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Study Tips for Dyslexic Students

How understanding your learning style will help
you study more effectively.



by **Sascha Roos MA, HDGC**

Sascha Roos has been a tutor for The Dyslexia Association of Ireland for over fifteen years and runs a private practice specialising in study skills and exam preparation for students with dyslexia who are struggling with their studies and confidence. Find out more at dyslexiasupport.ie

Dyslexia affects approximately 8% of the population meaning that there's likely to be **at least two students per class** who have this different way of learning and processing information. In this Studyclix guide, Dyslexia expert Sascha Roos explains that the key to studying effectively for a Dyslexic student is to get an understanding of your learning style.

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What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is known as a 'disability' but in actual fact it is a learning **difference**, which affects approximately 8% of the population. Dyslexia affects more than just reading and spelling, its main challenge particularly at second level is poor short-term memory, also called working memory.

Students with dyslexia want to take in the topics they need to learn in a particular way that suits them, and they need just a little more time to process their thoughts and formulate their answers. Students with dyslexia are usually of average or above average intelligence, with specific strengths in certain areas, such as Maths, Construction, Business and yes even English. Therefore, **dyslexia should be seen as a different learning ability to be tapped into rather than a 'disability' that stops you from succeeding.**

How do you know if you have dyslexia?

Here are some of the main signs that you may have dyslexia:

- ▶ A **bad short-term memory** – poor memory is the biggest frustration and a sure sign of dyslexia.
- ▶ Do you keep forgetting books even though you use tactics to try to remember? Is your homework journal a lifeline full of sticker reminders?
- ▶ Do you find it difficult to remember quotes, definitions, or even what the exam question was yesterday?
- ▶ Has it always been impossible to learn anything by rote or parrot fashion, like your tables at primary school?
- ▶ Do you need to read a passage several times to understand it?
- ▶ Does your mind just go blank once you are sitting a test, even though you studied and prepared for hours?
- ▶ **Complete exhaustion** - a major sign is the sheer exhaustion a dyslexic student feels at the end of a school day.
- ▶ On Fridays do you collapse after a week of school, and in the mid-term break do you just want to sleep?
- ▶ Students with dyslexia have to work 4 times harder than other students to keep



on top of the reading, note-taking, organising and learning, so no wonder they are exhausted.

- ▶ Good days and bad days – Are there some days when there is just no point in even trying to learn, as your mind is so frazzled by it all? You feel completely overloaded and your difficulties with

spelling, reading and remembering get worse with the stress and time pressure you are under.

‘I just can’t pull the word out of my head.’

Ben, Leaving Cert student

So you have dyslexia – what next?

Don’t despair. Through brain-scanning techniques neuroscience has shown how the dyslexic brain is more active in the right hemisphere. This is good news for dyslexic students and explains their abilities that stand out compared to struggles in other areas.

You can tap into these inherent, creative abilities to bolster those weaker areas, primarily that bad short term memory.

‘The best thing is having different abilities from other people.’

Cian, Leaving Cert student



What can you do to help yourself and relieve the stress of forgetting stuff and feeling exhausted?

The key is to find out how you learn.

Find your individual learning style.

We all learn in slightly different ways. So, think about how you learn – what works best for you? This is the key to find your individual learning style.

Think about - what are you good at remembering?

There will be something. Maybe song lyrics, films, dance moves.

Are you an auditory (listening) learner?

Are you a visual learner?

Are you a kinaesthetic / tactile learner - do you learn by doing, touching, making?

Check out www.vark-learn.com for a quick self-test and some ideas on how you could take in information and produce it for your studies.

The best way to study is to be multi-sensory in your revision – this means using some of your senses together – listening, seeing, touching, and even smelling. This way all the pathways to the brain are being used. Emphasise your learning strengths as well as being multi-sensory to help you process and memorise topics.

Here are some multi-sensory ideas for you to check out. Have a go, try them out, be creative, see what works for you.



Using the auditory learning channel

Are you a listening learner?

Do you like to listen and take notes?

Do you prefer to have background music to help you concentrate?

