



## Dyslexia in the workplace

There are so many positives to having dyslexic people join your workplace. It can mean that there are requirements that you as an employer need to put in place to make sure that your workplace is as supportive as possible.

If you are not sure where to start, or what dyslexia is then this helpful resource will get you started.

### What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a common learning difficulty that the NHS estimates can affect 1 in 10 people in the UK. The condition can cause problems with spelling, reading, and writing but also organisational skills. It is usually diagnosed during childhood, but some people are diagnosed later in adulthood.

It comes under neurodiversity alongside Dyscalculia, Dyspraxia, Tourette's Syndrome, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Autism. Someone may be dyslexic but also have another neurodivergent condition completely separately.

### How can dyslexia affect people?

Dyslexia can affect people differently, but several traits are commonly associated with the condition. This can include reading or writing very slowly, poor and inconsistent spelling, confusing the order of letters or words, confusing letters that look similar or writing them the wrong way round such as B or D.

The condition is more than just reading or writing though as dyslexic people may also find understanding verbal information difficult or struggle to carry out a sequence of directions. They may also find planning or organisation difficult and have difficulties with their short-term memory.

## Different types of dyslexia

There are lots of different types of dyslexia which may affect the access needs that a person may have.

There are four common types:

### ***Auditory dyslexia***

This refers to the difficulty in processing the sounds of phonemes and being unable to connect them to their written form. A phoneme is a distinct unit of sound that distinguishes one word from another for example P, B, D and T in the English language.

This may mean that someone with auditory dyslexia often misunderstands verbal instruction, can't hear if there is background noise and may struggle to pronounce L, R or Ths. They may also scramble multi-syllable words and have difficulty following instructions.

### ***Visual***

The visual type may mean that text appears blurry or goes in and out of focus. Text may appear double or alternate between single and double. Someone with this type of dyslexia may struggle with keeping their place in the text. They may also experience headaches or eye strain associated with reading.

### ***Double-deficit dyslexia***

Difficulty with auditory processes and naming speeds. It is also known as comorbid dyslexia where someone has two different types of reading difficulties. This might be authority and surface dyslexia where someone

may not find phonetics difficult but may struggle with words that appear different to how they are pronounced such as yacht or island.

### ***Rapid Naming Deficit***

People with this form cannot name colours, numbers or letters quickly. It can impact a person's reading skills or cause a person to say the wrong word or create a placeholder if they can't think of the missed word.

## Are dyslexia dysgraphia and dyscalculia the same thing?

No - each one is an individual condition, but a person can have more than one. Dyslexia and dysgraphia are easy to confuse because they share symptoms and often occur together. All three conditions are not linked to autism, but a person may also have the condition separately.

### ***Dysgraphia***

Dysgraphia involves difficulty with the act of writing. This can range from difficulties with physically writing words and also with organising and writing down thoughts.

### ***Dyscalculia***

A difficulty in understanding numbers that can cause problems with understanding mathematics. A person may struggle with counting and use their fingers, be unable to recognise and use + or - signs and not be able to remember mathematical facts such as  $2 + 2 = 4$ .

## What are the benefits of having dyslexic team members?

There are so many positives to hiring dyslexic people as they are great at ideas and are often innovative thinkers who can come up with creative problem-solving ideas. Similarly, this creative thinking makes them great at troubleshooting, helping to spot the issues ahead of time.

They can be good with practical tasks and great at communication, making them a popular team member. Not only that but they are often determined and persistent in making sure the job gets done.

## Why might people feel uncomfortable disclosing dyslexia?

Disclosing a disability can be really difficult for people due to previous experiences in the workplace or in their personal lives. Many people may feel that it will be used as a reason not to hire or promote them when this isn't the case.

This may have had a longer-term effect on their self-esteem and confidence levels. It may also be quite an isolating or lonely experience for them. They may feel that it is not relevant to their ability to do their job and may not require any adjustments to be made.

