

Working with Dyspraxia - a Hidden Asset



The creation of this material by the Dyspraxia Foundation has been financed by the Skills Funding Agency through the Adult Community Learning Fund managed by NIACE.

Copyright in this material is vested in the Crown but it is made freely available for others to use under the terms of the Open Government Licence.

Full details are available at

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/>

Working with Dyspraxia - a Hidden Asset

Dyspraxia Foundation Guide for Employers

This project has been funded by the Skills Funding Agency



**Adult and
Community
Learning
Fund**



Foreword

The Dyspraxia Foundation was delighted to receive a grant from the Adult and Community Learning Fund in October 2011 for a project (Dyspraxia Dynamo) to increase the employability and self-advocacy skills of adults with dyspraxia and to raise awareness amongst employers of the challenges faced by people with dyspraxia in the workplace.

A series of 5 highly successful workshops, delivered in partnership with Richard Todd from Key 4 Learning were held across England in winter 2011/12 and attended by over 75 adults with dyspraxia. As well as learning about their condition and strategies for success in the workplace, participants also benefited hugely from meeting others with similar experiences as these comments illustrate:

"I felt empowered attending the workshop and I was amazed at how many other people had suffered in the workplace due to their disability" – Shabana, Manchester

"I learnt a lot about strategies for my work, but mostly about my condition in general" – Craig, London

"Allowed me to meet other people with dyspraxia and feel normal. Allowed me to feel that having dyspraxia is not all about struggling and can be very positive" – Polly, Reading

"Hearing the difficulties of others made me realise I wasn't the only person struggling. It has helped me make a future plan of attack to join the workforce with confidence" – Matthew, Worcester

"I feel very confident about trying these new skills. I also feel I have the skills to reach my goals – they no longer feel so far away" – Anon, Newcastle

This innovative Employers Guide, developed to support the workshops, was produced by professionals with extensive experience of supporting adults with neurodiverse conditions in the workplace and incorporates feedback from workshop participants and those who attended the Dyspraxia Dynamo Stakeholder event in March 2012. We hope that it will bring better understanding of dyspraxia to people involved in employment, so that the talents of people with dyspraxia are nurtured and developed to the benefit of the individual and the organisation.

I would like to thank all those involved with the Dyspraxia Dynamo project including our mentors at the Adult and Community Learning Fund, the Dyspraxia Foundation team in Hitchin, Trustees and volunteers who supported the workshops and provided so much support behind the scenes, and especially to Key 4 Learning for delivering the workshops and producing the supporting materials.

Sally Payne

Chair, Dyspraxia Foundation

Dyspraxia Foundation Guide for Employers

Contents

Introduction to Dyspraxia.....	2
How dyspraxia may affect people in the workplace.	5
Dyspraxia Checklist.....	6
HR Issues	8
Disability legislation.....	8
Recruitment	9
Declaration of Disability	9
Etiquette.	11
Routes to help	12
Access to Work (ATW).....	12
Work Choice	13
Disabled Students Allowance	14
Charitable Organisations.....	14
Statutory Organisations	15
Specialist Organisations	15
Differences Explained.....	16
Co-ordination and Motor Difficulties.	16
Cognitive Style Differences.	19
Difficulties With Communication and Social Skills.	21
Concentration Difficulties.	23
Memory Difficulties.	26
Organisation Difficulties.	29
Reading Difficulties.	33
Self Esteem.....	36
Stress.	39
Time Management Difficulties.	42
Visual Differences.	45
Writing Difficulties.	48

Introduction to Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia is generally recognised to be an impairment or immaturity of the organisation of movement. It is a brain based condition and may have associated problems with language, perception and thought. It is estimated to affect between 2% and 5% of the adult population.

Dyspraxia is one of a variety of cognitive processing differences, sometimes called specific learning differences that also include:

- Dyslexia
- Attention Differences (ADD and ADHD)
- Conditions on the Autistic Spectrum (Asperger's Syndrome and A.S.D)
- Others that are identified less often

The characteristics of all these conditions are independent of intelligence, race, culture or socio-economic background. There is most often an overlap of characteristics between the labels and people may wear more than one.

This overlap has led to the idea of considering Dyspraxia as part of the neurodiversity of the human race.

“Everyone is different – that is the joy of humanity”.

When differences hinder understanding and development, or isolate an individual, it can be useful to cluster sets of difference together under a label. The label provides a point of reference and a short way to describe the profile. The label “Dyspraxia” doesn't make two people the same; each will “wear” their difference in a unique way.

