



Guidelines

For the examination and assessment of candidates who have dyslexia

Background

Dyslexia is a registered disability under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and is defined as a specific learning difficulty. People with dyslexia typically have certain difficulties with reading, spelling and writing.

The British Dyslexia Association defines dyslexia as “*a specific learning difficulty which mainly affects the development of literacy and language related skills.*”

It is likely to be present at birth and to be lifelong in its effects. It is characterised by difficulties with phonological processing, rapid naming, working memory, processing speed, and the automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual's other cognitive abilities.

It tends to be resistant to conventional teaching methods, but its effects can be mitigated by appropriately specific intervention, including the application of information technology and supportive counselling.”

They identify the following difficulties associated with dyslexia in an educational setting. Not all people with dyslexia will experience all of these difficulties but will usually experience some of them.

Written work

- Has a poor standard of written work compared with oral ability
- Has poor handwriting with badly formed letters
- Has neat handwriting but writes very slowly indeed
- Produces badly set out or messily written work with spellings crossed out several times
- Spells the same word differently in one piece of work
- Has difficulty with punctuation and/or grammar
- Confuses upper and lower case letters
- Writes a great deal but 'loses the thread'

- Writes very little but to the point
- Has difficulty taking notes in lectures
- Difficulty with organisation of homework
- Finds tasks difficult to complete on time
- Appears to know more than can be committed to paper

Reading

- Is hesitant and laboured especially when reading aloud
- Omits, repeats or adds extra words
- Reads at a reasonable rate but has a low level of comprehension
- Fails to recognise familiar words
- Misses a line or repeats the same line twice
- Loses his/her place or uses a finger or marker to keep the place
- Has difficulty in pin-pointing the main idea in a passage
- Finds difficulty with dictionaries, directories, encyclopaedias

Numeracy

- Finds difficulty remembering tables and/or basic number sets
- Finds sequencing problematic
- Confuses signs such as x for +
- Can think at a high level in mathematics but needs a calculator for simple calculations
- Misreads questions that include words
- Finds mental arithmetic at speed very difficult
- Finds memorising formulae difficult

Other areas

- Confuses direction - left/right
- Has difficulty in learning foreign languages
- Has indeterminate hand preference
- Has difficulty in finding the name for an object
- Has clear processing problems at speed
- Misunderstands complicated questions
- Finds holding a list of instructions in memory difficult although can perform all tasks when told individually

Behaviour

- Is disorganised or forgetful e.g. over sports equipment, lessons, homework, appointments
- Is immature and/or clumsy

- Has difficulty relating to others: is unable to 'read' body language
- Is often in the wrong place at the wrong time
- Is excessively tired due to the amount of concentration and effort required

(Source: The British Dyslexia Association website - www.bdadyslexia.org.uk)

Experiencing a combination of these difficulties can put a candidate at a considerable disadvantage when it comes demonstrating their competence through examinations and submissions. Some of these factors may also make it harder for a candidate to develop competences. They may need additional facilities or support in the workplace. Separate guidance for candidates, and for supervisors and placement providers, is available on our website.

Examination and Assessment

A candidate who has been diagnosed as having dyslexia is advised to inform the Qualifications Officer at the earliest opportunity and certainly before submitting work or sitting any examinations. Prior to any examinations or submissions the candidate should provide the Qualifications Office with a copy of their report or statement confirming their dyslexia diagnosis.

The Qualifications Officer will discuss with the candidate what adjustments might be required to examination or assessment arrangements, advising them of the options which are available and listening to the candidate's requests in respect of their specific situation.

All arrangements and adjustments must be agreed in advance of the examination or submission date and enough time must be given to enable arrangements to be made.

Written examinations

For written examinations a candidate with dyslexia will normally be allowed the following:

- 10 minutes additional reading time at the start of the examination.
- An additional 15 minutes for each hour of the examination

In addition, they will be allowed to choose from the following options to assist them in the examination:

- The examination paper can be presented on coloured paper (the colour to be specified in advance by the candidate)
- The candidate can be provided with coloured note paper to write their answers (the colour to be specified in advance by the candidate)
- The option of a reader to read the examination paper
- The option of a scribe to write the examination paper to their dictation
- The option of using a word processor to write their examination scripts. Where a word processor is used the candidate should advise the Qualifications Office in advance about any specific settings which may be required, such as coloured backgrounds or specific contrast settings. The

candidate will be allowed to arrive at the centre early to familiarise themselves with the word processor provided.

In all cases the candidate must make these arrangements with the Qualifications Office in advance.

To avoid disruption to the candidate from others leaving the examination before the candidate has completed their exam candidates will, wherever possible, be provided with a separate examination room.

Identification of work

All work which is sent to examiners or assessors will be identified by means of a sticker on the front of the work advising the examiner/assessor that the candidate has been diagnosed with dyslexia and referring to these guidelines.

General guidelines for marking work by candidates with dyslexia

An individual with dyslexia has difficulty both with the expression of his/her ideas in written form and with the correct use of language. It is commonly recommended, therefore, that wherever possible assessors award marks that reflect the candidate's understanding of the subject rather than the level of his/her linguistic skills. However, it is not intended that academic rigour be sacrificed, and where the marking criteria award marks for presentation or language special consideration should not be given.

