

# The Dyslexic

by Lynne Smith

## Reader



**Dyslexics can have difficulty with reading even though they might have had extra help throughout their schooling. Other dyslexics might appear to be fluent readers but have developed strategies to hide their difficulties.**

For example they will rely very heavily on context clues and their general knowledge and intelligence, making informed, but not always accurate, guesses for unfamiliar words. Another strategy might be to concentrate extremely hard when reading. This might stop them losing concentration; stop the print from blurring or 'moving'; keep their place on the page and stop themselves from 'racing ahead'. But this strategy will also lead to tiredness, headaches and even migraines when reading and will take away any enjoyment that reading might have. All this can lead to a very reluctant reader. He or she will not read for pleasure, can be embarrassed by his or her reading abilities, develop avoidance strategies with reading and can even become quite phobic where reading is concerned. This will create more barriers to overcome in order for he or she to become a confident and happy reader.

The original meaning of the word 'read' is 'interpretation'. We read numbers, maps, signals, signs, animal tracks, music, minds, body language, tea leaves, between the lines, etc. When reading, the recognition of meaning is direct and doesn't involve breaking the whole down into parts, an activity which dyslexic people find very difficult to do. When we look at a tree, we see the whole tree including the trunk, its branches and its leaves. Similarly when reading, we see the whole word and our eyes naturally take in the constituent

parts of the word, the letters. In this way, letters are seen as building blocks to the construction of visible words. Out of the 26 letters or basic shapes, we get a unique representation of every word in the English language. There are lots of activities to improve letter recognition within words. See the sections on symbol mastery of the alphabet and 'Sweep, sweep spell' in 'The Gift of Dyslexia' by Ron Davis and the star words computer game at:

[www.bbc.co.uk/schools/wordsandpictures/hfwords/starwords](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/wordsandpictures/hfwords/starwords) which helps with word shape recognition. There are so many different fonts available today that this can also increase confusion. For example just the word 'mouse' can be read in all these different fonts:

mouse  
**mouse**  
*mouse*  
**mouse**  
*mouse*  
**mouse**  
*mouse*  
**MOUSE**  
**MOUSE**  
**mouse**

It is also important that the print isn't too small and is clear. (It is very frustrating seeing a blurry picture and not being able to make out exactly what it is - like a badly taken photograph!)

Reading is a natural activity along with making sense of

complex sights, sounds, smells, tastes and textures in the environment. There is too much emphasis on reading knowledge. Fluent readers read

automatically and might not even remember learning to read. Children learn to read when the conditions are right (Remember the book, 'A Kestrel for a Knave' by Barry Hines which was also made into the film 'Kes'). These conditions include the children's relationship with books and other reading materials and their relationships with people who will help them to read. The conditions also include their own unique personalities, their self-image, mood, interest, expectations and comprehension. The British Dyslexia Association, in an article in their 2003 handbook, list the following ways of promoting purposeful reading:

- Be a good role model by letting your child see you reading newspapers, books, magazines, email etc.
- Avoid being a 'reading snob' - value any reading undertaken by your child no matter whether it is the television guide, comics, catalogues or football programmes.
- Remember that often your child may more successfully and willingly tackle books and comics associated with films and television programmes even though the reading is tricky, just because the subject matter is familiar or 'cool'.
- Don't underestimate the importance of reading to your child - we are never too old to listen to stories.

• Don't forget that story tapes are a great way to help your child to read books that he would find difficult to read independently.

I would also add to this list visiting the library and book shops with your children, including looking out for when book readings or story times will be taking place.

Dyslexic readers can have an advantage over non-dyslexic readers. They can bring to the printed page their amazing imaginations and can often see what others don't. Richard Branson in his autobiography said 'when someone sends me a proposal, rather than dwelling on detailed facts and figures, I find that my imagination grasps and expands on what I read'. Dyslexic readers will think visually first and then translate into language. When reading they will create visual images so that they can understand language. When one child read the expression 'the sea was as smooth as glass', she got very angry as her image of the sea was rough with white-topped waves breaking. This means that a dyslexic reader can find it very difficult to 'see' another person's visualisation. We've all seen a film after reading the book and been disappointed or upset at the way the characters and settings were very different to the ones we had imagined. (I have heard countless arguments as to whether the actors playing Hermoine, Ron and Harry Potter look like the

characters in the book!) Dyslexics can also suffer from poor memories. By visualising as they read, the reader will find that they remember characters, settings and plots far easier. These same techniques are also invaluable when trying to remember facts and information, especially for tests and examinations. (A way to help people develop and use this visualisation technique is outlined in the chapter on 'Picture at Punctuation' in 'The Gift of Dyslexia' by Ron Davis).

How important is reading today? It brings people together and gives people a way of communicating (both through author and reader, and through groups of readers) and of finding out what other people have to say. All the reading groups that have sprung up over recent years can see the importance of this activity. But reading is only one way of gaining knowledge, just as important is insight and reflection.