## Diagnosing dyslexia

Not everyone is diagnosed with dyslexia at a young age. Some adults may have missed a diagnosis in their younger years but suspect that they are dyslexic and want to get a formal diagnosis. They can apply to do this as an individual or through an employer. Prices can vary depending on different factors. Some employers may offer to pay for a diagnostic assessment, but smaller organisations may not be able to offer to fully fund the assessment but may instead offer to contribute to the costs.

You do not need a formal diagnosis to have reasonable adjustments made for you in the workplace.

## The Equality Act 2010

The act legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. There are nine protected characteristics under this act including disability, gender, sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity and age.

The act defines disability as 'a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.' Most dyslexic people will meet this criteria and therefore you cannot directly or indirectly discriminate against them. Someone with dyslexia may find elements of their job more difficult than others. Therefore, employers must make reasonable adjustments for them. Here are some of the ways that you can make the workplace, the hiring process, and communications more accessible.

## Adjustments in the recruitment process

CV writing and applying for jobs can be a lengthy process and quite distressing for neurodivergent people. Simplifying your job applications opens the door for many people who may be uncomfortable with tasks that require complicated timed grammar or reading tests. There may be things you can suggest such as alternative tasks, extra time or removing time limits that you can offer somebody.

Although allowing extra time during job interviews can be good for some people with dyslexia, the best thing to do would be to ask someone what they may need. It may be that they need to use their own laptop or have access to additional software.

### **Interested in making job interviews as accessible as possible?**

Download our free resource on accessible job interviews [here](#) to learn more.

## How can you support someone with Dyslexia in the workplace?

There are lots of things that you can do to make work life easier for dyslexic team members. The best thing to do is encourage communication and ask what you can do to support them. Again, asking and working with someone to discover their needs is better than assuming.

## ***Reasonable adjustments***

A reasonable adjustment is a change/s that an employer can make to reduce a disadvantage related to a person's disability. Employers are required to make reasonable adjustments in the workplace. Some examples which may work for dyslexic members of staff include using coloured paper and colourful presentations with bright backgrounds, images and text that can make information easier to read or understand, giving verbal as well as written instructions, highlighting important points in documents or supplying screen-reading software.

## ***Extra time***

If you are setting tasks why not consider allowing extra time for people to complete them if needed? This may or may not suit someone so remember to ask rather than assume that it will help.

## ***Utilise apps***

There are lots of apps on the market that are designed to help people with spelling and grammar. Otter and Grammarly are just two examples that can help make someone's workday easier but there are lots of different options. A reasonable adjustment may mean allowing someone to run the free versions on their laptops or consider paying the subscription costs for the upgraded version.

It's not just speech-to-text apps but the reverse can be found too! There are now apps and platforms that can convert text into speech so you can hear what you have written. Examples include: ClaroRead, Speak feature (MS Word, Outlook, Powerpoint) and reading pens among many others.

## ***Voice note***

WhatsApp groups and Slack have become a huge part of office culture in recent years, especially now home working has increased after lockdown. While we might think nothing of firing off a text, why not consider allowing

someone to leave voice notes where possible? Or someone may communicate better through video.

### ***Proofreading checks***

It's always good to have a fresh pair of eyes on any text or images that are due to be sent out. Human errors happen! However, it could help to put someone at ease knowing that someone sees their work before it goes out. It's important that whoever is proofreading is respectful and understanding.

### ***Strong organisation***

Encouraging a workplace to have strong organisational skills is great not just for dyslexic people as everyone benefits from it. This could be keeping accessible diaries online that showcase meetings with notifications that alert you when one is due, colour coding tasks or using organisational software such as Trello or Asana. It's best to have a conversation with your team members and ask if this software works for them. Don't assume that someone with autism will find the software accessible because someone with dyslexia does - each neurodivergent condition is different. Similarly, team members with different types of dyslexia may find different software works better for them.

