

Dyslexia:

Faculty of Arts, Humanities and
Education Practice Placement Support

Guidance for placement mentors and student teachers



Canterbury
Christ Church
University

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What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a combination of abilities and difficulties that can affect reading, writing, and spelling, as well as organisation, memory, and sequencing. It is not linked to intelligence, but to a need for structure, example-based explanations, and reinforcement.

Under the terms of The Equality Act 2010, dyslexia is a recognised disability and student teachers with dyslexia are entitled to receive 'reasonable adjustments' or support. However, they must still fulfil academic and placement competencies.

Dyslexia affects students in many ways and strategies that might work for one student on placement may not be helpful for another. However, students devise creative coping strategies to address challenges at university and some of these strategies can be adapted for teaching practice.

The emotional impact of dyslexia on professional placement

Dyslexia can sometimes have a negative emotional impact on students on placement. Some face emotional stress as they struggle to conceal their difficulties because of a fear of discrimination. As a result, they may find placement more tiring than others because of the extreme mental effort that is required.

Many with dyslexia struggle to come to terms with low self-esteem. They may lack confidence in their abilities, which could affect their performance on placement. This is particularly the case if they have only recently been diagnosed. They may feel isolated and fear that others are learning far more quickly than they are.



Dyslexia as a strength

People with dyslexia have different ways of thinking and learning. Research has identified common key strengths: an ability to think holistically, quickly seeing the 'bigger picture'; great problem-solving; innovative creativity and imagination; excellent visualisation and active learning abilities; and intuitive people skills. These skills can assist dyslexics in becoming excellent teachers, embracing a natural empathy and understanding of dyslexia to enhance teaching practice. For dyslexic teachers, multi-sensory learning and differentiation techniques tend to be innate and are consequently easily integrated into their pedagogy, promoting good practice (Glazzard and Dale, 2012).

Dyslexic challenges mostly relate to processing speed; working memory; and phonological awareness, processing, and retrieval. A combined approach of excellent communication, collaborative working and the application of strengths-based strategies can effectively address these challenge areas.

This guidance addresses some of the challenges that may occur on professional placement. The intent is to complement Placement Learning Support Plans and inclusive strategies are suggested to promote and enhance practice placement learning.



Memory, organisation, and time management

Student teachers who have dyslexia may take longer to transfer information from their short-term into their long-term memories, and therefore may require information reinforced or repeated. They can appear to have a short attention span and be easily distracted in meetings. Dyslexics often find it difficult to discard irrelevant or redundant information, which could lead to 'memory overload' and confusion.

Some people with dyslexia will have difficulty with:

- following instructions
- ordering ideas
- remembering names
- retaining information that is given verbally
- filing and retrieving information
- alphabetically or sequentially reading dates and times
- remembering information to pass on to others
- sequencing tasks correctly



Student teachers may have difficulty with:

- balancing coursework and placement commitments
- lesson planning
- estimating how much time is needed for a task
- allocating a realistic timeframe to tasks
- completing tasks on time
- understanding what is expected of them
- multitasking
- retaining information

Strategies for mentors and supervisors:

Student teachers need structure and time to effectively transfer information from their short-term to long-term memories.

Together with your student teacher, discuss their Placement Learning Support Plan (PLSP) and identify appropriate strategies for support.

- At the beginning of placement, highlight important information and key dates.
- Send key information electronically to enable student teachers time to reflect and review it.
- Schedule weekly mentor meetings and set clear, measurable learning outcomes.
- Demonstrate and explain procedures clearly and simply.
- If a task involves following a process, reinforce instructions clearly in a written or electronic format.
- Be patient. Allow additional time for overlearning and reinforcement if needed.
- Encourage reflection.
- If possible, provide a quiet space where student teachers can work without distraction.
- If possible, provide student teachers with a placement pack, giving useful information, standard procedures, and a map of the site.

