



# NetNews

an online newsletter devoted to adult literacy

December, 2004

LDA of Minnesota

Vol.5, No.2

## Dyslexia Defined

LDA of Minnesota provides statewide consultation services to Adult Basic Education (ABE) providers via phone, fax, or email at no cost through supplemental services.

There have been many questions over the years about **dyslexia**. Examples of questions to be answered in this issue include:

- My learner reverses letters. Is this dyslexia?*
- How do I teach an adult with dyslexia?*
- Can dyslexia be cured?*
- Can you receive GED accommodations for dyslexia?*

Dyslexia is an overused, misunderstood term. It is often associated simply with reversal of letters, numbers, or directions. People have been known to diagnose themselves with dyslexia or have been told (including through Internet assessments) "you are dyslexic". There have been a number of media-publicized treatments or cures for dyslexia.

Dyslexia is one type of a reading difficulty, but not a separate special education categorical disability. It is included under **specific learning disability** according to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). Dyslexia is believed to be due to faulty wiring in the brain that results in difficulties with phonological processing - the mastery, storage, and retrieval of sound/symbol systems. The effects range from mild to severe.

*Persons with dyslexia have difficulty reading and spelling accurately and fluently.*

According to the **International Dyslexia Association** (IDA) and National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD):

"Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by **difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities**. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge."

According to **Nancy Mather**, a noted researcher in the field of learning disabilities:

"Dyslexia is a **problem with rapid word identification and/or spelling caused by phonological and/or orthographic awareness**. Its treatment requires specialized methods and accommodations. This implies a biological basis for the difficulty, and includes difficulties with mastery of the coding aspects of reading and/or spelling. It is a complex syndrome, as opposed to one isolated symptom (e.g. only poor spelling)."

In other words, dyslexia is much more than reversal of letters, numbers, or directions. The diagnosis requires a comprehensive assessment completed by professionals who understand the complexities of the reading process.



NetNews is supported by a grant from the Minnesota Department of Education, Adult Basic Education.

4301 Highway 7, Suite 160 ■ Minneapolis, MN 55416  
(952) 922-8374 ■ [www.ldaminnnesota.org](http://www.ldaminnnesota.org)  
Learning Disabilities Association of Minnesota

## In this issue...

- *Dyslexia Defined...*
- *Diagnosing Dyslexia...*
- *Helping Adults to Read...*
- *Accommodating Dyslexia...*

*page 1*  
*page 2*  
*page 3*  
*page 4-5*

# Clues to Dyslexia

Dr. Sally Shaywitz, author of *Overcoming Dyslexia - A New and Complete Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at Any Level (2003)*, lists the following clues to dyslexia for adults:

## Weaknesses:

- mispronunciation of names of people or places
- difficulty remembering names of people or places
- confusion with names or words that sound alike
- difficulty with word retrieval
- limited spoken vocabulary compared to listening vocabulary
- childhood history of reading and spelling difficulties
- word reading that requires great effort
- lack of fluency
- slow reading rate
- avoidance of oral reading
- substitution of made-up words for words that cannot be pronounced
- extreme fatigue from reading
- preference for books with figures, pictures, charts, or graphs
- preference for books with fewer words on a page or lots of white space
- extreme difficulty with spelling
- preference for less complicated words in writing

## Strengths:

- high learning capability as shown by success in specialized areas or oral expression
- noticeable improvement on reading tasks when given extended time
- exceptional written expression if mechanics (spelling, capitalization, punctuation) are not evaluated
- exceptional empathy and feeling for others
- big-picture thinking
- inclined to think outside of the box
- resilient and adaptable

In order to determine the likelihood of dyslexia, it is very important that **a persistent pattern of reading and spelling difficulties exists over a prolonged period of time**, not just now and then. Dyslexia also has a strong genetic link. Persons with a family history of reading disabilities need to be especially aware of the above clues.

# Diagnosing Dyslexia

Dyslexia is determined through a comprehensive diagnostic assessment. Self report, teacher report, parent report, interview, observation, formal and informal assessment may be used to document the presence of high learning capability and “unexpected” difficulties with phonological awareness, decoding (word reading), encoding (word spelling), fluency (rate and accuracy), and comprehension (understanding meaning). **Of great importance for adults is a history of significant and persistent reading difficulties.**

According to Dr. Shaywitz, a history of “laborious reading and writing, of poor spelling, or requiring additional time in reading and taking tests - represents the most sensitive and accurate indicator of a reading disability in young adults”. She strongly recommends administering tests of oral or silent reading rate such as the *Nelson-Denny Reading Test* or the *Gray Oral Reading Tests-Fourth Edition (GORT-4)* available through Riverside Publishing. These tests establish a lack of fluency in otherwise competent adults and justifies the need for extended time to complete reading-related tasks in educational or vocational settings.

**LDA of Minnesota provides formal diagnostic assessment of reading difficulties for children, teens, and adults.** Currently, adult learners referred through ABE receive this service at no cost through supplemental services. LDA uses standardized intellectual testing to document at least average learning capability and the presence of a processing problem and standardized achievement testing to document significant difficulties in decoding, fluency, or comprehension. LDA also uses self report, teacher report, familial history, interview, and observation to determine a persistent pattern of reading difficulties.

