

A guide for lecturers who support student nurses and midwives with dyslexia

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Introduction

This guide is developed from an internal publication to assist lecturers within the School of Nursing and Midwifery University of Sheffield (1996). The original text had references to local support and policies. It is very similar in style and content to the booklet *a guide for student nurses and midwives with dyslexia*. In attempting to make this work more widely available I have removed the local references and replaced them with general guidelines on supporting nursing and midwifery students with dyslexia.

I hope you find this guide useful. If you have any comments about developing it further please contact me by post or email (details at the end of the booklet).

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Wright DJ 1999 **A guide for student nurses and midwives with dyslexia** Sheffield, School of Nursing and Midwifery, University of Sheffield.

(When referencing this work you should also take into account the house style of the organisation/journal it is being referenced in).

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a set of symptoms related to language and perceptual difficulties which are often observable early in children who are of normal and often above normal intelligence (Miles & Gilroy 1986). They display difficulties in learning to read, write and spell and show a confusion of some letters (such as b and d) throughout life. Some people show uncertainty over sorting out left and right, sorting out sequences (such as the alphabet or the months of the year) and many find difficulty in learning arithmetic (particularly tables) and show idiosyncratic methods for dealing with numbers. When some people with dyslexia speak they may put words in the wrong order or/and put syllables in the wrong place (for example Par Carck for Car Park).

Campbell (1989) indicates that people with dyslexia have a number of common characteristics;

high conceptual abilities but low abstract abilities

high visual ability but low verbal ability

difficulty with a second language, either verbal or mathematical; and

difficulties with large or small motor coordination

These characteristics are just that, generalisations about the population as a whole, and may or may not be accompanied by the best known symptoms;

mirror reading or writing

left-right confusion; and

an inability to learn even simple number sequences such as telephone numbers.

The most important thing to recognise is that dyslexia is .. complex and refers to a variety of different handicaps that share common denominators ... and is unique in every case.

(Campbell 1989 pg. 58-9)

How can I tell if a student may be dyslexic?

The following indications are based on a literature review and give examples of what the lecturer may recognise with a student who may be dyslexic.

In the classroom

ability to answer questions orally, but difficulty in writing the answer

difficulty in taking notes

appears to have *thought blocks*

concentration spans are short

the student is easily distracted from tasks
the student appears not to be paying attention
the lecturer may note that the student appears to have a high anxiety level and low esteem of themselves
the student may appear restless
spoken expression may be jumbled, not concise
forgets instructions quickly

In written work and assignments

spelling the same word several different ways
letters or numbers the wrong way round (eg. 73 for 37 and b for d)
written work is untidy and disorganised
verbs and tenses may be misused
handwriting is illegible
assignment deadlines may be difficult to meet
achievement may be irregular
unable to read own written work
difficulty in using standard dictionaries
crucial/key points are missing
questions may be misread
written work does not express what the student knows
unable to proof read own work
difficulty in interpreting the work of others and integrating it in own work

On clinical placements

disparity between classroom performance and clinical performance
disorganised and difficulty meeting time targets
difficulty following directions
problems carrying out lengthy procedures
confusion with directions (such as *up, down, left* and *right*)
care plans are completed late/deadlines are missed
errors in charting and writing of patient (and other) records
difficulty articulating instructions given to the student by others (eg. nursing staff)

Where these types of symptoms cause a student problems it is important they are formally tested. As a lecturer, it may help to use the *Revised Adult Dyslexia Checklist* (pg 11 & 12 of this handbook), to make an informal judgment as to whether or not the student requires formal assessment. There are other assessment tools that can be used: see further reading.

Testing for dyslexia

A student who needs additional help with particular skills and who has not had a recent assessment should be advised to have an assessment without delay. Seek advice from your local Disability Officer or the Student Union.

The student has been formally tested for dyslexia and has a copy of the assessment

Most students will already know they are dyslexic, and may be able to provide a Psychologists assessment of their needs. If the assessment is recent (usually within the year before they start the course) then you should discuss the students particular needs. If the assessment is not recent (more than one year old) it may be beneficial to ask the student to be reassessed to ensure that their needs have not changed in light of changing educational programmes and institution.