“Neurodiversity is like a Marks and Spencer jumper, everyone wears it differently and it fits some better than others”.

Jo Todd.

It is important to remember not all the people with dyspraxia fit a description exactly 'everyone is different'. Adults with dyspraxia routinely bring determination and innovation to the workplace. Many have demonstrated particular strengths in creative arts, music, foreign languages and original thinking.

The aim of this document is to bring better understanding of dyspraxia to people involved in employment, so that the talents of people with dyspraxia are nurtured and helped to develop to the benefit of the individual and the business.

What is dyspraxia?

The word dyspraxia comes from the Greek words 'dys' – meaning difficulty and 'praxis' – meaning acting or doing. It includes what to do and how to do it. Other names include Development Co-ordination Disorder (DCD), Perceptuo-Motor Dysfunction and Motor Learning Difficulties. In the past people with dyspraxia may have been diagnosed with Clumsy Child Syndrome.

A checklist of symptoms for dyspraxia may lead many people to ask 'doesn't everyone



have some of these characteristics?' Many of them are things that we all suffer from at times, but with dyspraxia, the symptoms tend to be the rule rather than the exception, and can be more extreme. However, because someone has dyspraxia it doesn't mean they have all of the symptoms.

By definition people with dyspraxia have a specific area of difficulty, therefore they also have strengths and these areas provide the productive opportunity to exploit the hidden asset. In contrast, if people are limited by their lowest level of performance the business loses.

Rather than promoting a profile of sameness, profiles of unique or exceptional skills can be utilised and developed across the organisation giving a market edge. The aim must be to bridge the areas of difficulty and release the potential.

Persistence, determination and extremely hard working are all characteristics associated with dyspraxia – which makes people with this condition valuable employees.

Many have good auditory skills such as an ability to learn languages, music, produce creative writing or poetry; traits shown by Daniel Radcliffe and Florence Welch, both of whom have dyspraxia.



Several organisations now deliberately look to people with Neurodiverse profiles to be part of their teams to take advantage of different thinking. Innovation and different ways of approaching tasks often come easily to those who don't fit the average box and organisations are often desperate to develop their unique selling point.

Effects of dyspraxia.

Difficulties with dyspraxia may include:

Movement and coordination: This covers gross motor movement i.e. large movements, such as walking and balance and fine motor skills i.e. small movements, such as writing and using a sticky tape dispenser.

Speech and Language: A person with dyspraxia may talk slowly and ponderously, repeat him or herself or have difficulty with pronunciation.

Visual Problems: Visual difficulties may result in problems with tracking text when reading or looking quickly and effectively at information. There may also be difficulties with focus and coordination of the eyes.

Perceptual Difficulties: i.e. interpretation of information by the different senses.

People with dyspraxia may find organisation, memory, sequencing, concentration and time management to be areas that require additional effort.

Sensory sensitivity: Another feature of dyspraxia may be a heightened sensitivity to sound, light, touch or certain fabrics. People may find it particularly difficult to cope in a noisy environment or to work in brightly lit areas. In preference they may find it easier to work in subdued lighting.

Each individual will be affected by a particular set of difficulties, meaning that the adjustments needed are likely to be different for each. The table on the opposite page gives pointers to parts of this guide that provide suggestions to help.



How dyspraxia may affect people in the workplace

Please refer to the section ("Differences Explained") for an explanation of the differences and strategies that can help.

Symptoms.	Differences Explained.
Tendency to trip, fall over or bump into things.	Organisation Difficulties Co-ordination and motor difficulties.
Difficulty with office equipment particularly that requiring operation with two hands.	Co-ordination and motor difficulties.
Poor handwriting that may be difficult for others to read.	Writing difficulties. Organisational difficulties.
Poor sense of time.	Memory difficulties. Organisational difficulties. Time management difficulties.
Difficulty finding places.	Memory difficulties. Co-ordination and motor difficulties.
Difficulty planning and organising thoughts.	Organisational difficulties.
Problems with communication with colleagues and in meetings.	Auditory differences. Co-ordination and motor difficulties. Difficulties with communication and social skills. Self esteem
Lack of confidence, embarrassment, low self-esteem and frustration, fear of promotion particularly if this would involve more interaction with others.	Difficulties with communication and social skills. Organisation difficulties. Reading difficulties. Time management difficulties. Writing difficulties. Difficulties with subject specific language. Self esteem

Could this be your colleague?

