

Characteristics of Dyslexia

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Source of information: CAPED Conference presentation by Dr. Nancy Mather, "Use of the WJ IV to Diagnose Dyslexia in Postsecondary Students"

- **Definition:** It is a neurobiological disorder that affects basic reading skills, spelling and sound-symbol (letters) connections. Many other abilities are often intact and can be advanced. It is a lifelong condition, but effective interventions reduce the impact. New neurological connections can be formed with early intervention.
- **Part of brain affected:** Persons with dyslexia often have over-activation in the front part of the brain as well as the right side, and underactive in the back. As a result, they often see print as art.
- **Vision aspect:** In the normal eye, the cones are different; one eye is dominant. In dyslexia the cones in the eyes are symmetrical so they are using both sides equally; both eyes are giving feedback at the same time. This can result in one side competing with the other as to what is being seen, for example, is it a "b" or a "d"?
- **Black and white contrast issues:** Some students have topic sensitivity syndrome; black and white print can produce petit mal seizures due to the high contrast. Wearing rose or blue tinted glasses is helpful. There are also Irlen's Overlays, blue and rose overlays that can be placed over the paper to reduce contrast. See for more information: <http://irlen.com/what-is-irlen-syndrome/>

Comorbidity: Dyslexia can co-exist with Language Impairment (Reading Disorders and Specific Language Impairment are often comorbid). There is also high comorbidity between dyslexia and AD/HD (Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder).

Phonics: Dyslexia is not just a phonological problem. If the student can read nonsense words, this is a sign of good phonological awareness.

The student may typically require a long period of time while they think of more words. The student may have good vocabulary but weak recall.

Students with dyslexia tend to have weakness in the automatic recall of spelling patterns and spell words the way they sound rather than the way they look ("egzact" for "exact")

Sight Words: The word "man" normally becomes a sight word after 2-3 times of repetition, but students with dyslexia do not recognize sight words even after repeated practice.