

# Dyslexia

## What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia describes a difference in how an individual learns and processes information. People with dyslexia often have strengths in areas such as creative thinking, problem-solving and communication but may struggle with things such as spelling, reading and memorising facts.

Dyslexia is not linked to intelligence but can make learning difficult, especially with traditional teaching methods. Along with ADHD, autism and dyspraxia, dyslexia is a neurodiverse condition and is considered to be a specific learning difference. Neurodiverse conditions can overlap or co-occur, meaning individuals may have another of these conditions alongside their dyslexia.

Dyslexia can be thought of as a continuum, as people can be mildly, moderately or severely affected.

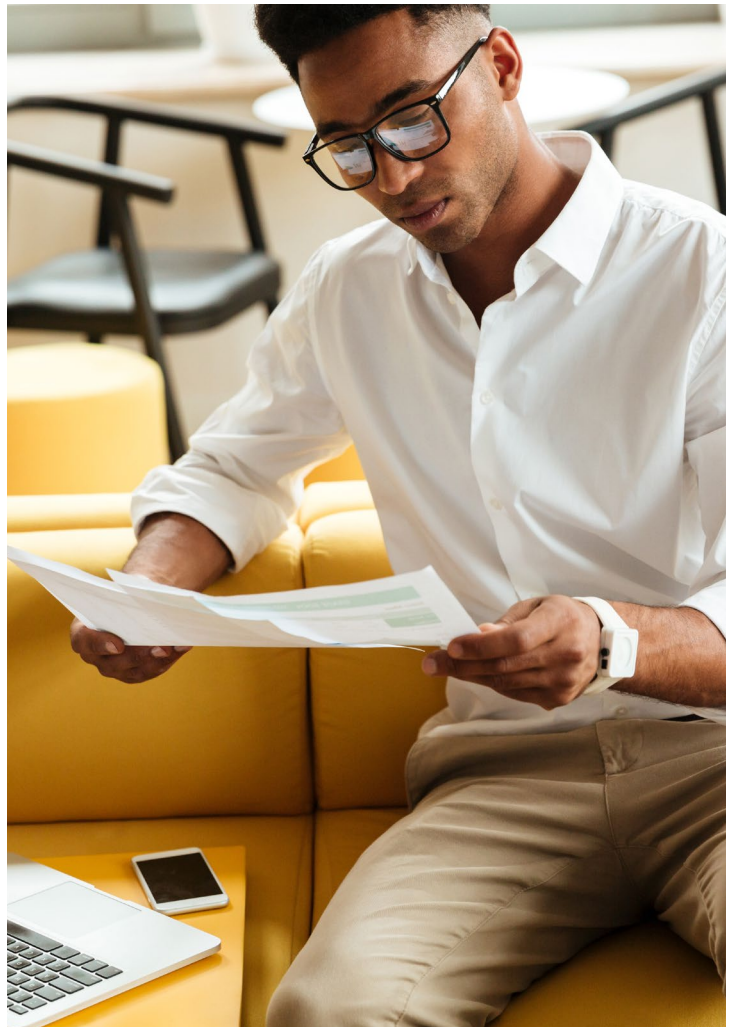
## How common is dyslexia?

It is widely reported that dyslexia affects around 10% of the population, which equates to around 6.3 million people in the UK. Around 4% of the population are severely impacted by their dyslexia.

### The language we use when talking about dyslexia

When talking about disability, and neurodiversity in particular, there are conflicting views about whether person-first language (for example, 'a person with dyslexia') or identity-first language (for example, 'a dyslexic person') should be used. Neurodivergent people usually prefer identity-first language.

You will notice in this factsheet that we use both. It is always best to ask the individual how they prefer to refer to themselves when talking about their condition.



## What skills and strengths do people with dyslexia have?

People with dyslexia can bring a number of key strengths and skills to the workplace.

### Strong analytical skills and attention to detail

Dyslexic people tend to be curious and inquisitive, as well as highly observant and detail-focused, with the capability to quickly analyse complex information and notice when things are out of place. This means they are often great at troubleshooting and identifying faults. In fact, security services have specifically recruited people with dyslexia because of their ability to crack codes, spot patterns in events or data and solve complex problems.

### Strategic thinking

Because they have an alternative way of thinking and tend to look at things simultaneously, as a whole, rather than in a sequence, dyslexic people are often able to see beyond the details to gain a more strategic view of a subject or problem.

This enables them to identify inter-relationships and similarities between ideas and see patterns and trends in information or data sets more easily. Such strengths are likely to be particularly valuable in fields like science, mathematics and industry.

