

5 Tips for Assisting A Student With Dyslexia

In many public school systems, Dyslexia is still not getting the attention it deserves. This is despite the fact that the condition has been known and described for about [130 years](#).



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For most of my professional life, I have been teaching in Denmark.

In Denmark, there is a lot of focus on assisting children with learning difficulties.

Still, I often met students in my classroom that were dyslectic and did not get enough assistance.

Many of them went through their entire school career without being spotted.

This can have serious consequences for their self-esteem personal development.

In this article, I would like to give some simple tools a teacher can use with dyslectic students.

They are mostly based on my own experience. But I found that many of them can make a significant difference.

But first, I would like to put out a disclaimer. My opinion is that we should not wait for a diagnosis. If a tool or method works for the student, we should use it.

We should not shy away from trying out different methods in our classroom. I know that sometimes psychologists, social workers, and other professionals disagree with me on this.

But we always need to put the student first. There is too much at stake. Especially if the student shows signs of Dyslexia.

Now, with that out of the way, let us first shortly look at what Dyslexia is.

What Is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a condition, which makes it difficult to read written words.

The students often experience, that they cannot properly recognize characters with similar characteristics.

Examples of these are the letters b and d. Also, the letters get switched around in the mind.

Students with Dyslexia often struggle with reading words that sound differently when spoken and written.

Another challenge is words that are spelled similarly (And believe me, every language has plenty of them).

For more info, head over to [Mayo Clinic](#) or [Wikipedia](#) to read more about it.

There is also this great Ted-Ed video you can watch instead.

Students With Dyslexia Process Written Words Differently

There is an important fact to consider in our classrooms.

The student is reliant on decoding the words letter by letter, all the time.

This is not how our brain usually [processes written words](#). We usually read words as whole units. Especially words, we already are familiar with.

For students with Dyslexia, this means that they need to read a lot slower.

This is important to consider when planning our lessons. The same text might take the dyslectic student four times as long to read when compared to his peers.

5 Strategies For Assisting Students With Dyslexia

1. Make physical reading aids or reading rulers
2. Focus on the phonetics
3. Breaking words into syllables
4. The bigger, the better
5. Electronic aids

1. Physical reading aids and reading rulers

One of the most simple, and effective tools is a reading ruler.

A reading ruler reduces visual stress for the child.

Students with Dyslexia readers frequently become overwhelmed by the sheer amount of text on a printed page.

Hardly a surprise, since their brain is always overworked when they read.

A workaround is to reduce the amount of visual information by blocking out part of the text. A reading ruler is great for this. You can see examples of reading rulers for purchase [here](#).

You can also create one with a simple piece of cardboard paper. I made a short instruction video below.

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/L29QAVmnsRY>

2. Focus on the phonetics

The reading process gets even more complex when we consider phonetics. Phonetics are the sounds that letters and words make when we speak them. Often what we hear can be different from what we read.

The Danish language is particularly terrible in this regard. It is one of the reasons why it is considered a fairly hard language to learn.,

Our brains learn to process these sounds and couple them with the respective words over time.

For the dyslectic brain, however, this does not work optimally.

Therefore, it is important to put extra emphasis on phonetics when teaching the child to read.

Instead of just learning the alphabet, try to also implement lessons where you make a “phonetic alphabet”. This helps the student familiarize him/herself with the sounds of the individual letters.

See an example of a phonetic alphabet song in danish for inspiration below.

The idea is that when we decode text we string the sounds together instead of

the letter names.

The same should be done for divergent letter sounds or letter combinations, that produce specific sounds.

3. Breaking words into syllables

Another approach is to teach the student to break down the words. It can pay off to put some extra emphasis on learning to break down words into syllables.

This way, the word becomes less complex. Think Dys-le-xi-a.

4. The bigger, the better

For students with Dyslexia, reading is complicated enough as it is.

We should try and ease the process where we can.

One of the simplest ways to do it is to avoid texts with small letters as much as possible.

If the student has access to a computer or tablet try and assign the texts in digital form.

This enables the student to adjust the text size as needed.

Sometimes, I also digitize a printed text with OCR, so I can copy the text into a word document and re-print it in a bigger font for my students.

In general, a Chromebook is a very good investment for a student with Dyslexia. If you can convince the school or other stakeholders for the child to provide funding for it, you should try and push for it.

That brings me to the last method.

5. Text-to-speech

The above methods make it easier for the child to read. But they do not eliminate the problem.

There is no known cure for Dyslexia. We need to accept that the condition will be a barrier for the child his entire life.

Fortunately, [modern technology](#) provides us with many options to cross these barriers.

One of the best is text-to-speech, which has developed to a very high standard nowadays.

For Chromebooks, you can look at the add-ons [Read Aloud](#) and [Speech to Text](#).

The first is a traditional TTS program. The add-on scans the digital text and reads it aloud.

The second add-on does the reverse. It listens to your speech input and writes the words for you.

Both apps have built-in support for a wide range of languages. A Brazilian colleague of mine tested the add-ons with one of her students in Portuguese. It worked great.

Both add-ons are free.

There are many similar apps on the market nowadays. But high-end ones, like IntoWords, cost a lot for the licensing.

Most modern mobile phones and tablets also have built-in text-to-speech functions, by the way.

The Barriers of Dyslexia Can Be Crossed

These were five tips to assist students with Dyslexia.

Of course, you can also use the same tips for your own child, if he or she is struggling with this condition.

I wrote more teacher-centric because I often received requests from colleagues about this matter.

I hope you can use these tips. Let me know in the comments if you tried them off and how they work.