

Modern Foreign Languages and dyslexia

For the dyslexic student learning languages, including English, is not an easy task. All the factors listed in the first column are likely to cause difficulties in learning any language. However, if teachers understand the underlying difficulties faced by the dyslexic student and are assured that success is possible, the modern languages teacher can devise appropriate strategies to support the dyslexic student. It should also be emphasised that the strategies, routines and techniques put in place for the dyslexic student will also benefit others in the class.

Information based on a table produced within *Dyslexia – Successful Inclusion in the Secondary School*, edited by Lindsay Peer and Gavin Reid, 2001. David Fulton Publishers Ltd.

Factors to take into account and characteristics of some dyslexic students which will affect learning	Effect on FL learning. Students may have difficulty with the following	Strategies which may be incorporated into classroom teaching	Additional support which may be needed
<p>Memory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working memory (the ability to hold and juggle information in short-term memory) – if overloaded, information may be lost • May be inaccurate representations in long-term memory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remembering and carrying out instructions (in English or FL) • Remembering recently-learned vocabulary • Repeating multisyllabic words • May know the answer but cannot verbalise it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present new information in small chunks • Set limited but realistic targets • Make learning multisensory – use music, actions, graphics • Allow plenty of time for recall. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support materials to be used at home or with teaching assistants.

<p>Sequencing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting things in order – alphabet, letter order in words, word order in sentences, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding words in a dictionary • Ordering days of the week, months, numerical data, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow for frequent practice using rhyme, rhythm, games, songs, etc. • Have charts, lists of vocabulary, diagrams, etc. on display in the classroom. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make use of e-learning tools such as foreign language spelling and word checkers • Encourage the use of memory strategies such as mnemonics.
<p>Speed of information processing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slower in responding to incoming information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to information or instructions given in either English or FL • Understanding and responding to a continuous flow of information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow extra time for processing by slowing down presentation • Allow student extra time to answer questions and complete work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply for extra time or other special arrangements in national tests.
<p>Visual discrimination/perception</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor ability to discriminate/differentiate between words/similar-shaped letters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiating between similar-looking words • Differentiating between accents, and therefore problems with correct punctuation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make use of picture cards for association • Use practice cards for daily revision (put the English word on one side of a small card and the subject word on the other so that the student can work through the pack from either side, saying what word is on the reverse) • Use colour highlighting for accents, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use e-learning tools such as a Language Master to aid learning of common words and words which are easily confused.

<p>Auditory discrimination/perception</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty in perceiving the difference between similar sounds • Difficulty identifying sounds • Problems identifying where one spoken word ends and a new word begins. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems knowing if a sound is correct when repeating after a teacher • Recognising the difference between two words containing similar sounds • Listening tasks • Answering oral questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide text and sound together • Exaggerate word separation at first and then as it would be spoken normally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If possible, opt for a choice of language which is phonically similar to the student's first language, e.g. Italian or Spanish may be better for an English-speaking student than French.
<p>Phonological processing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak sound/symbol correspondence • Lack of awareness of individual sounds within words. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pronunciation, even of words encountered quite frequently • Recognising familiar words and phrases • Confusion of similar-sounding words • Reading, especially reading aloud. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an early introduction to the phonic system of the new language • Make sure new material is introduced in a multisensory way – show it, listen to it, look at it, hear it, say it, write it • Only ask the student to read aloud if readily volunteers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use practice cards for reinforcement • Use tapes to accompany printed materials • Pair the student with a good reader wherever possible.

<p>Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handwriting may be slow • May be difficult to read • Letter formation may be inaccurate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copying from the board • Writing down what can be produced orally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide written notes or cloze (gapped) exercises rather than expect the student to copy from the board • Limit the amount of written work required • Allow the use of wordprocessing if writing is illegible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow the student to present work in other formats such as taped or wordprocessed • Provide photocopies of notes with tapes to be practised at home.
<p>Spelling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty remembering what a word looks like • Lack of knowledge of spelling conventions • Linked to phonological processing difficulties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spelling may follow English phonetic code ('mother tongue interference') • Words spelled in different ways in the same piece of text. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage use of personal dictionaries • Help students to find ways of remembering spellings – mnemonics, words within words, base words and suffixes, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support to reinforce spellings – target word sheets with strategies for spelling.
<p>Grammar/syntax</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor understanding of syntax and grammar. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forming accurate sentences • Problems with the rules of grammar. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach rules and build in lots of reinforcement within the lesson • Use diagrams, cards, etc. to show sequences and patterns of language. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide revision cards with rules for use as reference in class and at home.

<p>Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tasks – weak grasp of time required • Writing – tendency to ‘lose the plot’. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and allocating time to complete tasks • Planning a revision schedule • Planning writing tasks to include all information and not wander from the subject/title. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use planning calendars to work backwards from the hand-in dates to show when work should be done • Use writing scaffolds to support planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide writing scaffolds to support independent work.
<p>Directionality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tendency to confuse left/right, up/down, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following and giving instructions • Following instructions which rely on prepositions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide symbols/pictures/arrows as well as text. • Provide visual clues wherever possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pair the students with someone who can support them in this.

It is important to recognise that, although the dyslexic student may have difficulties in many areas, there will be areas of strength. Recognising and utilising these strengths is important to the student’s academic and intellectual development. These strengths are important to the self-esteem of the dyslexic student.

As with the areas of possible difficulty listed above, dyslexia is very diverse and some strengths will be found in some students and not in others.

<p>Factors to take into account and characteristics of some dyslexic students which will affect learning</p>	<p>Recognising these talents within the classroom</p>
<p>Creativity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A high degree of curiosity • Ability to concentrate intensely and for a long period of time on something they are interested in • May have excellent spatial skills – the ability to perceive and interact with three-dimensional space. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for strengths • Notice areas of interest • Provide a wide variety of activities • Talk with the students about what they like to do • Ask parents about a student’s interests and talents • Ask other teachers about the strengths they

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can think abstractly. 	<p>have noticed.</p>
<p>Problem solving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to think ‘outside the box’ • To see other ways of approaching the problem • To visualise a solution • Ability to see patterns in seemingly unrelated data. 	
<p>Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good social abilities • Enthusiasm • Willingness to take risks • Willingness to work hard • A strong sense of humour • Empathy with others • Good observational skills. 	<p>Nurturing these talents within the classroom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise them • Provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their talents within the classroom • Utilise the talents within literacy and numeracy tasks – work to the interests, e.g. football – write game reports, produce league tables, train or bus timetable to get to away matches, etc. • Provide opportunities to discover and create new interests and talents.
<p>Verbal skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be good at communicating verbally. 	