try harder.”
- f. “You knew it yesterday.”
- g. Humiliate her in front of the entire class.
- h. Compare her to a sibling who is not dyslexic.
- i. Say in front of the class that “everyone is dismissed except for _____.”

15. Multi-sensory Structured Language (MSL) Teaching

- a. Find schools with MSL trained teachers in early elementary school programs.
- b. Find public schools with Department of Education (DOE) MSL programs.
- c. Consider private MSL tutoring. (Children's Dyslexia Center)
- d. While it is preferable to have another MSL trained educator work with your child, if this is not an option consider getting trained in MSL strategies to help teach your child to read, write, and spell.

16. Have your child assessed by the school psychologist or private testing/assessment organization.

- a. If your child is assessed as eligible for special education services, he may have the opportunity to participate in a MSL program, or to receive certain remediation from the DOE.
- b. If your child has a special education or specific disability assessment, let the school and teachers know. Even if your child attends a private school that may not be equipped to provide remediation, your child may be entitled to reasonable accommodation. See item 15 above for possible sources of remediation. See Annex 1 for possible accommodations. The school may require formal determination of required accommodations from a professional.
- c. Private school children may qualify for DOE assessment and possibly DOE private school special education projects. Assessment and participation is arranged through the school the child would be attending if he was in public school.
- d. Take advantage of programs (e.g., tutoring, student services, seminars) that are offered by the DOE.

11. Foreign Language Requirements

- a. Consider Latin – it may be easier for some children with dyslexia to learn because many English words are Latin-based and roots will be familiar. However, some Latin courses emphasize the written rather than spoken language or focus on vocabulary memorization – this can be very difficult for children with dyslexia.
- b. Consider Italian or Spanish – Since they are Latin-based they may be easier for some children with dyslexia to learn than other languages.
- c. Consider American Sign Language – it is often easier for children with dyslexia to learn, and it can provide real career opportunities. However, check into college “entrance” requirements. Will they accept American Sign Language or other credits instead of foreign language requirements?
- d. Consider taking an abbreviated foreign language class during the summer, or asking for a language waiver in high school – some private schools have granted these.

12. Assistive Technologies

- a. The use of iPads and iPhones to assist in learning is becoming more common. Besides Apps that can be downloaded, learn how to use the Text to Speech features:
http://dyslexia.yale.edu/EDU_SpeechToTextoniPad.html
- b. Graphic Organizer of iPad apps for children with dyslexia at http://adshe.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ipad_apps1.pdf
- c. Recommended iPad apps from International Dyslexia Association - www.interdys.org/iPadAppsForLiteracyInstruction.htm
- d. *Kurzweil Education Systems* at www.kurzweilededu.com – scaffold reading, writing, and study skills solutions for struggling learners – including text-to-speech software.
 - (1) *ClaroRead* at www.clarosoftware.com
 - (2) *Read & Write Gold* at www.readwritegold.com

- (3) *WYNN Literacy* at www.freedomscientific.com/LSG/products/wynn.asp
- (4) *Dragon Naturally Speaking* – www.nuance.com/talk
- e. Portable handheld text-to-speech options.
 - (1) *Intel Reader* - www.intel.com/healthcare/reader/index.htm
 - (2) *Iris Pen Scanner* – [www.irislink.com/c2-1052-189/IRISPenscanner ---Ideal-pen-scanner-for-printed-text-retyping.aspx](http://www.irislink.com/c2-1052-189/IRISPenscanner---Ideal-pen-scanner-for-printed-text-retyping.aspx)
 - (3) *Wizcom Technologies* – www.wizcomtech.com
- f. *Kindle* at www.amazon.com – text-to-speech and font enlargement features.
- g. *Inspiration* software at www.inspiration.com - graphic organizer software. For younger children, consider using *Kidspiration*. These are also available as an app.
- h. *LiveScribe Smart Pens* at www.livescribe.com for note taking and recording pens.
- i. *Franklin Electronics* at www.franklin.com for portable “talking” spell checkers, dictionaries, thesauruses, translators, etc.
- j. *Co:Writer* at www.donjohnston.com/products/cowriter/index.html for interpreting spelling and grammar mistakes, and it offers word suggestions.
- k. *WordQ* at www.wordq.com, like *Co:Writer*, it suggests words and provides feedback to help find mistakes.

13. Write and talk to your child’s teachers at the beginning of each school year:

- a. Educate them about dyslexia – assume they know little or nothing about the subject.

- b. Print a copy of this dyslexia brochure and highlight accommodations in Annex 1 that you know will help your child.
- c. Invite them to a “dyslexia simulation” (see item 24)
- d. Give specific examples of how your child’s dyslexia may affect him in the classroom (e.g., difficulty copying assignments from the blackboard, reading aloud, taking notes, spelling, calculations without a calculator, etc.)
- e. Discuss the list of “things to not say or do” in Item 19.
- f. Ask them to tell you if your child is having difficulty with classwork or homework, or with other students.
- g. Tell them you will be helping your child by typing reports, reading out loud to them, etc.
- h. If reading out loud in front of others humiliates your child, ask the teacher to substitute other tasks.
- i. Keep records of your interactions with teachers and school, and learn the rules of the educational system so that you can be an advocate for your child.
- j. Be prepared to have some conversations over and over each year, as your child has new teachers who need to be educated about dyslexia.
- k. Remember to thank them early and often.

14. Special procedures to facilitate learning:

- a. Advocate for your child, and explain to your child what you are saying/doing and WHY. This way she will learn to advocate for herself.
- b. Consider asking your child’s teachers and school for special procedures to facilitate your child’s learning. Examples are listed in Annex 1. Not all of the procedures will be appropriate or available in each instance, and the list is not exhaustive. It is intended to give parents ideas to discuss with teacher and schools.