The written work of candidates with dyslexia may be characterised by one or more of the following:

- Omitted words or punctuation
- Excessive or misplaced punctuation
- Repeated information or phrases
- Unsophisticated language structures (often adopted as a strategy to avoid grammatical errors) do not necessarily reflect unsophisticated thinking
- Simplified vocabulary (often adopted as a strategy to reduce spelling errors)
- Difficulties with sequencing or word finding may produce a stilted style of writing

Although assessed work is often likely to be word-processed and spell checked, assessors should be aware of the limitations of a spell checker. Some of the problems likely to remain in spell-checked work include

- Homophone substitutions (e.g. there/their, effect/affect, course/coarse)
- Phonetic equivalents (e.g. fenetic for phonetic, homerfone for homophone)
- Incorrect word substitutions (e.g. distance for disturbance)
- American spelling (e.g. colorful, fueling)

Unless the assessment is of language or presentation skills the work of a candidate with dyslexia should be marked for content indicating their subject knowledge, understanding and skills. It is often suggested that it is easier to do this by reading the work quickly. This is because people with dyslexia tend to think in a holistic, non-verbal way, which means their work can be disordered with poor sentence

structure, spelling and punctuation. Examiners/assessors are asked to focus on the clarity of argument rather than the detail of expression, although the communication itself must be effective. As a general rule of thumb, do not penalise errors that a good copy editor could put right.

However, some errors might still mean a conditional pass is appropriate. For example, psychologists are often engaged in report writing which requires sources to be correctly referenced. As this is a skill necessary to fulfil the psychologists' role an adjustment would not normally be made.

Similarly, some errors which relate directly to the candidate's dyslexia might result in a fail. For example, a candidate for the Qualification in Forensic Psychology might include in their evidence a report written for a parole board. This is a key requirement of the forensic psychologist's role and they must be able to do this in order to be a competent forensic psychologist. Adjustments might be made to assist the candidate in preparing such a report to the required standard. However, it is possible that a candidate may lack the necessary skills to communicate in writing to the parole board and, in such circumstances, it would be appropriate for the assessors to fail the work.

Guidelines for oral assessments

Some candidates with dyslexia will favour oral presentation as an assessment method but others may experience anxiety or even phobic reactions, particularly if they have had humiliating experiences in the past which may relate to their dyslexia (for example, reading aloud at school).

Assessors should be informed that the candidate has dyslexia and that this might affect their performance during an oral examination. For example, candidates may use the wrong word in speech, or have difficulty finding the word they want to use, which in itself may provoke an anxiety reaction. People with dyslexia tend to think in a holistic way and their thoughts may appear disorganised, so assessors should be sensitive to this. People with dyslexia may also have more difficulty with questions that have several clauses or sub-elements, so assessors should plan to avoid these.

When making assessment decisions the assessors should focus on the candidate's understanding and skills in relation to the learning outcomes for the assessment rather than on presentation errors which may be attributable to dyslexia.

Where a candidate has a severe anxiety reaction in relation to an oral presentation or assessment the assessors may wish to consider whether an alternative form of assessment might be appropriate. These cases should be discussed with the Qualifications Officer, who can liaise with the candidate and the Board of Assessors about an appropriate mode of assessment.

Guidelines for providing feedback to candidates with dyslexia

As with all submissions feedback should be provided on the appropriate feedback sheet and not written directly onto the candidate's work. In most cases the candidate will not receive their work back (although there are some exceptions to this) but if comments had been written on the script or submission a candidate could access these comments by submitting a data protection request.

Written feedback should be provided considerately to avoid damaging the candidate's self esteem. People with dyslexia can sometimes perceive any criticism

of their written work as disparaging and negative feedback provided for assignments can be more distressing to these students than the actual mark awarded for the work. They are also often unable to see their mistakes. It is helpful, therefore, to focus on what the candidate has done well, and to use the 'sandwich' technique where shortcomings need to be identified (i.e. comment on a positive aspect of the work, provide constructive feedback on areas where improvement is needed, then finish on a positive note).

Comments should also give straightforward guidance in full sentences and all feedback should be provided in word processed documents. Abbreviations should be avoided. This will make it easier for the candidate to read and understand the feedback.

Whilst language errors will not normally be corrected it is important to include in the feedback that language errors have been ignored. If the work would have been awarded a conditional pass had it been submitted by a candidate who does not have dyslexia it may be appropriate to award a pass, but to specifically state that this adjustment has been provided in response to the dyslexia diagnosis.

Where a conditional pass or a fail is awarded as a result of errors which may be related to dyslexia then the feedback should explain why the dyslexia could not be taken in mitigation. For example, it might refer to the need for a psychologist to be able to write a report which clearly sets out their findings for other professionals and that this is a core skill which all those passing the qualification must demonstrate.

Further advice

Examiners and assessors who have questions about assessing a script or submission should discuss these with the Chief Examiner/Chief Assessor for the qualification concerned.