

A guide for student nurses and midwives with dyslexia

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Introduction

This guide is developed from an internal publication to assist students within the School of Nursing and Midwifery University of Sheffield (1996). The original text had references to local support and policies. In attempting to make this work more widely available I have removed the local references and replaced them with general guidelines relating to support.

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?

The term dyslexia is often used to describe a range of specific learning difficulties, the most commonly known being difficulties with reading and writing. There may be other difficulties not immediately associated with reading or writing, such as perceptual problems, difficulties with organisational skills, hand-eye control (affecting legibility of writing).

How can I tell if I might be dyslexic?

You may realise that you have particular difficulties with reading, writing, expressing yourself on paper, or orally. If you have difficulty reading maps, recalling directions (to places or to carry out tasks). Numbers may confuse you, and you could never, or found it difficult to learn your tables. Remember that some people who are not dyslexic may have some of these difficulties. You can try one of the checklists to assess yourself to see if you need further diagnosis (there is one at the end of this booklet). If you find that you have a larger number of yes ticks than no ticks you should talk to your personal tutor about having a formal assessment. Your personal tutor may want to ask you some further questions to make sure you are directed to the appropriate specialist/s.

Testing for dyslexia

If you have not been formally tested for dyslexia you will need to be assessed by a Psychologist. Some universities will pay for this and others will not - seek advice from your Disability Officer or Student Union.

I have already been tested for dyslexia and I have a copy of the formal assessment

Most universities will accept a recent assessment of your needs, however you may need to consider retesting if your learning needs have changed. Take your assessment to your personal tutor and discuss your particular needs. You may also need to seek the advice and support of your local Disability Officer to make sure that you obtain the support and resources that are available to you. For example some universities will offer extended library loans to students with dyslexia, but this has

to be arranged through 'student services'. If the assessment is not recent (more than one year old) you may find it useful to be re-assessed to ensure that your needs have not changed.

How can I improve my academic performance as an adult with dyslexia?

Some universities offer specialist support for students with dyslexia. This support may be extra classes to aid the development of those skills you need to develop such as spelling, writing, putting thoughts into a logical order for academic work. Other universities are not able to support nursing or midwifery students this way and you may need to obtain your own support and you can contact one or more of the following to see if they can help you (you may have to pay for this support):

Your local Higher Education College - check your local public library or telephone directory for contacts.

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.

Using the library

A number of academic libraries (University libraries) may offer extended and special borrowing privileges to students with dyslexia. Ask the librarian or disability officer for information. Learn to use the library and its resources, for example there may be video and tape recordings you can access which will help with multisensory learning.

Using the internet and local computer resources

Check with your tutor, or browse the University web pages, or other on-line facilities, there may be resources available to aid your learning, such as drug calculation programmes/tests and examples of biological function. The web may also have resources that suit your learning style - make sure that you know how to use search engines.

Other issues about disability

You may have other concerns about disability and you can often find the right kind of support within your university, for example:

Most universities will have a department or individual within schools/departments that can provide guidance and support.

- Check your university web pages to find out who your contact is.
- Contact your local Student Union office.
- Ask your personal tutor who you can go to for advice and support.
- Ask other students how they got their support.

Financial support for nursing and midwifery students

As a nursing student on a non-means tested bursary (most diploma and advanced diploma courses) you are not entitled to the equivalent of the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA).

If you are on a means tested bursary (most degree students) you are entitled to apply for the equivalent of DSA. See your local Disability Officer or Student Union office for guidance.

See the booklet *Financial Help for Health Care Students* (NHSE 1998).

You should be able to get more information about financial matters and help from your Student Union office.

What are the current policies that relate to examinations and assessments that I should be aware of?

Examinations and assessments measure knowledge and ability of students. Some people with dyslexia find examinations and assessments difficult. Universities are aware of many of these problems and try to support students through the examination and assessment procedures by ensuring that examinations fairly measure the student's ability.

Examinations and assessments

Universities have guidelines for the examination and assessment of students with disabilities, including dyslexia. As a Student Nurse or Student Midwife you should also have access to these facilities. Depending on the Psychologist's report and local examination rules, students with dyslexia can have extra time in examination, take in a dictionary, use a lap-top, have a reader to make sure that the student can access the questions and/or take the examination in a different way to the one usually used.

Check regulations, (often published on the university web site). For more personal advice contact your local Disability Officer, Student Union office or tutor.

What can I do to help myself?

Several people have researched how students with dyslexia study and they all have indicated that a multi-sensory (using sight, sound, movement) approach to learning is good for the student. Hulley & Pennington (1994) provide a simple guide for students which may help. See the next page.

What can I do that will help me on placements?

