

RESEARCH ADVISORY

Dyslexia

This research advisory provides an overview of dyslexia, including how it is defined, identified, and addressed through instruction and intervention.

How is dyslexia defined?

Dyslexia refers to a persistent difficulty specific to word reading and spelling. Research to date suggests that dyslexia may be a result of neurobiological distinctions that affect the development of phonological and orthographic processing. Dyslexia may lead to difficulties in text reading fluency, reading comprehension, and written expression, which in turn may impact learning across curricular content areas and contribute to social-emotional challenges. Research suggests that dyslexia should not be confused with language differences or language learner status. Research also indicates that dyslexia is not the result of differences in educational experiences or intellectual, sensory, attentional, behavioral, or emotional impairments that affect learning in general.

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How is dyslexia identified?

Dyslexia exists on a continuum with varying degrees of severity. However, for the purpose of providing appropriate services to students identified with dyslexia in schools, it is often simplified into a dichotomy of whether the student has dyslexia or not. Research suggests that early screening and identification followed by appropriate instruction and intervention can mitigate the severity of difficulties.

The process of identifying dyslexia typically involves a multi-step approach that includes screening and diagnostic assessments as well as consultation with teachers, families, and specialists. Screening assessments are conducted to identify individuals who may be at risk of developing reading difficulties, including dyslexia, and are administered by trained classroom teachers, reading specialists, or other educators. These assessments are generally brief and focus on key reading skills, such as word reading and spelling, and their precursors, such as phonological and orthographic processing. The availability of screening tools may vary depending on the educational context, but what remains critical is the use of reliable and valid assessments.

Screening assessments do not provide a diagnosis of dyslexia but rather serve as a means to identify those who may require further diagnostic evaluation. Diagnostic assessments, administered by trained specialists, such as school psychologists, delve deeper into various aspects of reading, writing, cognitive, and linguistic skills to provide a more accurate diagnosis of dyslexia. Information on family history of dyslexia, educational experience, and response to instruction is also considered in the identification process.

During the identification process for reading difficulties and dyslexia, particular attention should be given to individuals' linguistic backgrounds to avoid over- or under-identification, especially concerning students whose home language is different from the language of instruction in school. These students may experience difficulties learning to read as part of navigating more than one language or dialect, but this should be differentiated from dyslexia. To account for these diversities, and to ensure fair and equitable identification practices, culturally responsive and linguistically sensitive assessments should be employed.

By adopting a comprehensive and evidence-based approach, educational professionals can better support students with dyslexia.

How can dyslexia be addressed?

Effective, evidence-based instruction plays a crucial role in supporting students with dyslexia. Research suggests that phonics instruction that explicitly and systematically teaches alphabet letters and other orthographic symbols (graphemes) and their correspondences with speech sounds (e.g., phonemes) and meaning units (e.g., morphemes) has positive effects for students who struggle with word reading and spelling. Research suggests that students with dyslexia often need intensive intervention that includes small-group instruction with more opportunities for practice and feedback than what is provided by the core curriculum. Progress monitoring provides information on whether students with dyslexia are responsive to the instruction and whether the instruction needs to be adjusted to meet students' needs.

Phonics is only one component of evidence-based instruction. Equally vital in comprehensive evidence-based reading instruction are oral language, comprehension, and other skills

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and knowledge that are beyond the scope of this document. Furthermore, students with dyslexia may face social-emotional challenges related to reading difficulties, such as anxiety or negative attitudes toward reading. Research suggests that effective instruction that supports reading skills may help address social-emotional difficulties. Therefore, cultivating a positive learning environment and fostering self-efficacy, along with targeted intensive word reading and spelling interventions, can positively impact their social-emotional development.

Accommodations are also crucial to support students with dyslexia in the classroom and should be tailored to individual needs and implemented consistently to ensure equitable access to education. Such accommodations may include providing additional time for tasks, offering modified assignments, using assistive technology, or providing access to audio materials. Assistive technology, such as text-to-speech or speech-to-text software, can be beneficial for students with dyslexia. It helps them access written materials and supports continued development of their language and cognitive skills necessary for reading and writing development. Using assistive technology in combination with intensive instruction targeting word reading and spelling can enhance students' overall progress.

By implementing these suggestions, educators can meet the specific needs of students with dyslexia, empowering them to transcend reading and writing challenges, remain motivated as learners, and thrive academically.

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About the Advisory

This research advisory was prepared by the International Literacy Association (ILA) Dyslexia Task Force on behalf of the organization. The group was assembled in early 2023 and in March of that year began work by crafting a definition of the term for [ILA's Literacy Glossary](#). That definition became the starting point for the advisory, which was drafted and revised throughout the summer of 2023.

The ILA members who served on the Dyslexia Task Force are as follows:

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About the International Literacy Association

The International Literacy Association (ILA) is a professional membership organization of literacy educators, researchers, and experts spanning 128 countries. For more than 65 years, ILA has set the standard for how literacy is defined, taught, and evaluated, connecting research and practice to improve the quality of literacy learning across the globe. Through its *Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals*, ILA provides an evidence-based benchmark for the development and evaluation of literacy professional preparation programs. ILA collaborates with partners across the world to develop, gather, and disseminate high-quality resources, which include three peer-reviewed and edited journals—*The Reading Teacher*, *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, and *Reading Research Quarterly*. Learn more at literacyworldwide.org.

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