For more information on LDA’s assessment services, contact Marn Frank (mf@ldaminnesota.org) or Mike Anderson (ma@ldaminnesota.org) at 952-922-8374.

# Helping Adults Learn to Read

Many adults, native and non-native English speakers, are enrolled in literacy programs to learn how to read. They are a very diverse group. Some have experienced reading difficulties for years or have been diagnosed with dyslexia, but have not received adequate remediation. Some have never experienced reading instruction or received limited or irregular education. The good news... **it is never too late to learn how to read!**

For adults with reading difficulties or non-readers, the **ideal situation** is one-to-one or small group instruction with a trained teacher or tutor. Instruction is frequent and intense; optimally four times a week for one to two hours a session. This ideal situation is often difficult, if not impossible, for most adult literacy programs to provide.

A more **realistic situation** might be individual or small group instruction offered twice a week for one to two hours. For large groups of beginning readers (such as English as a second language learners), a realistic situation might be offering reading instruction for thirty minutes to one hour a day during regular class times.

The **ideal instruction** for adults with beginning reading difficulties is direct, sequential, systematic, and multi-sensory. It incorporates the essential reading components of phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency. It is relevant and always applied to meaningful or authentic materials that adults may encounter in everyday life.

This type of ideal instruction is provided in *The ART - The Adult Reading Toolkit, A Research-Based Resource for Adult Literacy* developed by LDA. *The ART* covers the five reading components identified by the National Reading Panel and includes case studies, research findings, and numerous assessment and instructional materials for beginning through advanced readers. Trainings on *The ART* are available at no cost to any ABE program or consortium in Minnesota. Contact Marn Frank (mf@ldaminnesota.org) for more information.

**There is no cure for dyslexia.** However, research has shown that reading improvements can be achieved through multi-sensory instruction and repeated practice of the “code of English”. This is true for struggling readers of all ages. It is also true for English language learners, regardless of the type of literacy background in their first language.



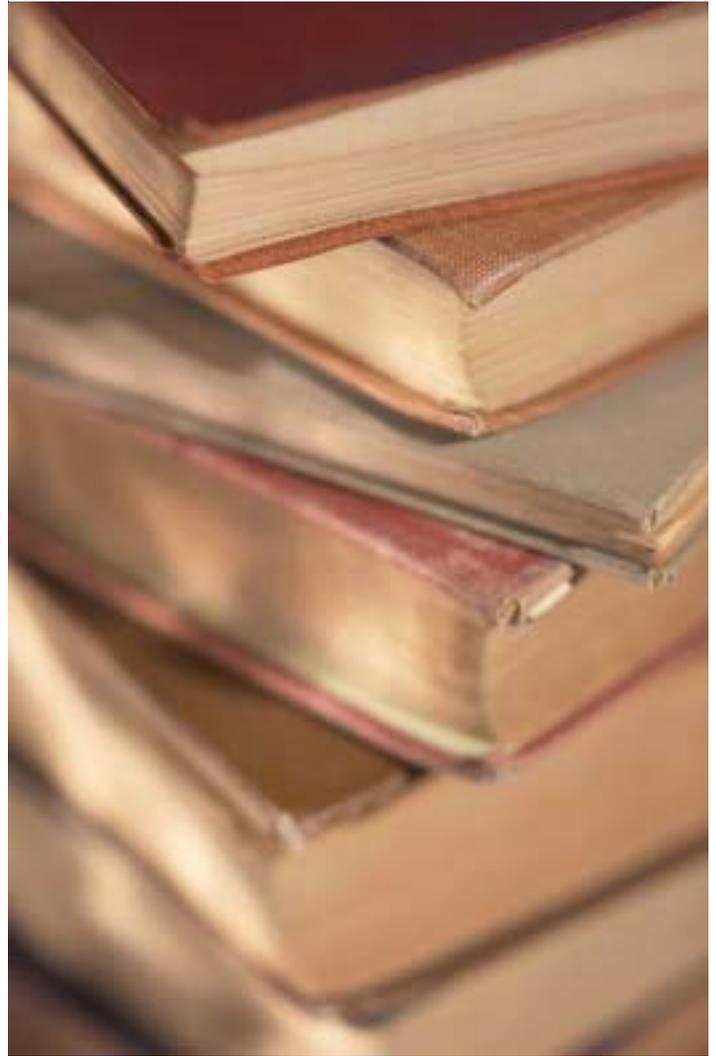
# Accommodating Dyslexia

Accommodations are approved adjustments in instruction or testing procedure made to meet special needs or disabilities documented through diagnostic assessment. They alone do not produce success; but they do improve the chance for success.

The most critical accommodation for the dyslexic reader is **extra or extended time**. Research shows that good readers and dyslexic readers follow very different pathways to decoding and comprehension. Good readers follow a pathway that is sequential, orderly, and automatic. Dyslexic readers deal with significant phonological processing difficulties. They must take a less efficient and less direct pathway to reading. They often rely on strong thinking or reasoning skills to supplement their weaker decoding skills in order to comprehend words and meaning. Consequently, dyslexic readers read more slowly and with great effort. According to Dr. Shaywitz, “dyslexia robs a person of time; accommodations return it.”