Most of the advice on the previous pages will also apply to placements. However people who have written about student nurses with dyslexia offer the following advice.

You may find it helpful to let the placement provider and your mentor know of your particular problems, in that way they will be prepared to assist in your development and be aware that they need to;

- Provide clear instructions and expectations
- Double check for mistakes, if you agree that this is appropriate

You 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

These ideas may also be used by other students who are not dyslexic, so you may not be doing anything different to other students in clinical situations.

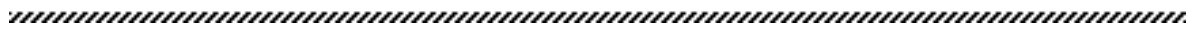
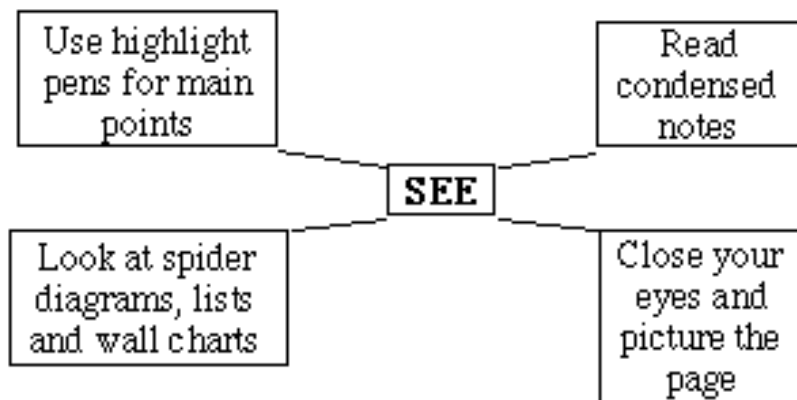
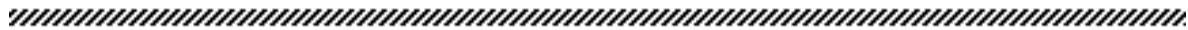
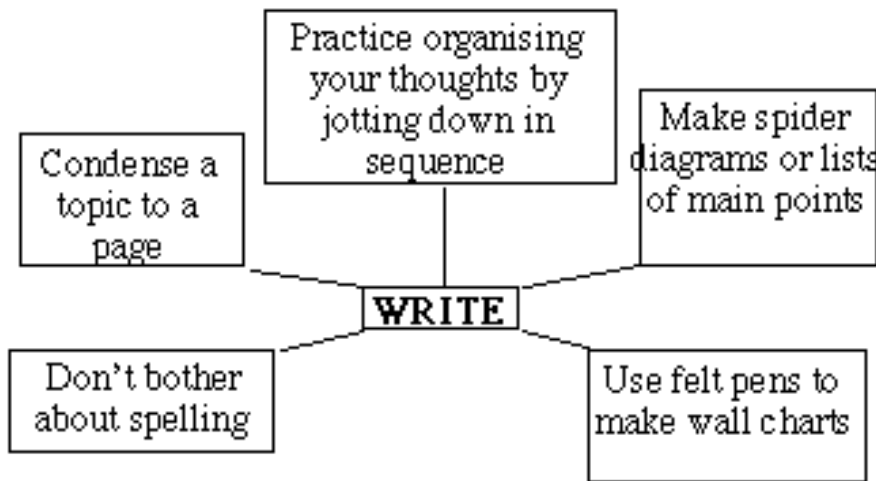
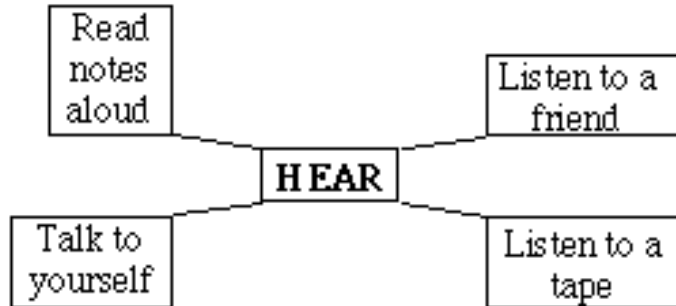
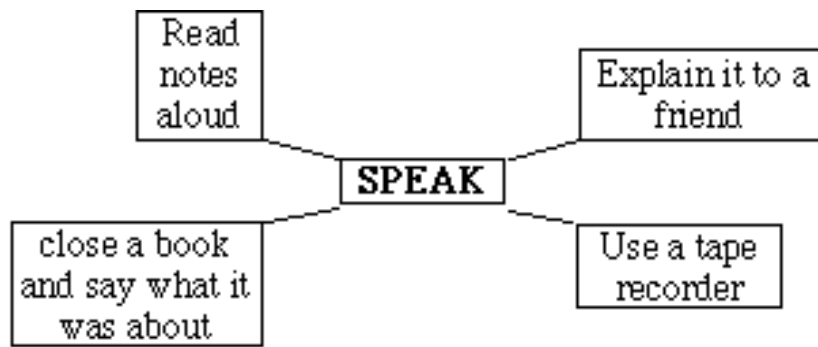
How will my personal tutor be able to help?