Do they sometimes seem awkward or bump into things?

Do they mishear or ignore instructions?

Do they seem to find it hard to get organised in space and in their thoughts?

They might just have dyspraxia.

The checklist on the next page is designed to identify whether someone may have dyspraxia.

Dyspraxia Checklist

A substantial number of adults have never been formally diagnosed with dyspraxia despite having demonstrated behaviours that caused comment throughout their lives. Having a recognised condition provides a framework to explore the difficulties, understand the differences and focus on the talents. This checklist is only going to help towards that. It is not a screening test or an assessment. The aim behind the checklist is to give a guide as to whether a further assessment would be useful.

The result is based on the individual's answers and also what difficulties may have been observed. It has not been tested on the general statistical normal (or a non dyspraxic) population. The result will indicate either probable, possible or unlikely tendencies of dyspraxia.

The individual should pick YES or NO to each question. Don't miss any questions out. If there is doubt, pick which ever feels like the truer answer. Don't think too hard, the first answer is often the best indicator,

		YES.	NO.
1.	Do you bump into things?		
2.	Do you trip over often?		
3.	Would you describe yourself as clumsy?		
4.	Do you often spill or drop things?		
5.	Do you find it hard to judge heights and distance?		
6.	Is your writing difficult to read?		
7.	Do you find it difficult telling left from right?		
8.	Do you find it difficult to follow directions or find your way in a strange place?		
9.	Are practical tasks hard for you e.g. riding a bike, DIY?		
10.	Do you find sports difficult especially team and ball games?		
11.	Do you find a keyboard and/or a mouse hard to use?		
12.	Does it take you longer to work things out than others?		
13.	Do you find it hard to do sums in your head?		
14.	Do people sometimes find it hard to understand you?		
15.	Do you find it hard to remember and follow instructions?		
16.	Are you generally muddled in the way you operate?		
17.	Do you find it hard to pronounce some words?		
18.	Do words on a page seem to 'jump about'?		
19.	Are you extra sensitive to noise, touch, light and taste		
20.	Do you find it hard to concentrate for a period of time?		
21.	Do you find it hard to make sense of information when listening or reading?		
22.	Do you keep forgetting and losing things?		
23.	Do you miss appointments?		
24.	Is personal organisation hard for you?		

Acknowledgement to the late Mary Colley who helped greatly in the production of this checklist.

If the individual answers yes to 12 or more questions, it may be worthwhile to seek further advice, as that is a higher than average set of indicators. The next step is to decide if a formal assessment is appropriate. It can be the route to practical help for day-to-day difficulties and perhaps disability benefits. For many a formal diagnosis comes as a great relief as difficulties are explained.

- For those in employment the first step could be to contact the human resources department, they may refer on to occupational health or a disability specialist. Many large companies do fund diagnostic assessments.
- If the individual is still studying in college or at university (even part time) it is worthwhile contacting the specialist learning support department. They may have routes to diagnosis or could look at making adjustments to the learning provision. Such adjustments would be directed at educational needs only, but the diagnosis would have wider applicability.
- If there are no resources available through those routes the next step could be to contact your doctor for onward referral to an occupational therapist or psychologist. Your doctor may not know much about dyspraxia so take the checklist.
- Finally if the individual is prepared to self fund an assessment there are a small number of specialist psychologists and occupational therapists who do private diagnoses.
- It should be noted that it is not necessary for individuals to have a formal diagnosis to apply for help from Access to Work.



HR Issues

People with dyspraxia bring their whole profile of abilities and talents to a business. They will have experienced difficulties in reaching their current level, and have overcome adversity. Almost without exception, this gives them a level of tenacity and drive to achieve that is a great advantage to the employer.

Many of the actions that the HR team can provide to minimise the negative aspects of dyspraxia are normal practice and will be in place already. Others are simple to do and have no or a very low cost to implement. In almost all cases actions and adjustments are aids to productivity and are self financing.

Disability legislation

Most western countries have equal opportunities legislation that provides protection for people with disabilities at work. In the UK, it is the disability provisions of Equalities Act that are relevant since 2010 when it succeeded The Disability Discrimination Act of 1995.

Does someone with dyspraxia have the right to the additional protection that the Act provides? The answer is almost certainly yes. Dyspraxia is a lifelong condition affecting peoples' day-to-day activity in an adverse way.

