



AN ERASMUS PROJECT

GOOD PRACTICES AND GUIDELINES FOR DYSLEXIA AT WORK



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INTRODUCTION

European citizens with learning difficulties such as dyslexia represent between 3 and 12% of the population with sometimes significant differences between countries (European Dyslexia Association - EDA - <https://eda-info.eu/what-is-dyslexia>).

- These profiles have long been considered in relation to educational challenges.
- However, the reality is that this Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) persists throughout a person's life and can lead to obstacles and difficulties in adulthood.
- Nevertheless, dyslexia in adults, and even more so in the workforce, remains little recognized or analysed. On a European and international level, there is a lack of shared procedures, where workers with SpLD do not benefit from any specific protection. Those working in the job placement sector often demonstrate a complete lack of familiarity with the profiles of people with SpLD.

Dyslexia in the professional place is, therefore, an important public health issue!

We need more information, in this perspective, the European Erasmus+ project + Dyslexia@work.EU (an ERASMUS Project) brings together associations and researchers from five countries (France, Italy, Malta, Ireland, the United Kingdom) with the main objective to fill these gaps, and lack of knowledge surrounding dyslexia in the workplace and legal context.

- Thus, several associations and researchers from five countries (Italy (responsible), Ireland, France, Malta, UK) have joined the project to meet the objectives of the project:
 - **AID Associazione Italiana Dislessia (responsible);**
 - **European Dyslexia Association;**
 - **Malta Dyslexia Association;**
 - **Fédération Française des Dys-;**
 - **Universita Degli Studi Dell'Insubria;**
 - **Dyslexia Association of Ireland;**
 - **British Dyslexia Association.**

This brochure is based on the results and findings of this project.



DYSLEXIA

Dyslexia is a **learning difference** that can cause difficulties with learning and work. It affects approximately **1 in 10**. It occurs on a spectrum with some people mildly affected and others more severely. With the right understanding, accommodations and support people with dyslexia **can achieve success** in education, the workplace and in wider society.

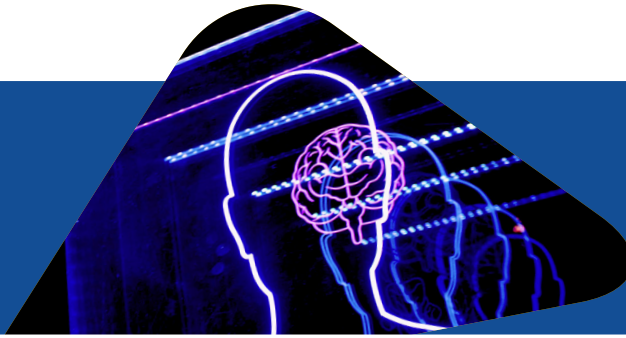
Everyone with dyslexia is different but there is a commonality of **difficulties with reading, spelling and writing** and related **cognitive/processing difficulties**. Dyslexia is not a general difficulty with learning, it impacts specific skill areas. The impact of dyslexia can change according to the environment (i.e. what a dyslexic person is being asked to do and under what circumstances).

While people with dyslexia **may develop strengths** due to their dyslexia such as determination, problem solving and resilience, dyslexia does not automatically bring specific gifts or talents. We respect the individual variation that all human beings display, including those with dyslexia.

Language, Recognition and Rights

Some people prefer the wording 'a person with dyslexia', while others prefer the term 'a dyslexic person'. When working with individuals it is important **to use the terminology that the person is most comfortable with**. When communicating with a wider audience the terms may be used interchangeably to reflect the variation of preference that exists.

Dyslexia is a **recognised disability under law in most European countries** (such as under equalities, accessibility and disability legislation). However, many dyslexic people do not consider themselves 'disabled' and this view should be respected.



IMPACT OF DYSLEXIA

Dyslexia is characterised by cognitive difficulties in **phonological processing**, **working memory**, and **speed of retrieval of information from long term memory**.

Phonological processing

Refers to one's ability to identify and manipulate sounds in **oral language**. This can affect reading fluency, automaticity, speed, comprehension and pronunciation.

Working memory

The ability to hold and manipulate information in the mind over short periods of time.

It can look like incomplete recall, failure to follow instructions, task abandonment.

Speed of retrieval of information from long term memory

This can impact on anything that requires retrieval or remembering something instantly and bringing it back.

Examples

- Inability to name common objects quickly.
- Can be challenging to memorise things that seem every day and easy such as the days of the week, the months of the year in order.
- Sequencing difficulties.
- Therefore... the best gift you can give a dyslexic is time.