Another reasonable accommodation for dyslexic readers is **a private or separate room for testing** so that distractions and noise are minimized. This allows the dyslexic reader to focus their efforts on reading and comprehension while comfortably using the extra time they are allowed.

For severe dyslexia, **taped texts or tests** would be considered reasonable. Some adults may always struggle with decoding, yet can learn from oral presentation or share their acquired knowledge through oral testing. A wide selection of taped texts are available through *Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic* at [www.rfbd.org](http://www.rfbd.org). Some standardized tests are presented on tapes or CDs. Oral reading of standardized tests is usually not an approved accommodation because each person’s voice and intonation varies. This compromises the validity of the test and consequently the results.



# GED Accommodations

Currently, the General Education Development Testing Service (GEDTS) uses a specific process for requesting accommodations on GED testing. The process includes the completion of **Form L-15** for persons diagnosed with a learning disability or ADHD/ADD. This form is available from the GED Administrator or the local GED Examiner. Form L-15 is primarily completed by the “certifying professional” who provided the diagnostic assessment or by a “certifying advocate” who has access to the documentation of the disability. Each request is considered on an individual basis by the GED Administrator. Official and supporting documentation of the area of disability and the relationship to the requested accommodation(s) is essential!

Documentation of a learning disability according to GEDTS includes evidence of at least average ability, the presence of an information processing problem, and significant difficulties in reading, writing, or mathematics. Additionally, the learning disability cannot be the direct result of mental retardation, hearing, vision, or motor impairments, severe emotional disturbance, environmental or cultural differences. Form L-15 does “match” the terms reading disability and dyslexia. **Therefore, in order to receive GED testing accommodations for dyslexia, applicants must meet the criteria for a learning disability that impacts the area of reading.** They must demonstrate a past and current history of significant difficulties in decoding, fluency, and/or comprehension. Reasonable GED testing accommodations for dyslexia may include:

- Audiocassette edition
- Large-print edition (documentation not required)
- Extended time
- Supervised breaks
- Use of a private room
- Use of a scribe (if writing is also impacted)

LDA offers diagnostic learning disability assessment for GED accommodations at no cost to ABE learners through supplemental services. Following the GED Model, LDA acts as the certifying professionals who complete the L-15 and provide the supporting documentation. It is important for the adult learner and the referring instructor to understand that the diagnosis and documentation provided for the L-15 are in response to GED criteria and may not be acceptable at the post-secondary level.

If the requested accommodations for GED testing are approved, it is necessary that the candidate practice using the accommodations before taking the official test. They need to be familiar with the adjustment(s) to testing procedure and find out if they work!

Other test-taking recommendations include getting a good night’s sleep, getting up with time to spare, eating a meal, wearing comfortable clothes, leaving early for the testing site, finding a comfortable seat with good lighting, giving yourself time to focus, and imagining yourself succeeding.

LDA of Minnesota wishes you the best during  
the holiday season.

We look forward to seeing you next year!

# Become a member of LDA!

Learning Disabilities Association of Minnesota is the state affiliate of LDA of America. LDA believes that every person with learning disabilities can succeed in school, at work, in relationships, and within the community -- when provided the right opportunities.

As a member of LDA, you will receive:

- Resources through a national LD Resource Library/Bookstore
- Research Updates covering the latest research in the field
- News from Washington - monthly reports on legislative issues
- Newsbriefs - LDA of America's comprehensive national newsletter published six times a year
- Learning Times - LDA of Minnesota's local newsletter published four times a year
- Comprehensive local web site and new national web site featuring exclusive Members area with access to leading experts and online training
- Discount on national LDA conferences and workshops
- Discount subscription to Learning Disabilities: A Multidisciplinary Journal, a quarterly peer-reviewed journal
- A chance to connect with others who have similar interests

## Member information:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City / State / Zip

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone

\_\_\_\_\_  
Email Address

## I am interested in:

Individual Membership \$30  
 Journal Subscription (members only) \$30  
 Journal Subscription (non-members) \$60  
**Subtotal \$\_\_\_\_\_**

*LDA relies on the generosity of our members and the community to provide information and services that advance our mission.*

I want to help LDA, I have enclosed a contribution to support LDA's mission \$\_\_\_\_\_

**Total \$\_\_\_\_\_**

## Method of payment:

Check (payable to LDA)

Visa  Mastercard

\_\_\_\_\_  
Card number                      \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Exp. date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

### Contributions to LDA are tax deductible

So that we may better serve you, please consider providing us the following OPTIONAL information.

I am a:

Person with Learning Disabilities

Professional     Family member     Other

*Please mail completed application  
along with payment to:*

**LDA of Minnesota  
4301 Highway 7, Suite 160  
Minneapolis, MN 55416**

**ph: 952-922-8374    www.ldaminnesota.org**

LDA is a private, non-profit, educational agency that specializes in helping children, youth, and adults with learning disabilities or other learning difficulties maximize their potential so that they and their families may lead more productive and fulfilled lives.