The acts were introduced to end unfair discrimination against disabled people in all areas of life. As far as employment is concerned they aim to ensure that a disabled person, is considered fairly along with other applicants in job seeking, and is provided with an environment to assist them in performing their work.

The two main pillars of the legislation are:

- To avoid discrimination against an individual on the grounds of their disability
- To provide reasonable adjustments to remove substantial disadvantage

Reasonable actions to support employees.

As a caring employer that values its workforce, most organisations do their best to look after all their employees, regardless of whether they are recruited with a known disability, or whether staff are identified during the course of their employment.

Good employers look to make 'reasonable adjustments' or 'reasonable accommodation' for all employees who need them whether or not they would strictly be covered by the provisions of the law.



What does the term 'reasonable adjustments or reasonable accommodation' mean?

The concepts aim to create an environment that minimises the impact of the disability, whilst still being "reasonable" for the organisation to implement. A large publicly funded organisation would be expected to make more significant (and costly) adjustments than a small organisation. The critical word is 'reasonable'. However, there is no absolute requirement to change the way an organisation works to accommodate a disabled person, neither is there an obligation to 'create' a job whose functions were not already being carried out somewhere in the organisation. Equally lowering the performance standards is not

required although often employers will give some leeway.

Most of the time simple, easy to implement, adjustments go a long way to helping individuals deliver of their best so improving the productivity of the organisation.

The sort of adjustments that an organisation might make could include:

- Acquiring special equipment or modifying existing equipment.
- Altering a process
- Reallocating part of a job to another member of staff with a balancing exchange of duties
- Transferring into another more appropriate job.
- Altering working hours to cater for fatigue.
- Supplying additional training or specialist coaching for areas of difficulty.
- Modifying procedures for testing or assessment for recruitment and promotion.
- Making physical adjustments to premises (e.g. stair lifts).
- Providing additional supervision or checking.

Recruitment

For many people with dyspraxia the first point of difficulty in gaining employment is the job application. Organisations are obliged to review their processes for recruitment for any inherent bias or discrimination.

Handwritten application forms can be particularly difficult, on-line options are preferred. If the application is in PDF format it is a good idea to make it an accessible PDF form so the content can be filled in on computer by the applicant.

Job descriptions should be carefully considered for ambiguity, for example "good communication skills" doesn't distinguish between verbal and written but for some people with dyspraxia the difference is critical to their view of whether the job fits their skills profile.

If there are exercises, trade tests or an assessment centre it is important that their content matches with the job requirements to avoid unfair discrimination. Any such tests or activities should be identified to the candidates in advance to give sufficient time for requests for reasonable adjustment to be communicated and implemented.

At interview dyspraxia can affect many factors; speed of response to questions, ease of maintaining eye contact, speech, appearance which can be misinterpreted if the interviewer is not made aware of the profile.



Declaration of Disability

The obligation on an employer to provide an environment that minimises the impact of a person's dyspraxia (reasonable adjustments) makes good business sense, regardless of the

need to do so that is inherent in the equalities legislation.

The legal obligation has a dependency on the employer knowing that a disabling condition is present and affecting the performance at work. It is not necessary for the condition to have a specific formal diagnosis provided the effect of the impairment meets the criteria of long term, substantial and adverse that is stated in the legislation.

Until the Equality Act 2010, employers could ask a new member of staff if they had a disability on the job application form and at interview. Now questions related to disability and health are limited. The employer can ask if the applicant will require adjustments at interview because of a disability but needs to take care how that information is shared with others. Good practice would suggest only sharing on a need to know basis. It is not necessary to share why the adjustment is needed with the interview panel for example.

The employer may ask questions which are health or disability related when they directly refer to a core part of the job. For example the job involves standing up for most of the day then asking if that would pose any difficulty is an acceptable question.

In a similar way, asking a candidate to undertake a trade test is acceptable. Good practice would be to ensure the nature of the test was clearly identified well beforehand and that the candidate was asked if they would need any adjustment. The test should match the job requirement closely.

After offering the job the new employee should be asked if they need any adjustments to carry out the role and the organisation

might offer assistance in that process by suggesting contact with Access to Work for a workplace assessment.

The employee discloses

Unfortunately often an existing employee only discloses when something has gone wrong so the process is one of recovery.

Judgement on performance would need to be delayed until adjustments had been considered and implemented with sufficient time for learning and to be embedded as



standard practice. The employer may want to consider a diagnostic assessment to further inform any decisions around performance.