Common co-occurring challenges

- Time management
- Organisational skills
- Multi-tasking
- Fatigue
- Attention span

The impact of dyslexia on one's self-esteem and mental health can vary, **studies show a lack or late identification can negatively affect self-esteem and belief**, alongside a failure to understand dyslexia and introduce accommodations.

- Risk of being very anxious
- Risk of low self-esteem
- Imposter syndrome¹
- Fear of failure
- Strong feeling of insecurity



Examples of some specific difficulties in the workplace

Writing a report. What can help?

- Template / example
- Feedback (1st draft)
- Realistic timeframes and extra time if needed
- Working with a colleague to proofread work
- Assistive Technology

Reading a text in front of an audience. What can help?

- Avoiding this type of task
- Send all relevant documentation in advance of meetings
- Ensure all materials are accessible

¹ The persistent inability to believe that one's success is deserved or has been legitimately achieved as a result of one's own efforts or skills.

Example of text without and with assistive technology for proofing (e.g. Grammarly)

First Draft of an Email

Dear Hanah
Can u please confirm if u recieve
my last mesage?
Thanks
John

Second Draft Using Software to Proof (e.g. Grammarly)

Deah Hannah
Can you please confirm if you
received my last message?
Thanks
John

Example of an e-mail written without and with voice dictation

Email written without voice dictation

Bonjour monsieur X,
Je me permet de vous contactez
suite a votre demande de
reservation de vehicule. Tout sera
pris en charge suite a la restitution
du vehicule.
Merci de nous avoir fait confiance.
En vous souhaitant une agreable
soiree.

Cordialment,
Mr. T.

Email written with voice dictation

Bonjour Monsieur X,
Je me permets de vous contacter
suite à votre demande réservation
de véhicules. Tout sera pris en
charge suite a la restitution du
véhicule.
Merci de nous avoir fait confiance.
En vous souhaitant une agréable
soirée.

Cordialement,
Mr. T.



Truth or Myth ?

In adulthood, dyslexia no longer has an impact?

Wrong! Difficulties in adulthood can persist despite identification and interventions. Accommodations can ease challenges but will not eradicate all difficulties associated with having a dyslexic profile.



THE ADDED VALUE OF EMPLOYEES WITH DYSLEXIA

Companies that currently have employees with a dyslexic profile note that the **abilities, talents and opportunities** a dyslexic person brings to an organization are of **immense value**. In particular, they **highlight their work ethic** and their **ability to adapt**, which is linked to one's good knowledge of their own profile, how dyslexia impacts them. Supports that can be introduced ease challenges while playing to one's strengths.

“Neurodivergent people experience, interact with, and interpret the world in unique ways and can be a valuable asset to a company”

Peter Brabazon, CEO of Specialisterne Ireland

Several scientific studies highlight the talents of dyslexic people, which may include:

- Lateral thinking skills
- Diverse thinking skills
- Visual thinking skills
- Spatial thinking skills
- Creative abilities
- Problem-solving skills
- Strong leadership skills
- Ability to process holistically
- Strong oral skills
- Strong interpersonal and intrapersonal skills
- Empathic
- Strong narrative reasoning
- Strong long term memory
- Good pattern recognition
- Good narrative reasoning
- Resourceful
- Hard-working, determined and persistent

Remember, dyslexia is a spectrum and each person is affected differently with their own mix of strengths and challenges.



Truth or Myth ?

People with dyslexia have a lower IQ than the norm.

Wrong! There is no correlation between intelligence and dyslexia!

Testimony

“Dyslexic people are extremely creative, problem solvers, focused on solutions. Because they often worked so hard to achieve and developed coping strategies they can be an asset to any organization especially during the challenging times we face at the moment.”

(From a UK company interview of the project dyslexia@work)

“Our company believes in valuing diversity in the workplace because differences represent a wealth and a resource to be valued. People are heterogeneous talents. Maximizing the potential of their diversity is a business imperative, critical to our competitive success. Before we discovered dyslexia through the disclosure of one of our employees, probably the common sentiment was that it was a rare developmental disability that doesn't affect adults and the working world. The surprise was discovering that people with SpLD often have talents and abilities that are crucial to professional success. Our goal is to learn about the problem and revise our processes so that they are accessible and customizable to the needs of each individual employee.”

