Supporting students with Dyslexia in higher education

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Dr Laura Dickinson
Academic and Peer Support Services
Deakin University

So what is dyslexia?

'Dyslexia is a **language-based** learning disability. Dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, which result in people having **difficulties** with **specific language skills**...It is referred to as a learning disability because dyslexia can make it **very difficult** for a student to **succeed academically** in the typical instructional environment, and...will qualify a student for special education, special accommodations, or **extra support services**' (International Dyslexia Association, 2014). own emphasis

Myths and Misconceptions

I'm not dumb,
I'm dyslexic.
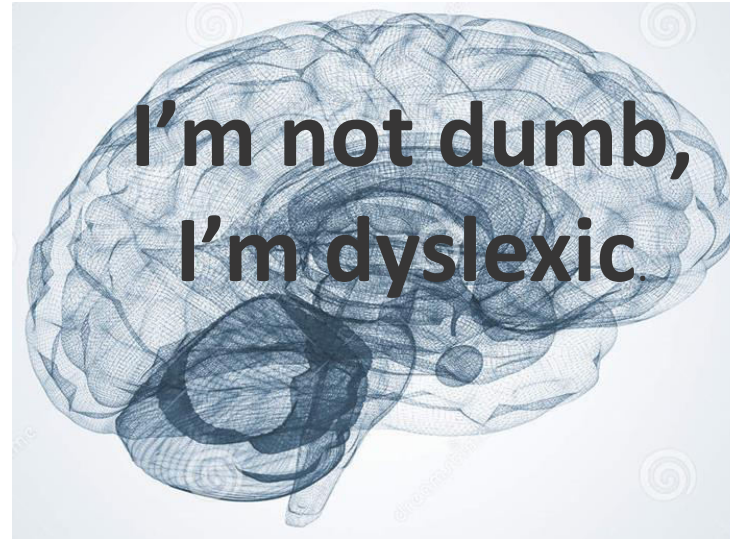
Wireframe model of the human brain (Jezper 2017).

'**Negative assumptions** about student capacity...are frequently constructed based on **myths** and cultural misunderstandings'
(Tanner cited in Webber, 2016, p. 28). own emphasis

'Such discriminatory stigmatisation has been found to result in...informal **labels of 'lazy', 'stupid'** and **'dumb'**' (Webber, 2016, p. 28). own emphasis

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Symptoms

- unusual and inconsistent **spellings**

- **reversals** or **transpositions** of letters in words, or of numbers in figures, formulae and dates

- **omission** of parts of words or sentences, or omission of auxiliary verbs, pronouns and prepositions

- lack of proper order or demonstrated **sequence** in writing

- Students may also **mispronounce or misread words** and have difficulty acquiring **new vocabulary** or have a **limited vocabulary**

- The **reading** rate is generally **slower than average**, though not necessarily in all areas

- Reads and rereads with **little comprehension**

- **Test well orally**, but **not** as well **in written tests**

- Difficulty putting **thoughts into words** verbally or in writing

- Poor short term working **memory**

(ADCET 2017; University of Melbourne 2017)

Getting support

'Most universities offer services for students with dyslexia, co-ordinated through generic '**learning support**', '**equity and access**' or '**disability support**' units' (MacCullagh 2014, p. 102). own emphasis

Disability Resource Centre	→	**Learning Access Plan**	→	**Language and Learning Adviser**

A hidden impairment

Dyslexia is described as a '**non-evident disability**'(Goffman cited in Webber 2016, p. 156).
'As a consequence, participants often identified with an option of **disclosure or concealment**' (Webber 2016, p. 156). own emphasis

'dyslexia **is not…a socially neutral label**: its meaning is bound to political, educational, and social contexts, and to **individual experiences**' (Cameron & Billington 2017, p. 1360). own emphasis

'Students with a SLD label reported concealing their learning barriers in order to avoid disclosing both their **sense of inadequacy** and their label for **fear of stigmatisation**' (Barga cited in Webber, 2016, p. 27). own emphasis

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Dyslexia diagnosis

'Many students with SLDs **commence** their tertiary education **without a diagnosis**' (ADCET 2017). own emphasis

'Upon receiving a label of dyslexia,...[students] **expressed relief**, saying that the label provided a **reason for their difficulties**...,resulting in a **positive self-identity**' (Stampoltzis & Polychronopoulou cited in Webber 2016, p. 29). own emphasis

'"Up until then I had just been bad at spelling and there was **nothing really wrong with me**". Thereafter, she **viewed herself as having a disability**' (Pollock cited in Chanock, 2007, p. A-36). own emphasis

How dyslexia impacts on study

'SLD characteristics are particularly evident in the **education context**, where individuals are **confronted with reading and writing expectations on a daily basis**. For those unable to comprehend the written word or write to expected norms…the experience of education is often **fraught with barriers** that impact…success with learning' (Webber, 2016, p. 1). own emphasis

How dyslexia impacts on study

'Difficulties are **not restricted to reading, spelling and writing**, but may be experienced **across a range of tasks** that students encounter in higher education' (Mortimore & Crozier 2006, p. 236). own emphasis

- memorizing names and facts
- remembering sequences
- rote memory tasks
- copying
- word retrieval
- problems with time and time management
- processing speed
- concentration
- organisation

(Klein cited in Mortimore & Cozier 2006, p. 237).