Strategies for student teachers:

- Summarise instructions to check understanding.
- Ask questions so that you understand what is expected of you.
- Record important information in an accessible and structured written or electronic format.
- Create a simple flow chart for sequenced tasks.
- Use coloured pens and highlighters to organise and prioritise work.
- Use templates wherever possible.



Reading

Some student teachers may:

- feel embarrassed about reading aloud; misread unfamiliar words; read slowly and find scanning or skimming difficult; find text is distorted – particularly black print on white backgrounds; have difficulty reading with noise distractions.
- Have difficulty reading charts if multiple layers of information are presented on one chart or if information is presented on various levels – reading both across and down.

Strategies for mentors

- Where possible, allow students the option to view tables and charts on coloured backgrounds; the student may have a preferred colour.
- Allow extra time for reading: give essential reading well in advance, highlighting important sections if appropriate.
- Any written information should be 'dyslexia friendly':
 - ❖ write in a logical sequence
 - ❖ avoid small print, italics and serif fonts
 - ❖ use bullet points
 - ❖ space information for clarity
 - ❖ avoid jargon



Strategies for student teachers

- Record useful words and meanings of abbreviations in an easily accessible format.
- If helpful, use highlighter pens, and coloured backgrounds, overlays and paper.
 - Use visual tools, such as mind maps or flowcharts to organise ideas.

Writing and Spelling



Some student teachers may have difficulty with:

- writing concisely
- spelling
- writing under time pressure – some students may write very slowly and need to redraft their writing
- filling in forms or adding data, especially when asked to do so quickly

Strategies for mentors

- Explain the relevance of any key information.
- Help student teachers to compile a list of relevant professional terms and acronyms.
- Allow student teachers to bullet point lesson plans and evaluations.
- Help student teachers to summarise main points using mind maps, flowcharts or bullet points, depending on their preference.
- Provide exemplars and ensure that resources, schemes of work and existing planning are made available.
- Where possible, allow student teachers the option to complete placement documentation on coloured backgrounds, using a sans-serif, dyslexia friendly font, such as Arial.
- Avoid observing student teachers whilst they are typing/writing to minimise anxiety.
- Summarise, or allow student teachers to record, key information from mentor meetings.

Strategies for student teachers

- Take time to familiarise yourself with placement documentation, e.g. templates.
- If no template exists, create one.
- Keep a record of words and acronyms commonly used.
- Use spellchecking software.
- Develop effective proofreading skills.
- Prepare PowerPoint and other presentations in advance, so that you have classroom-ready resources.

Classroom Practice

Strategies for student teachers

- Plan bullet-pointed lessons as far in advance as possible, using templates.
- Practise using the whiteboard, using the reveal function for pre-checked spellings, if possible.
- Use software, such as PowerPoint, ClaroRead and mind mapping applications.
- If reading to the class, practise in advance and break text into chunks to avoid large blocks.
- Take pauses when reading aloud. This helps your listeners to understand, and gives you, as the reader, time to process.
- Consider having your learners help with spellings. This is good practice for them, as well as assisting you.
- If appropriate, have a wall display of subject-specific words.
- Have a list of key words prepared and easily accessible for each lesson.
- Allow plenty of time for marking and try doing it in small batches, taking regular breaks. Use coloured overlays if they help.



Notes – Student teacher / Mentor

Student teacher – how my dyslexia affects me:

Notes – Student teacher / Mentor

Student teacher/Mentor – suggested strategies:

Sources of Further Information

CCCU Student Disability Service	disability@canterbury.ac.uk	01227 922576
CCCU Student Mental Wellbeing Service	mentalwellbeing@canterbury.ac.uk	01227 923056
CCCU Student Wellbeing Advisers	studentwellbeing@canterbury.ac.uk	01227 922675
British Dyslexia Association	www.bdadyslexia.org.uk	0333 405 4555
Dyslexia Action	www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk	01784 222304

References

Glazzard, J. and Dale, K. (2012) 'Trainee teachers with dyslexia: personal narratives of resilience' *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 13(1), pp. 26-37. doi: 10.1111/j.1471-3802.2012.01254.x