(From an Italian company interview of the project dyslexia@work)



SOME KEYS TO SUCCESS/ FACILITATE A RECRUITMENT

The recruitment phase is important for the future integration of employees with dyslexia. The following good practices will **ensure an inclusive and accessible recruitment process**:

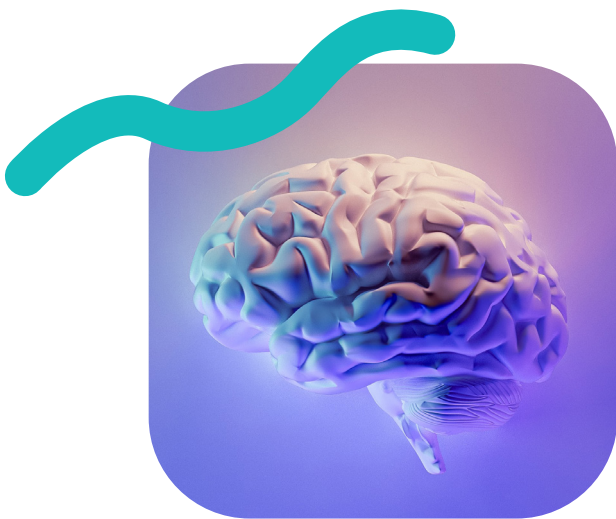
- Have recruitment info available and accessible in alternative formats, such as video
- Move away from generic skill sets and focus on priority skillsets for the role
- Contacting the candidate before the interview to discuss any reasonable accommodations that may be needed
- Create a safe environment in the interview e.g. letting the individual know that an instant response is not expected, questions can be repeated
- If a candidate discloses during the interview process, be respectful and listen to their needs
- Allowing additional time for the candidate to adjust before actually starting the interview
- If dyslexia is disclosed, talk about it openly without taboo

Adapting recruitment tests so that the person can be evaluated fairly. Consider if the use of this test is appropriate, would **the best reasonable accommodation** be to waive the test for the dyslexic candidate, however, if it is imperative, you should consider the following:

- Adapt a universal design mindset for the workplace
- additional time
- adapted form
- access to a computer
- use of assistive technology

Example of good practice during specific recruitment

→ Recently, an Italian company that launched a project for the inclusion of people with SLD in the world of work (SLD Progress For Work Project - see Operational Manual) asked its main provider of personnel selection tests to include audio recording and the possibility to set additional time on all tests used in assessments. This strategy allows the company to be inclusive and accessible regardless of disclosure and, most importantly, not lose valuable people.



Truth or Myth ?

Dyslexia is part of a spectrum of learning differences and neurodiversity, such as: dysorthographia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia, dysphasia, and dyscalculia.

Right! There are several types of specific learning disorders: dysorthographia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia, dysphasia, dyscalculia. In addition, there is a high degree of comorbidity: almost one dyslexic person in two has a second condition.

Testimony

“Raffaella applied for an internship with our company which, she confessed, was her professional dream. The standard assessment also includes timed written tests involving calculations. Today we know that with a calculator she would certainly have been able to set up and solve the proposed problems, but she didn’t have the courage to ask for one. She was afraid to reveal her difficulty, so she left that part of the test blank and was not hired. A few years later, with a degree in human resource management, a second chance for a clerical role came up and Raffaella decided to give it a second try. And there it was again, a timed written test with math problems. This time she told herself that she had nothing to lose and decided to reveal her learning difficulty to our recruiter who very tactfully told her that it was not a problem and that they would not use written tests to evaluate her profile. Raffaella finally felt understood and was able to demonstrate her talent. The interview went very well and a few days later she received confirmation of her hiring.”

(From an Italian company interview of the project dyslexia@work)



You
belong

DAILY ADJUSTMENTS

SOME KEYS FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION

Unfortunately, not everyone understands dyslexia and how it can impact upon one's daily life. Therefore as a society, we all have a responsibility **to be aware and understand** how dyslexia presents and impacts, to ensure the societal barriers to accessibility and participation are removed, the shame and stigmatisation that has incorrectly been attached to being dyslexic is a thing of the past. This will allow people to reach their full potential.

Some ideas for a successful inclusion


- Positive workplace culture
- Be mindful of the power of words
- Sensitize colleagues to dyslexia (plan awareness-raising activities, intervention of specialists and researchers, testimonies, etc.)
- Anticipating the needs of the dyslexic person (for instance, providing a quiet work space; more time to complete a specific task, etc.)
- Dyslexia training to ensure all members of the organisation understand dyslexia
- Speak to the individual - they know their dyslexia best, their strengths and challenges and what supports can help
- Dyslexic champions, especially within senior management, positive role models who openly discuss their dyslexia: they can be more empowering than training because they can be positive models
- Having a road-map of best practices, supporting agencies and signpost for resources



Testimony

“Many people still don’t know what dyslexia is. There should be a big awareness session on dyslexia in the workplace, on the difficulties of access to employment and the suffering.”

