

# What is dyslexia?



Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty and/or disability that is believed to be the result of faulty wiring in the brain. Individuals who have dyslexia have difficulties reading accurately and fluently as well as spelling words accurately. To read fluently means to read quickly and with expression. These difficulties typically result from a breakdown in linking the sounds in words with their letters. Another effect of dyslexia may be difficulty in understanding what is read (reading comprehension). An individual who reads too slowly or with many mistakes cannot make sense of what is being read. It is very likely that an individual who has difficulty reading accurately, fluently, and with understanding, will not practice reading; further contributing to their reading difficulties. The reading difficulty experienced by an individual with dyslexia may be surprising given that s/he shows high intelligence and abilities in other skills.

*Adopted by the IDA Board of Dyslexia, Nov. 12, 2002. This Definition is also used by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).*

## What are some characteristics of dyslexia?

- Individuals with dyslexia experience difficulty:
  - ✓ decoding unfamiliar words
  - ✓ reading fluently despite being accurate
  - ✓ reading small words: “that, is, on, an, for”
- Individuals with dyslexia may show inaccurate and labored oral reading of passages.
- Individuals with dyslexia may have poor handwriting, which often masks poor spelling.
- It is currently believed that an individual is born with dyslexia; however, an individual who has sustained damage to the brain may demonstrate similar symptoms.
- Individuals with dyslexia comprehend what they read at a level much higher than what they can decode (sound out) because they often rely on other words in a sentence to predict the word they are having difficulty with.
- It is important to know that individuals with dyslexia have difficulty retrieving words quickly, but it does not impact their ability to think, reason, or master difficult concepts.
- Individuals with dyslexia often have average to above average intelligence and may show stronger abilities to deal with abstract ideas than non-dyslexics.

## Can dyslexia be cured?

Current and emerging research indicates some children who have undergone intensive phonemic awareness, decoding, and fluency training have been able to re-train their brains to function more like non-dyslexics. The success of these interventions in altering brain functioning of adolescents and adults with dyslexia has yet to be proven.

For most individuals, the effects of dyslexia can be accommodated for or compensated by selecting learning strategies and appropriate environments. If the individual experiences increase in stress, disruptions in sleep, as well as changes in work or learning environments, the effects of dyslexia may re-emerge.

## How is a specific learning disability in reading (dyslexia) identified?

An evaluation of dyslexia should indicate the following assessment findings:

- Poor reading skills, specifically phonological awareness, decoding, and fluency
- Poor comprehension skills
- Evidence of high learning capability despite difficulties in reading.

LDA provides diagnostic learning disability assessments that can identify dyslexia. Please call 952-922-8374 for information or to register.

## What teaching works best for children with dyslexia?

Students with learning disabilities should be provided extra, intensive, structured programs that focus on practice. Highly structured and sequential phonemic awareness, decoding, and fluency building skills are recommended for students with phonological deficits.

### Sample research-based reading strategies:

- Multi-sensory instruction that combines visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities
- Choral reading (also known as Neurological Impress Method)
- Repeated reading
- Orton-Gillingham multi-sensory instruction

### Reading materials that use these strategies:

- Great Leaps Program published by Great Leaps
- Souday System published by Winsor Corp.
- Step-by-Step published by LDA of Minnesota

### Sample research-based comprehension strategies:

- Kansas Learning Strategies
- Cognitive Strategy Instruction—SQ3R, KWL, visualization
- Concept mapping and graphic organizers

## Where can I get more information?

- LDA of Minnesota: <http://www.ldaminnesota.org> or 952-922-8374
- International Dyslexia Association: <http://www.interdys.org/index.jsp>
- National Center for Learning Disabilities: <http://www.nclد.org/>
- Shaywitz, Sally MD. (2003). *Overcoming Dyslexia*. Alfred A. Knopf: New York.

## LDA of Minnesota

For more than 36 years, **Learning Disabilities Association of Minnesota** has been serving the needs of people of all ages at risk for learning disabilities or related learning difficulties by maximizing their potential so that they may lead more productive and fulfilled lives. Services include educational assessments, one-to-one and small group tutoring, consultations, family literacy activities, school-to-work transition programming, professional training, public education, and high-quality educational products.

LDA of Minnesota is the state affiliate of LDA of America, a non-profit organization of volunteers dedicated to identifying causes, promoting prevention of learning disabilities, and enhancing the quality of life for all individuals with learning disabilities and their families by encouraging effective identification and intervention, fostering research, and protecting their rights under law.