Your personal tutor will be able to help you in the same way that they help all their students, they can give advice and support relating to your academic work, talk through problems and help you provide evidence of your practice for registration purposes.

Your personal tutor will not be an expert in the area of dyslexia and will not be able to provide any special support that you require. They will be able to advise you on the contacts and the procedure for obtaining extra time for examinations and assignments. They may also be able to talk to other lecturers about your needs in the classroom if you find you are having difficulty doing it yourself.

Conclusion

As you can see there is support within the University structure, and local organisations, for students with dyslexia. You should be aware that many people with dyslexia do well academically and there is evidence within literature that people with dyslexia can, and do, practice safely as nurses. You must be prepared to work a little harder than some students and willing to take advantage of the support services available.



Pennington S & Hulley J (1994) Help for dyslexic students Loxley College Sheffield p.1(reproduced with the kind permission of Sheffield College)

Testing yourself to see if help is needed

Answer the following questions as honestly as you can.

	YES	NO
Did you have difficulty learning to read?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you still feel that you have difficulty reading?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you remember what you have read?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you avoid reading for pleasure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you find it hard to learn from books?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is your handwriting untidy and difficult to read?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you sometimes write letters the wrong way round?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is your spelling poor?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you sometimes put letters in the wrong order?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have difficulty putting down your ideas in writing?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have problems when you fill in forms?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
you write a cheque?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
you write a letter?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you find it hard to remember or follow instructions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
car registration numbers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
times of trains or buses?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you find it difficult to remember messages?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you make mistakes when you say long words?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have difficulty reciting your times tables?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
the months of the year?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you find it hard to look things up in the dictionary?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
telephone directory?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Radio or TV listings?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you find it difficult to find your way in a strange place?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you find it hard to follow left/right instructions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you find it difficult to tell the time on a clock face?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you find it hard to concentrate for long periods?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have ticked more **Yes** than **No** boxes, or you have had some difficulty deciding to answer **Yes** or **No** to some of the questions then you should seek the advice of your personal tutor.

(From: Matty J 1992 Dyslexic people in further and higher education and in training and employment British Dyslexia Association with Independent Media Support Reading (pp 4) (Reproduced with kind permission of the British Dyslexia Association))

WWW - Dyslexia sites

Dyslexia the gift

A forum for networking and sharing information about creative thinking, dyslexia, and other learning differences.

A place to find information, materials, and training in the use of methods for overcoming academic difficulties.

<http://www.dyslexia.com:80/>

Neurophysiological Basis of Dyslexia

Dyslexia Unit, University Laboratory of Physiology, Oxford University, Oxford OX1 3PT, UK.

Also has links to other sites

<http://www.physiol.ox.ac.uk/mcdp/DyslexiaUnit.html>

SNE Web Resources - Dyslexia

This site contains links to other sites related to dyslexia.

<http://schoolnet2.carleton.ca/sne/dyssites.html>

Dyslexia Related Software - Diagnostic - HyperStudy

Outlines software designed to help dyslexic students.

<http://www.hensa.ac.uk/dyslexia/software/support/f>

The Dyslexia Archive - Specific Learning Difficulties

Dyslexia Archive gives information about higher education and support for students, with advice and links to other sites.

<http://www.hensa.ac.uk/dyslexia.html>

The British Dyslexia Association.

The National Organisation for Specific Learning Difficulties

<http://www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk/>

George's Links

Links compiled as a result of doing automated searches and exploring the www.

<http://www.iscm.ulst.ac.uk/~george/subjects/dyslexia.html>

Orton Dyslexia Society

Links to other web sites

<http://www.charm.net/~jpmiller/dyslexiapage.html>

Life Histories of Higher Education Students who are Dyslexic

David Pollak's DPhil project. - University of Sussex Institute of Education

http://www.iscm.ulst.ac.uk/~george/subjects/dyslexia_pollak.html

There is no guarantee that any of the above information is accurate or correct, or that the sites can be contacted. Please try the sites and use their links to other sites to find what you are specifically looking for.

Health care professionals with dyslexia - reading list

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.
- Campbell J 1989 **Dyslexia and the older college student** *Nursing Health Care* 6(10) 559-61.
- Campbell J 1989 **Dyslexia and the older college student** *Equity & Excellence* 24(3) 58-62.
- 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.

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