From the above it can be seen that it is so much easier if the employee discloses early in their relationship with the employer. Then adjustments can be discussed and implemented during training activity and become part of the usual way of working.

Etiquette

- When someone makes a disclosure about his or her disability ask him or her what it means for them, and listen. Dyspraxia is a condition, not an illness that can be 'cured'.
- People don't need to 'admit' to dyspraxia; it is something they have rather than a 'fault'.
- People with 'specific disabilities' are individuals who share a common condition.
- Be aware that dyspraxia may affect people differently; for some it may be no more than a minor inconvenience most of the time. For others, it may have a continual major impact on their lives.
- Disabilities are not always obvious and the impact of a disability can be even less obvious.
- Don't assume someone does not have a disability just because you are not aware of it.
- Disability is a natural part of human identity not something to be fixed.
- It is important once someone has disclosed a disability they are not defined by it - not 'a dyspraxic' or 'a dyslexic' but a person with dyspraxia or a person with dyslexia.
- Beware considering you are an expert on dyspraxia because you know someone else who has it, only the individual is an expert on how dyspraxia affects him or her.
- Instead of using the terms "normal or disabled", use "non-disabled or disabled".
- When speaking to an adult treat them as an adult - use a normal speaking tone and style.
- Do not ignore someone with a speech impediment because you are concerned you will not understand him or her.
- People who are disabled in one area can become 'differently-abled' through adjustment.
- Don't assume that a person with a disability who approaches a task differently will do it less well.
- Sympathy is not as constructive as empathy and acceptance.
- A disabled person does not have to be grateful for reasonable adjustment any more than a non-disabled person has to be grateful for steps up a hill or lights in a dark room.

Routes to help

The government provides help to people with disabilities through Jobcentre Plus, the two schemes that appear relevant are the Access to Work scheme and Work Choice. People with dyspraxia, provided they satisfy other employment criteria, are eligible for help from these schemes

Access to Work (ATW)

This scheme is open to people with a disability who are in work and also to help with interviews when applying for work. Many employers have never heard of the scheme. It gives advice and information to individuals and employers and also may fund specialist assistance and equipment.

Individual cases are managed by ATW advisors, who are Jobcentre Plus staff. Specialist assessors may be assigned to carry out an assessment of need based on discussion with the individual and the employer. This assessment service is free. Following assessment ATW may fund approved adjustments associated with a persons disability. The funding can be 100% for small employers and the self employed.

The proportion of funding available is greater if an application is made within the first six weeks of starting the job.



What sort of adjustments?

The aim is to bridge all the barriers experienced by the individual directly related to doing the job. This could include, equipment and IT, specialist training and coaching, awareness raising (Line manager training) and support worker. ATW will also support travel to work if public and personal transport is not an option.

After an assessment a report is produced detailing the suggestions, costs and suppliers. This is sent to the individual client.

Getting the best from ATW

It is important that the assessor who is allocated to visit has the right experience of working with people with dyspraxia. Ask about the assessor; what experience do they have with workplace assessments? If you are not happy, explain why to the ATW advisor and request someone else who has appropriate knowledge.

Prepare for the assessment, make a list of what the individual finds troubles them at work and add to it if there are any organisational issues. If there are ideas as to how help may be provided then make a list of them so they are not missed. Listen to the assessors suggestions but also contribute ideas on what could be better.

How to apply for ATW

The application for ATW has to come from the individual concerned, it is a personal service. All applications are handled through an Access to Work Contact Centre, the contact details for these are available on the DirectGov website.

At the time of writing they are:

London Contact Centre

For South East England, London, East of
England

Jobcentre Plus, Access to Work Operational
Support Unit,

Nine Elms Lane, London SW95 9BH

Telephone: 020 8426 3110 Fax: 020 8426 3134,

Email: atwosu.london@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk

Cardiff Contact Centre

For South West England, Wales, West Midlands,
East Midlands

Jobcentre Plus, Access to Work Operational
Support Unit,

Alexandra House, 377 Cowbridge Road East,
Cardiff, CF5 1WU

Telephone: 02920 423 291, Fax: 02920 423 342,

Email: atwosu.cardiff@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk

Glasgow Contact centre

For Scotland, North West England, North East
England, Yorkshire and Humberside

Jobcentre Plus, Access to Work Operational
Support Unit,

Anniesland JCP, Baird Street, Glasgow G90 8AN

Telephone: 0141 950 5327 Fax: 0141 950 5265

Email: atwosu.glasgow@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk



The individual should Phone (or email) the ATW Contact Centre and explain they have difficulties at work due to a disability. They will be asked if the disability is covered by the Equalities act, which almost certainly is the case for dyspraxia. Currently no proof is required. An application form will need to be completed but the call centre can do this for the client while they are on the phone and post the completed form for check and signature. The name of a representative from the employer will be requested.