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Stress, anxiety and dyslexia

'Dyslexic students in higher education show **anxiety levels** that are well above what is shown by students without learning difficulties' (Carrol & Iles 2006, p. 651). own emphasis

'**years of repeated struggles** with reading will have disposed dyslexics to feel signs of **stress, worry and anxiety** when placed in a situation **demanding literacy accuracy**' (Carrol & Iles 2006, p. 657). own emphasis

'People with dyslexia may also **face emotional challenges** such as anxiety, low self-esteem, poor self-concept, lack of confidence, frustration and anger' (Burden, 2008; Carroll & Iles, 2006; Madriaga, 2007; Mortimore & Crozier, 2006; Ridsdale, 2004; Tanner, 2009 cited in MacCullagh, p. 102). own emphasis

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Empathy and understanding

'**empathetic understanding** of how it feels to experience the frustrations and learning difficulties that a person with dyslexia faces daily' (Wadlington, Elliot & Kirylo 2008, p. 265). own emphais

'**conscious of another's difficulty and distress** while simultaneously seeking out possible **solutions and alternatives** to alleviate anxiety and troubles' (Kirylo cited in Wadlington, Elliot & Kirylo 2008, p. 266). own emphasis

Understanding their needs

'As each student will present with their **own unique learning profile**, it is important that… [we] get to know the student including their **strengths, weaknesses and processing preferences**' (ADCET 2017).

Do you find **writing** difficult?
What areas do you find difficult?

Do you find **reading** difficult?
What areas do you find difficult?

Are there **other areas** you feel you need help with in your studies?

What **feedback** do you receive for your assignments?

How do you think you **learn best**?

What do you think are your **strengths** that can assist you in your studies?

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Possible Strategies

Students

Visual learning tools -mind maps, diagrams, pictures

Templates - notetaking template, paragraphing, essay/report structure

Online tools - dictionary, thesaurus and spelling and grammar check

Assistive technology – use various technology to assist

Articulate ideas and read out loud - other readings and your own

When reading - use highlighters, margin notes and post it notes

Summarise while reading or soon after

LLAs

Scaffold and **demonstrate** how to make corrections and discuss why

Have students **implement** themselves what you have shown

Break down bigger tasks into smaller more achievable ones

Organisation - discuss tips on being organised

Time management - give tips on time management

Resources - develop resources that take into account accessibility, videos

Be **encouraging** and **reassuring** - be patient and understanding

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Assistive Technology

'Assistive technology offers students with learning disability **greater access** to text-based learning experiences as well as those that require listening and the organisation of information'
(ADCET 2017). own emphasis

Recording and Notetaking
Livescribe Smartpen
Audionote

Voice Recognition and Dictation
Sonocent Audio Notetaker
Dragon NaturallySpeaking (App)

Text-to-Speech
Read and Write Gold TextHelp & ClaroRead
TextAloud
Prizmo (App)

Mindmaps
ImindMap
Inspiration

(Perez & Kelly 2016)

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Does it level the playing field?

'very helpful to many students and can make the **difference between passing and failing** in their studies…However, technology **cannot** be solely relied upon to **"level the playing field"**' (Chanock 200, p. A38). own emphasis

'Compared with non-dyslexics, those with dyslexia have to spend **much more time and effort** on their work in order to achieve accepted levels of academic competence' (Singleton 1999 cited in Carrol & Iles 2006, p. 658). own emphasis

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Success is hard won

'The **success** of students with dyslexia is clearly **hard won**' (Mortimore & Crozier 2006, p. 247). own emphasis

'…dyslexia is by no means incompatible with a **successful outcome in higher education**, given an appropriate level of **commitment on the part of the students** and an appropriate level of **resources on the part of their institution**' (Richardson & Wydell cited in MacCullagh 2014, p. 100). own emphasis

but not unachievable.

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Further research

'It is clear from the current body of literature that **further research** on the **participation and experiences of students with dyslexia** in higher education is **urgently needed**, especially in Australia…It should **ask students what they are experiencing** in each context and **what would help them**, rather than making assumptions based on current practice' (MacCullagh 2014, p. 107). own emphasis

Appreciation of our support

I wanted to thank you for your help with my journey, it was definitely a learning experience for both of us.

I wouldn't have got through if it hadn't been for people like yourself who went above and beyond to help me.

I was so glad the day I walked in your door and felt you understood where I was coming from.

Once again thank you so much.

A final word

Dyslexia

If you have Dyslexia you get stressed and nervous when you get pushed too much or something is too hard for you.

What some people don't understand is that it's a lot more difficult for people with dyslexia to read, spell and learn things as quickly as other people can.

If you are wondering how I know about all of this is I have Dyslexia.

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Useful resources

Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (ADCET). **https://www.adcet.edu.au/**
Provides a legislative framework, information about dyslexia, case studies and further information and resources.

Australian Dyslexia Association **http://www.dyslexiaassociation.org.au/**
Provides information and resources to identify and assist individuals with dyslexia and they provide a pre-assessment service.

Dyslexic students' guide for academics **http://www.unimelb.edu.au/accessibility/guides/dyslexia**
Provides tips from a student perspective on how dyslexia affects their studies at university and is written by University of Melbourne students.

Opening all options **https://www.adcet.edu.au/oao/**
Provides resources for disability practitioners, academic and teaching staff to support students with Specific Learning Disability (SLD) in the post-secondary education sector.

SPELD Victoria **http://www.speldvic.org.au/**
Provides information and services to children and adults with Specific Learning Difficulties and for carers and professionals.

Study strategies for students with dyslexia Lois MacCullagh
https://www.ccd.edu.au/services/multimedia/StudyStrategies_Dyslexia_LoisMacCullagh_2014Nov23.pdf
Provides study strategies for students with dyslexia and was compiled from ideas of students from Macquarie University.