### Experiential learning and visual thinking

People with dyslexia tend to learn more through experiences, either real or imagined. They may also recall information as a story, with information linking together, rather than as a random set of data. This episodic memory and narrative reasoning can help them to integrate contextual information better.

They also often have the ability to visualise or create a three-dimensional, multi-sensory image of an issue, which allows their thoughts to evolve and grow as more information is added. This visual thinking is thought to be much faster than verbal thinking. Research has also shown that many dyslexic people are better at manipulating 3D objects in their mind, a skill which lends itself to areas such as design, engineering, construction and architecture.

### Problem-solving

Dyslexic people tend to be excellent problem-solvers. Their brains are set up for being analytical and logical, using identified patterns and concepts to see a way through a problem, evaluating the evidence, exploring possibilities and then making balanced and informed decisions. They will also often have honed these skills growing up, finding different ways to learn or solve problems when traditional learning has been difficult for them, for example, through finding information from other sources, making different connections and picking up new ways to complete tasks.



## Empathy and understanding

The struggles that many people with dyslexia experience themselves through their lives mean they often show an enhanced level of empathy for others who are going through difficulties. They also tend to have a high level of intuition, making them good at reading situations and understanding what is happening from other people's perspectives.

These traits, along with the creativity and imagination that are characteristic of dyslexic people, mean that they are frequently very artistic, often excel at music or sports and also tend to be very entrepreneurial and good at inspiring and leading others.



## What challenges and difficulties can people with dyslexia experience?

### Reading and written communication

Dyslexia impacts the skills involved in accurate and fluent reading, writing and spelling. People with dyslexia can often experience difficulties associating written letters and words with their sounds (phonics) and with elements of written work, including making spelling and grammatical errors, having poor handwriting and finding it hard to structure written communication and express ideas in writing. You may notice a distinct contrast between what they express verbally and what they put down on paper. They are also likely to experience some reading issues, such as difficulty reading fluently, a reluctance to read aloud, struggling to understand and learn new words and misreading words. Some people may also have a visual sensitivity to text where the words seem to move or blur on the page.

### Memory and processing information

A lesser-known effect of dyslexia is its impact on processing and memory, particularly short-term and working memory. This can affect a person's ability to recall or process a list of words or numbers or to understand and remember a list of instructions, particularly when delivered verbally, and mean it takes longer for them to learn things, especially in the traditional way things are taught or trained. People with dyslexia may also find it difficult to apply rules to different situations and may need extra time to respond to questions or express themselves.

### Organisation

Another characteristic of people with dyslexia is struggling with organisation and time management. Dyslexia can make planning, prioritising and multitasking more difficult, which can lead to:

- Difficulty with completing sequences of tasks or following instructions
- Seeming unprepared for meetings and events because they haven't been able to order their thoughts
- Having a disorganised work area or frequently losing things
- Difficulty meeting deadlines, especially with long projects that involve complex tasks
- Difficulty with directions, such as problems navigating, a tendency to get lost or mixing up left and right.

Not everyone with dyslexia will experience all of these issues or to the same degree, and it's important to remember that the best way to understand the difficulties someone is facing is to ask them.

# Helpful tips for supporting someone with dyslexia at work

Whether you have a dyslexic employee, colleague or customer, there are some simple things you can do to make their life easier and support them with some of the key areas they may struggle with.

## Reading and writing

- Find other ways of giving information and instructions, to avoid them having to read a lot of text
- Highlight key points in documents using bold font or provide summaries
- Provide information on coloured paper and consider the font and size of text you use
- Allow plenty of time to read and complete tasks
- Minimise tasks that involve writing, especially in any group settings
- Explore other options for recording information, for example, consider providing them with a voice recorder or computer
- Supply a dictionary, spell checker or glossary and offer to proofread their work.

## Processing and memory

- Give clear, concise instructions, one at a time – be direct and clear
- Write down important details or use diagrams or pictures to convey the key information
- Demonstrate tasks or provide examples and templates
- Encourage note-taking or offer handouts.

## Organisation, time management and planning

- Provide a quiet workspace and minimise distractions and interruptions
- Encourage them to focus on one task at a time and to plan ahead
- Suggest using folders, post-its, colour-coding or labelling
- Be aware that they may need extra time to complete tasks
- Help with prioritising tasks and setting small targets and deadlines
- Suggest the use of a 'to-do' list, diary or planner.

## Communication, emotional and social skills

- Be clear about the aims of any work and provide an overview
- Provide information in bitesize chunks and allow thinking time
- Allow time for them to process questions and respond
- Recap, summarise and check their understanding regularly
- Provide lots of praise and positive feedback when they complete tasks or accomplish goals.
- Allow breaks in longer appointments or sessions.

**Remember, the individual is the expert in their condition – if in doubt, check with them!**