(From a French company interview of the project dyslexia@work)



Truth or Myth ?

If people with dyslexia make spelling mistakes, it is because they do not proofread their writing.

Wrong! Scientific research shows that people with dyslexia reread as well as non-dyslexic people, but their rereading is less efficient because they have a deficit of error recognition.



ADAPTATION OF THE WORKSTATION

- Dyslexic employees may need an adapted workstation. There is no single ideal solution, and only customized accommodations can provide the best tools
- These solutions can sometimes be very simple to implement and inexpensive. It is also important to discuss openly with the dyslexic person what works best for them

Some ideas for a successful and adapted workstation

- Proposing a customized and adapted workstation (size of the screen, computerized speech recognition tool, computerized spelling correction tool, office partitioning etc.)
- Facilitating work processes (Ritualizing meetings or debriefings, making the objectives of these meetings explicit, clearly identifying the team members, etc.)
- Agreeing explicitly on timelines and work plans (avoid urgent requests or unscheduled meetings)
- Providing the right work environment (preferring a quiet work environment, avoiding open plan space, etc.)



Examples of assistive technology

- Spelling assistance software, such as dictation or word prediction software
- Spelling checkers (grammarly, texthelp)
- Voice recognition software (the computer writes out what you dictate)
- Reading software (voice synthesizer to read a text)

Others examples

- Setting up a buddy system for written tasks (a designated colleague who can assist in writing and proofreading)
- Setting up coaching
- Setting up support and supervision structures
- Engagement with professionals (ergonomist, etc.)
- Regularly reviewing with the employee whether the supports put in place are sufficient

Testimony

(About spelling errors)

“Tolerance is needed, because the mastery of spelling says nothing about a person’s skills and qualities.”

(From a French company interview of the project dyslexia@work)



ORGANISATION OF WORK

It is necessary to **provide support and flexibility** in the organization of the tasks to be performed.

Some ideas:

- Encouraging cognitive breaks during the workday
- Flexibility in working hours
- Assistive technology
- Working as a team

How to handle and facilitate a meeting?

Anticipating and preparing the meetings

- Provide ALL relevant and necessary documents to the employee with dyslexia BEFORE the meeting (objectives, agenda, participants, his/her role during the meeting)
- If there are new concepts or new vocabulary during the meeting, send them so that one can become familiar with them before the meeting
- If the employee with dyslexia has to actively participate, they must have time to prepare well in advance in order to feel secure

During the meeting

- Provide multiple means of representation for all communications
- Beware of multiple simultaneous tasks, especially when one of them involves writing
- Allow the use of assistive technology

After the meeting

- Asking the person with dyslexia for feedback on how the meeting went (any difficulties? Which improvements can be made? any needs?)
- Send minutes of the meeting, highlighting the important points and any action points one needs to complete

Testimony

“Not a barrier, with the right support and match skills to play to people’s strengths. We take care to do this within our team.”

(From an UK company interview of the project dyslexia@work)

“Move away from old school essential skills on the job spec, make it more relevant to the role and the working environment. More universal approach needed. Dyslexic champions would be very powerful, mentorship program would be very beneficial.”

(From an Irish company interview of the project dyslexia@work)



Truth or Myth ?

There is a method to treat dyslexia.

Wrong! Dyslexia cannot be cured! There is no miracle method. However, strategies specific to each dyslexic person can be put in place to support any challenges.



IF THE GOVERNMENT COULD CHANGE ONE THING

What would facilitate the hiring of people with a specific learning difference, such as dyslexia?

- Specific training on dyslexia that raises awareness
- Improving legislation by possibly including dyslexia as part of a protected category, yet as a distinct category from disability
- Solutions could be summarized with more information on dyslexia in order to implement a standardised process
- Development of a positive inclusive policy in each company

Testimony

“Doesn't have to cost a great deal of money to support or employ colleagues with dyslexia, Access to work is a good government scheme to enable changes to happen.”

(From a UK company interview of the project dyslexia@work)

Testimony

“Dyslexia is not known in companies. None of our employees have ever disclosed their dyslexia. I discovered it when my niece was diagnosed a few years ago. We need training and incentives from the government to be able to start internships and pathways to inclusion with the support of specialists.”

(From an Italian company interview of the project dyslexia@work)

Testimony

“Take into account in the law on disability all people identified as dyslexic people and not only the most severe dyslexia in order to allow companies to benefit from aid to accommodate for the disability. The State must facilitate hiring with aid and do more communication about dyslexia.”

(Extract from an interview with a French company in the context of the dyslexia@work project)

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www.dyslexiaprojects.eu

project partners:

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