Following receipt of the form the ATW advisor will telephone the client and the named employment contact to agree next steps.

Work Choice

Work Choice helps people with disabilities whose needs cannot be met through other work programmes, such as Access to Work or through simple workplace adjustments.

This might be because there is need for more specialised support to find employment or keep a job.

Work Choice is tailored to meet the individual's needs providing employers with the support they need. More information is available on the directGov website. www.direct.gov.uk/workchoice

Who to talk to about Work Choice

The local Disability Employment Advisor (DEA) looks after entry to the programme. DEAs are based in local Jobcentre Plus Offices.

Alternatively contact can be made with Work Choice at Jobcentre Plus: Tel: 0845 604 3719

Disabled Students Allowance

Higher Education students, on part time study or secondment from work may be eligible for the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA). This is provided to help meet the extra costs students face in their studies because of a disability.

DSA can help pay for:

- specialist equipment needed for studying like computer software
- non-medical helpers, such as a notetaker or reader
- other costs such as photocopying or printer cartridges

DSA is paid on top of the standard student finance package, or on its own. DSA does not have to be paid back.

How to Apply for DSA

The application is made to Student Finance England and can take up to 4 months to complete. If the course is at the Open University (OU), you should apply direct to the OU. Contact them before the course starts if possible to find out about eligibility.

Unlike ATW, the applicant will need to provide proof in relation to the disability, a letter from a doctor or a "Post 16" psychologist report. Usually a needs assessment is conducted at a specialist assessment centre and the recommendations are funded afterwards.
Tel: 0141 243 3686 for help

Charitable Organisations

Dyspraxia Foundation

8 West Alley

Hitchin

Herts

SG5 2EH

01462 455016

info@dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk

www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/dyspraxiafoundation

Twitter: twitter.com/#!/DYSPRAXIANEWS

Dyspraxia Foundation National Adult Support Group

Peter Keegan, Adult Trustee and Representative c/o Dyspraxia Foundation
peterkeegan55@hotmail.com

Facebook: Dyspraxia Foundation National Adult Support Group

Disability Rights UK

12 City Forum

250 City Road

London

EC1V 8AF

020 7250 3222 (Radar)

www.disabilityrightsuk.org



DANDA

Developmental Adult
Neuro-Diversity Association
Unit 12-13, Springfield House,
5 Tyssen Street,
London E8 2LY
info@danda.org.uk

Statutory Organisations

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Helpline: 08456 046610
www.equalityhumanrights.com

directGov on disability

www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/inc
htm

Specialist Organisations

Employer's Forum on Disability

Nutmeg House
60 Gainsford Street
London
SE1 2NY
020 7403 3020
enquiries@efd.org.uk
www.efd.org.uk

Key 4 Learning Ltd

The Old Village Stores
Chedworth
Cheltenham
GL54 4AA
01285 720964
office@key4learning.com
www.key4learning.com

Dyscovery Centre

Felthorpe House
Caerleon Campus
Lodge Road
Caerleon
Newport
NP18 3QR
01633 432330
dyscoverycentre@newport.ac.uk
[http://www.newport.ac.uk/research/
researchcentres/centres/dyscovery%20centre](http://www.newport.ac.uk/research/researchcentres/centres/dyscovery%20centre)



Differences Explained

These pages provide suggestions for individuals and line managers to try out. You will notice similar ideas suggested in more than one area. The pages are not a complete solution and are most effective when used in conjunction with a specialist workplace assessment. It may also be useful to provide a mentor or coach to help focus on areas of strength and weakness and help develop the skill base with the individual.

The suggestions are framed with the premise that:

- Their primary function is as a basis for dialogue.
- They are not specific for a particular job, grade or organisational culture.
- A 'pick and mix' approach for the job and the individual is expected.
- They provide cost effective and easy strategies for anyone, not just those with hidden disabilities.
- Adapting to the requirements of the workplace and developing new skills is particularly demanding for an individual with a cognitive processing difficulty.
- The nuances of cognitive processing difficulties are often hard for people who do not have them to comprehend.