### ***Note-taking***

Is there someone who could assist by taking notes in a meeting? Or minutes? This could be helpful for neurodivergent team members with ADHD or Autism too. You could also consider allowing someone to record a meeting either with a dictaphone, phone or apps such as Otter.

### ***Coloured paper***

If helpful, provide all hard copy resources on coloured paper but do find out which colour helps the person to read best. Studies suggest that coloured paper helps to alleviate visual stress and improve low reading rate, accuracy, and comprehension.

### ***Provide quiet space and clear instruction***

Communicate instructions slowly and clearly and minimise distractions, and check understanding. Reduce distractions for focused tasks (sit away from doors, noisy machinery etc).

### ***Educating management and team members***

You don't need to 'out' someone on the team as being dyslexic, but you can run training sessions aimed at educating your staff on what neurodiversity is and how to support each other. Ask your employee how/if they would like to disclose their dyslexia. They may choose not to which is fine but there may be people such as HR departments or direct line managers who need to know. This can be done quietly, respectfully, and privately.

### **Thinking of running disability awareness training?**

Visit our [website](#) to find out more information on the different types we provide.

## Accessible communication - internal and external!

We may not think twice about sending an email with details of a task on it to our team members or a PDF with instructions. However, it may not be accessible to everyone on the team, making it quite stressful for those who can't access the information.

Here is how to make written communications more accessible:

### ***Accessible fonts***

It's tempting to just use the same font we like but it might not always be accessible to everyone. Selecting a sans serif font like Arial, Calibri, Verdana or Tahoma which are easier to read and less crowded than other typefaces can make a difference. Use a font size of 12 to 14 points.



### ***Break up the text***

Use larger headings to break up a large amount of text. This will make it easy for neurodivergent people to read and make the text more visually appealing. It's suggested that headings should be at least 20% larger than the body of text. One point or piece of information per paragraph is usually enough.

### ***Highlighting and italics***

Avoid using formatting like underlines and italics, as these can make words look closer together which makes them appear more cramped. If you need to highlight a part of a word or heading, then use bold formatting instead.

### ***Check your colours***

The colour contrast you select in online and offline communications can make a difference too. Some people with dyslexia are sensitive to a high contrast (pure black on bright white) This can make text appear distorted and produce a glare that is hard to read. You could use dark-coloured text on a light background - not black but dark grey with an off-white background for example.

### ***Pattern-free***

Patterns or photos in the background can make it harder for people to read or focus on the text.

### ***Consider your spacing***

Keep text left aligned. Avoid large bad practices like doubled spaces after full stops, justified text or irregular spacing, which can all combine to make reading more difficult. Avoid columns where possible and don't use upper case letters.

### ***Highlight the key points***

If there is a lot of text, consider highlighting the main parts that let a person know exactly what they need to know or the exact instruction you want them to follow.

### ***Keep it simple***

Don't overcomplicate language but keep it simple, easy to read and understand. Swap longer words for shorter words where possible. Avoid using jargon and keep sentences short.

### ***Bullet points***

If there is a lot of text, could it be summarised at the top or bottom of a page in bullet points? Think about the key information that a person could need and that is what belongs in the bullet points.

### ***Text alternatives***

Depending on your information, could you present it as diagrams or pie charts or lay it out visually instead of just text? Consider imagery, visual symbols or even switching to audio or visual formats.

### ***Relevant headings***

Keep any headings that you use relevant to the text below to help with understanding.

### ***Auditing***

It is possible to audit your communications. This means an expert will go over your communication platforms to make sure they are accessible for disabled, Deaf or neurodivergent people. This is especially important with websites as these can form the first impression someone has of your business - be it a potential new employee or a customer!

## Thinking about disability Awareness Training?

We have different options available depending on your requirements. This includes face-to-face training or virtual sessions as well as lunch and learn mini sessions. For more information, [visit our website](#).