

Strategies for Helping the Dyslexic Learner

Improving Decoding

- Word Sorting Activities – Word sorting provides students with opportunities to sort words many different ways, such as onset and rime, vowel patterns, syllable patterns, etc. This helps them look closely at words for similarities/differences and strengthen overall decoding skills.
- Explicitly teach prefixes, suffixes, bases, roots, and Latin and Greek roots and affixes.
- Create word walls or individual word study notebooks so that students can enter examples of “chunks”, letter patterns, affixes, etc that help them remember specific patterns in words that will help when decoding, especially when decoding multisyllabic words.

Developing Vocabulary

- Provide direct instruction in word learning strategies to enable students to figure out meanings of unknown words on their own. Examples include context clues, knowledge of word parts, using a dictionary, etc.
- Use preview activities to explore new vocabulary and allow students to incorporate visual representations, when possible. Examples include using color-coded index cards or self-generated vocabulary illustrations.
- Teach dictionary skills!

Monitoring Comprehension

- Use a strategy such as “Chunk, Read, Retell” or “Chunk, Read, Sum” (summarize) so that students have the opportunity to stop and think about what they are reading in smaller sections.
- Use graphic organizers such as a framed outline (fill in missing information), a storyboard (students write or draw sequence of events), timelines, Venn diagrams, flow charts, or any type of semantic map. These help students follow the events of the text and also can be used when recalling information.
- Teach selective highlighting.
- Teach visualization!

Boosting Spelling

- Encourage students to write words in non-conventional ways that may make it more “visual” for them and will help them to remember. Examples include tracing, using colored markers on individual white boards, using gel pens on colored paper, using iPads, etc.
- Use color to differentiate word parts. Examples include using a lighter color to write the silent letters, writing syllables in different colors, etc.
- Teach students *how* to study new words. Examples include say it, stretch it, split it up into sounds/syllables, look for patterns, find the meaning, then write. Another multistep model is say the word, write the word while saying it, trace the word while saying it aloud, try to write the word from memory, check for accuracy.
- Include manipulative activities, when possible
- Encourage students to play games that involve spelling, such as Hangman, Scrabble, Boggle, etc.

Helping With Organization

- Require the use of binders/notebooks with colored dividers
- Require the use of a planning calendar and monitor student use
- Provide time and assistance for cleaning out and reorganizing desks, notebooks, materials and papers
- Provide a “study Buddy” so that students can help one another with organization and time management
- Present assignments, due dates, page numbers, etc. both orally and visually, whenever possible

Supporting Memory

- Teach students to use first-letter mnemonics to help them remember and recall important information, steps in a process, etc.
- Create associations using vivid imagery, color and action. The more you exaggerate, the more memorable it becomes!
- To help long-term memory, do something interactive or reflective with the materials: discuss it, paraphrase it, write notes about it, make a story map about it, etc.
- Keep written instructions and reminders simple; use sticky notes when applicable.

Printed Presentations

- Don't mix and match too many fonts; Ariel, Verdana and Comic Sans work best.
- When possible, use 12-14 point font; 24 point for PowerPoint presentations.
- Use boxes or color to emphasize important text.
- Have a clear, consistent layout with headings and subheadings.
- Use clear spacing between paragraphs and use bullet points if information presented gets lengthy.
- Clear, short sentences are helpful, as is a glossary.
- Keep graphics and text separate.
- Use clear, visible text on diagrams, tables or charts.
- On PowerPoint presentations, avoid the overuse of animation or text that moves, dissolves, etc.

Verbal Presentations

- Explain clearly in simple, straightforward language.
- Present information in small units or "chunks", if possible.
- Summarize and repeat key information.
- Give students time to record important information.
- Relate new information to previous knowledge to ensure that concepts are clear.
- Know that writing things down during lectures is extremely difficult for dyslexic students, so provide key ideas, a template for note taking, or other resources to help break down the information into manageable "chunks."

RESOURCES

The International Dyslexia Association <http://interdys.org/>

Overcoming Dyslexia by Sally Shaywitz. Random House Publishing, 2003.

The Dyslexia Checklist by Sandra Reif and Judith Stern. Jossey-Bass Publishing, 2010.