These pages should help help the line manager and Personnel Officer to support the individual.

Co-ordination and Motor Difficulties.

What are co-ordination or motor difficulties?

At the heart of the difficulties experienced by people with dyspraxia are coordination and motor difficulties. The impact can be very varied from almost unnoticeable by anyone other than the individual to substantial in the effect. As dyspraxia can affect almost any muscle group in the body there is a wide range of possible difficulties that will affect each individual differently.

No one individual will display the same profile of strengths and difficulties

If the co-ordination of an individual is different from everyone else, then the attitude of his colleagues and line manager with regard to his ability may be distorted. The way the brain sends messages to limbs, mouth or eyes may make the individual slower in tackling tasks. However the quality of what is achieved may be high.

Motor control may affect the way an employee uses equipment or moves around. Simple adjustments can make life easier, e.g. electric hole punch, stapler etc.

Carrying out practical office tasks like photocopying may be difficult for someone with co-ordination or motor difficulties. An individual may completely understand how to do a task but have difficulty carrying it out.

The way an application form is filled in may give the lie to the ability of an individual to do a job. The result may be untidy if handwritten, or perfect if typed and very great care taken.

How co-ordination and motor difficulties may affect people in the work place.

- Poor presentation of work.
- Untidy and rumpled personal presentation.
- Problems with tripping over, falling over or bumping into things.
- Problems with spilling drinks etc.
- Problems with exaggerated movement of arms etc when walking/ running.
- Problems with balance.
- Poor posture.
- Slow and difficult to read handwriting and problems with gripping pen.
- Difficulty using keyboard and mouse.
- Difficulty in taking minutes/notes.
- Poor at copying (especially figures).
- Tendency to be chaotic, forgetful and disorganised.
- Poor at timekeeping/tendency to miss appointments.

- Slow to finish work.
- Lack of manual dexterity e.g. using scissors, stapler, use of dials, locks, machinery.

What adjustments might be made to help?

Not all individuals will need all adjustments, often the provision of simple adjustments will make a substantial difference.

- Awareness of the need of an appropriately sized and arranged work space.
- Physiotherapy or occupational therapy if necessary.
- Use of a tape recorder in meetings to avoid writing notes.
- Use of a roller ball mouse.
- Use of specialist scissors or other equipment.
- A special chair, mouse or foot rest may make life more comfortable.
- Assistance with the use of office equipment.



- Provide clear written instructions on how to use the photocopier, fax machine etc.
- Re-allocate responsibility for using difficult machinery and keys.
- Ergonomic key boards may help.
- Using keyboard shortcuts may help if using the mouse is difficult.
- Encourage the use of the telephone rather than writing.
- Encourage the use of word processing rather than handwriting.
- Voice recognition software (speech to text) may help.
- Cups with lids (travel cup) may help for carrying drinks around the office.
- Use of a laptop for notetaking.
- Staplers and hole punches with special handles or electric actuation may help.
- Yoga, Tai Chi or Pilates may help with co-ordination.
- Disciplined use of lists and timetables.
- Time spent in an empty office getting used to the geography may help.
- Have a clock in view.
- Use a timer or flag up/reminder system on computer.
- Allowance of extra time because of speed of processing.

Case Study: Mike

Mike has a degree in law. He had always wanted to join the police force and when he finished his degree applied and was accepted into the police training college.

He enjoyed the course but found the physical elements of the training difficult. The tutor ridiculed him in the training sessions and they became more and more demanding. Although Mike passed all the other elements of the course he failed the physical performance section.

He was accepted onto active duty and seconded to an area where there were often disturbances that required physical intervention. The aim was to see if Mike could cope under pressure and improve his performance when it mattered.

Mike ended up in hospital after an affray. He felt severely stressed and he failed his probationary period. He then went into a job that made no physical demands on him.

The experience had a profound effect on his self-esteem and he suffered from depression. The doctor referred him for counselling and the counsellor suggested that his difficulties may be associated with dyspraxia. Mike had an assessment and the diagnosis was confirmed.

Mike determined to inform the police service about his experience, mainly because he felt they needed to know. The training department decided to widen their understanding in the light of other cadets who had failed the course.

Mike felt some feeling of closure, but still resents his experience. He no longer works for the police.



Cognitive Style Differences

What are cognitive style differences?