The student should be informed of the Universitys Policies relating to examinations and assessments which

are often found on the University Web pages or in the printed Calendar. You can then direct the student to appropriate support services or advisor who can assist the student.

Support for students with dyslexia?

Some universities can offer nursing students specialist support and educational programmes to aid their academic development. In some areas students may need to contact their local HE College who often have special classes for adults with dyslexia. There are also organisations who may be able to offer help and advice:

British Dyslexia Association
98 London Road
Reading
Berkshire, RG1 5AU
Student Helpline 0173 466 8271 (Open 10.00-12.30 & 14.00-16.45 weekdays)
<http://www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk/>

Dyslexia Institute
133 Gresham Road
Stains
Middlesex, TW18 2AJ
<http://www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk/>

For general information about students with disabilities you might want to contact:

Skill - the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities
336 Brixton Road
London, SW9 7AA
Tel & Minicom: 0171 978 9890 (1.30pm - 4.30pm Monday to Friday)
Fax: 0171 274 7840
<http://www.skill.org.uk>

Some Student Unions have a support group for students with dyslexia. Often meeting during the University semesters and provides a way of meeting other people with similar experiences who can also offer informal support through a peer group network. Contact your local student Union office to find out if they have such a group. If they have you can direct the student to this facility.

Helping the student through examinations and assessments

Most universities are aware of the needs of students with disabilities in examinations and try to support them through the examination and assessment procedures by using procedures that allow a fair assessment of the students ability. This should be further explained in the local policy statement and procedures relating to students with disabilities. You should be able to get access to these through the local web site or the university Calendar.

How can I help the student with dyslexia?

Hulley & Pennington (1994a) have suggested the following ways to help a student with dyslexia;

- 1 Give explicit instructions.
- 2 Teach specific strategies for organising work.
- 3 Assume nothing!
- 4 Be sympathetic.
- 5 Give feedback on mistakes - teach as you mark.
- 6 Avoid putting the student in the position of public failure;
eg. asking him/her to read aloud.
- 7 Offer photocopied notes where possible.
- 8 Let your colleagues know that a student may request copies of notes - let the student take

responsibility for asking for notes.

- 9 Suggest the use of a tape recorder. (The student should ask permission of lecturers before using a tape recorder.)
- 10 Present material in short chunks.
- 11 Help the student to understand the writing process.
- 12 Make time for discussion.

Helping the student on placements

The guide for students outlines what the student can do to help themselves on placements and that information is repeated here. The student can (depending on personal needs);

- let the placement provider and mentor know of the students particular problems, in that way they will be prepared to assist in the students development and they will be aware that they need to;
- Provide clear instructions and expectations
- Double check for mistakes, if the student and mentor agree that this is appropriate

The student may want to use all or some of the following ideas;

- Note priorities for the shift
- Repeat instructions to avoid any misunderstanding
- Write instructions in sequences
- Jot notes on scrap paper and having them checked before committing them to charts
- Discuss notes with other students and staff
- Keep a pocket book for notes
- Practice skills, before meeting patients, under observation to ensure safe practice

References

- Campbell J 1989 **Dyslexia and the older college student** *Nursing Health Care* 6(10) 559-61.
Miles T & Gilroy D 1986 **Dyslexia at college** Methuen London.
Pennington S & Hulley J 1994 **Supporting dyslexic students in the classroom** Loxley College Sheffield (Now Sheffield College).

Health care professionals with dyslexia - further reading

If you know of any other literature specifically about health care professionals with specific learning difficulties please contact me (details at the end of the booklet).

For general discussions about dyslexia there is a wide range of reading. Contact your local library or one of the associations for people with dyslexia.