Do you want to say written words out loud?

Some study techniques for auditory learners

- ▶ Read your notes out loud
- ▶ Recite from memory what you need to learn, for example quotes for English, Science definitions
- ▶ Recording notes on to your phone so you can have a quick listen anytime
- ▶ Create a rhyme, use a nursery rhyme tune to remember facts in Science and Geography.
- ▶ Mnemonics have their uses when you need to remember a sequence – take the initial letter and make a sentence, for example learning the colours of the rainbow as a young child – Richard of York Gave Battle in Vain.
- ▶ Is there someone at home who would listen to you explaining photosynthesis without quizzing you? When you explain a difficult topic to another person your own understanding becomes clearer, as you are putting it in your own words.
- ▶ You can work with music in the background if it helps you block out other distractions, and silence makes you stare into space. Just try to choose gentle, instrumental music, not death metal. Practice doing exam questions without background music as obviously there will be no music allowed when doing exams in your school.

‘Music blocks out everybody else in the house.’

Josh, Leaving Cert student



Using the visual learning channel:

Are you a visual learner?

Are you good at seeing things in your 'mind's eye'?

Do you enjoy using colour in your notes?

Are you good at remembering directions and things in 3D?

Then try some of these techniques linked to your visual sense.

- ▶ Keep seeing what you need to learn in your 'mind's eye', picture it.
- ▶ If you are good at recalling the look of a page make use of colour, highlighting, creating pictures and diagrams and bullet points in your revision notes
- ▶ Some students find mind maps confusing, just have a go. It takes time but it can be a good way to do a quick review later on, and it helps you to make connections between facts. It can particularly work for Geography and History.
- ▶ Check out youtube for further clarification of your topics in Science, Geography and History.
- ▶ Have your own whiteboard to test yourself in Maths, Languages, Science.
- ▶ Watch film adaptations of your studied texts in English
- ▶ In your study space have posters and 'post -it' notes of topics, key words, definitions and whatever you find hard to remember

'Mind-maps help me to make connections.'

Daniel, Junior Cert student



Using the kinaesthetic / tactile learning channel:

Are you a doing, making, touching learner?

Do you find it difficult to sit still for very long?

Do you like making things, taking things apart and fixing them?

Do you enjoy subjects where you are active and touching objects?

Then try some of these techniques linked to your kinaesthetic / tactile sense.

- ▶ Write your notes from memory. Do NOT write out your notes 10 times - that is a lot of time and effort without much success.
- ▶ Put your key notes and definitions on different coloured flash cards and flick through them regularly
- ▶ It is good to fidget! Do fidget with pens, elastic bands, blue tac or whatever works for you. It all helps you to concentrate. Also chewing gum or having peppermints helps concentration.
- ▶ Walking around or going for a walk will help you focus and formulate your knowledge. Walk up and down, reciting your poetry quotes.
- ▶ Location mnemonics – take a sequence of facts you need to learn and relate each one to a specific point on a regular journey you do, like to school. Then picture that journey and review those facts at each point, for example the shop on the corner, the traffic lights, that big tree and so on.
- ▶ Be creative – use different materials to help you learn and remember – like paper making origami, a sand tray, play-dough, clay or wire.
- ▶ Have ‘post-its’ of key words from your Shakespeare quotes around your room. Walk around reciting these quotes triggered from those key words.
- ▶ Doodling - research has shown that doodling helps concentration and formulating your thoughts



Move beyond your comfort zone when it comes to studying and just have a go at some of these multi-sensory techniques. The aim is to make life a little easier and less tiring for the dyslexic student.

Finally, keep reviewing topics, keep practicing exam questions and keep it varied.

And one last thing – watch ‘Kara Tointon: Don’t Call Me Stupid’, an hour long BBC4 documentary on the actor Kara Tointon exploring her own dyslexia, multi-sensory learning and much easier ways to learn her lines.

Play to your strengths,

And best of luck,

Sascha



You can find out more about Sascha at Dyslexia Support Ireland

www.dyslexiasupport.ie

email sascha.roos@dyslexiasupport.ie