- Anonymous 1994 **Dyslexia spells trouble** *Nursing Standard* 8(15) 52.
Beeker B 1985 **Helping students succeed despite learning disability** *Nursing Health Care* 6(10) 559-61.
Cobley R & Parry R 1997 **Education. Spell check... dyslexia** *Nursing Times* Apr 16-22; 93(16): 38-40.
Guyer B 1987 **Dyslexic doctors** [letter] *New England Journal of Medicine* 1987 Jul 16; 317(3): 171.
Green G 1994 **No limits. Dyslexia spells trouble** [letter] *Nursing Standard* Jan 5-11; 8(15): 52.
Guyer BP 1988 **Dyslexic doctors: a resource in need of discovery** *Southern Medical Journal* Sep; 81(9): 1151-4.
Lane M & Hayes C 1996 **A student discovers she is dyslexic** *Imprint* (Nov/Dec) 43(5) pg.56.
Nganasurian W 1994 **Spelling it out** *Nursing Standard* 8(35) 42-3.
NHSE 1998 **Finacial help for health care students** NHSE, Department of Health, Wetherby (available online from <http://www>).
Sheehan M & Nganasurian W 1994 **Education: spelling it out. The student's tale. The teacher's tale** *Nursing Standard* May 25-31; 8(35): 42-3.
Shellenbarger T 1993 **Helping the dyslexic nursing student** *Nurse Educator* Nov-Dec; 18(6): 10-3.
Shuler S 1990 **Nursing students with learning disabilities: Guidelines for fostering success** *Nursing Forum* 25(2) 15-8.
Tumminia P & Weinfield A 1983 **Teaching the learning-disabled student** *Nurse Educator* 8 (winter) 12-4.
Watson PG 1995 **Nursing students with disabilities: a survey of baccalaureate nursing programs** *Journal of Professional Nursing* May-Jun; 11(3): 147-53.
Webster G 1994 **A student's struggle: The problems of dyslexia** *Nursing* (New Zealand) Apr; 2(3): 18-9 1172-1979.

The Adult Dyslexia Checklist

The following page is for an informal assessment of a student that you may suspect of being dyslexic. It is not a diagnostic tool in its own right. Its purpose is to help guide you and your student towards seeking appropriate help.

Notes/Instructions

- 1 The student completes the questions in your presence so that you can observe the response style and rate. A slow rate of completion may be an indicator and suggests that the student requires further, professional assessment..

Some adults with dyslexia may give a small number of **Yes** responses because over the years they have developed compensatory mechanisms. One of the principle distinguishing marks of these people was extreme hesitation in responding to the questionnaire, as they wanted to specify precise circumstances where a Yes response might be justified. Hence watching individuals fill out the questionnaire is in itself an indicator of dyslexia.

- 2 A **Yes** rate of more than eight questions suggests that the student requires further, professional assessment.
- 3 The following questions are a strong indicator of dyslexia, 1, 4, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19 & 20. A high number of **Yess** in these questions may be of greater significance than a high score as a whole and suggests that the student requires further, professional assessment.
- 4 Your knowledge of the student should be used with this guide, as caution is needed in interpreting results for any individual.
- 5 More information is available from the article;

Vinegrad M 1994 **A revised adult dyslexia checklist** *Educare* March 48 pp.21-3.

Checklist - complete the following questionnaire in the presence of your lecturer, you will be given the time you require to complete it at your own pace.

- | | YES | NO |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Do you find difficulty in telling left from right? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 Is map reading or finding your way to a strange place confusing? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 Do you dislike reading aloud? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 Do you take longer than you should to read a page of a book? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 Do you find it difficult to remember the sense of what you have read? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6 Do you dislike reading books? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7 Is your spelling poor? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8 Is your writing difficult to read? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9 Do you get confused if you have to speak in public? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10 Do you find it difficult to take messages on the telephone and pass them on correctly? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11 When you have to say a long word, do you sometimes find it difficult to get all the sounds in the right order? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12 Do you find it more difficult to do sums in your head without using your fingers or paper? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13 When using the telephone, do you get the numbers mixed up when you dial? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14 Do you find it difficult to say the months of the year forwards in a fluent manner? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15 Do you find it very difficult to say the months of the year backwards? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16 Do you mix up dates and times and miss appointments? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17 When writing cheques do you frequently find yourself making mistakes? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 18 Do you find forms difficult and confusing? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19 Do you mix up bus numbers like 95 and 59? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 20 When you were at school, did you find it hard to learn your multiplication tables? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

(Vinegrad M 1994 **A revised adult dyslexia checklist** *Educare* March 48 pp.23; Reproduced with the kind permission of *Educare*)