Everybody has his or her own particular way of working and thinking - we develop our own style. Organisations usually create set procedures that are considered most useful to the majority of the workforce. People with neurodiverse profiles may go about tasks in a different way because of their specific difficulties.

Although many people want to support and help disabled staff in the work place, misguided line managers may put undue stress on their staff by requiring them to carry out tasks in the same way as other employees. The line manager may make inappropriate judgements about a staff member who is working in a style more appropriate to his own skills. Misguided intervention could prevent an individual achieving a result that is as effective as other members of staff, but by a different route.

People all have their own modality strengths – some people prefer to be told how to do a task, others may like to be shown, others may prefer the hands-on approach where they carry out a given task. A combination of all three may help others. If an individual has one sensory channel that is less efficient than the others, it is important for line managers to find a way to help. Finding a new approach to carrying out a task may help other members of staff work more efficiently.

How cognitive style differences can affect people in the work place:

- Staying late to 'catch up'.
- Taking too much work home at the weekend.

- Inability to complete tasks on time.
- Doing things differently.
- Becoming stressed.
- Taking too much time off.
- There may be conflict with other work colleagues.
- Capability procedures.
- Poor reports/appraisals.
- Frustration for the individual and/or line manager.
- Staff resigning.
- Sickness.
- Poor quality of work.
- Dissatisfaction.
- Staff skills being under-utilised.

What adjustments can be made to help?

- Divide tasks into small chunks, re-evaluate how they may be tackled.
- Prioritise tasks.
- Change of management style e.g. give demonstrations rather than assume understanding.
- Use models or templates for documents.
- Provide a buddy or mentor to explore specific areas of difficulty.
- Allow employees to go to a quiet area away from the telephone or other office distraction for a period each day to quietly focus and concentrate.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of a job.

- Explore the use of technology to compensate for disability, e.g. the use of a dictaphone by the manager and employee.
- Evaluate by results.
- Allow the individual to express their own style/share different styles and ways of working.
- Try to understand thinking/work style of each individual.
- Be flexible.
- Be aware that the same end may be reached by a different route.
- Ask how an individual would prefer to tackle a task.
- Mutually agree a strategy and then give it a time frame for a trial implementation then review.
- Delegate staff to support an individual with similar understanding of an individual's successful work style.
- Ask for help from Human Resources and the Disability Officer.



Case Study: Lisa

Lisa worked in a large and busy planning office department as a clerical worker. Lisa had made a disclosure about her dyspraxia and explained she was able to do most office duties, but needed extra time to learn new tasks and find her 'own' way of doing things. Her line manager, Mavis, prided herself on the efficiency of her section.

Lisa had difficulty with sequential thinking so had the alphabet written on card as a reminder, which she taped into the filing cabinet for quick reference. When she took something out of a file, she marked its location with a coloured card. When she had files to put away she pulled a spare chair next to the filing cabinet to put the files on. If the phone went, instead of writing on the standard message form, she typed and then printed the message. Mavis was not impressed and told Lisa she must learn the alphabet. She insisted the message form was used and was not tolerant of Lisa's handwriting. She continually asked Lisa if they had taught her anything at school.

Lisa became more and more despondent and started taking time off. Her doctor put her on anti-depressants and suggested she talk to a more senior manager and her equal opportunities representative. Both individuals knew Mavis' reputation for efficiency and felt Lisa was to blame and asked her to leave.

Lisa sought legal advice and a formal case was taken to law for unfair dismissal. Lisa won her case and a substantial settlement. Mavis was shocked and had to have time off work for stress. Lisa's self esteem was so challenged that she could not go back to clerical work. There are few winners in legal cases.

Difficulties With Communication and Social Skills

What are communication and social skills difficulties?

For some people with dyspraxia, the concentration required to carry out tasks is often to the detriment of social relationships and effective communication. Assumptions and judgements may therefore be made about people with cognitive processing difficulties based on the way they behave or react without understanding the nature of their difficulties. Individuals are often unaware of the impact of their own behaviour and the implication of what others are saying and doing. This may lead to social interaction difficulties or isolation in the workplace.

Sensory difficulties can also impact on communication, with speech being too loud or soft and individuals finding it difficult to cope in groups.



How difficulties with communication and social skills can affect people in the work place:

- Difficulties with conversations and discussions.
- Difficulty in adapting to new or unpredictable situations.
- Difficulty remembering instructions.
- Problems with team work.
- Difficulty in picking up on non verbal signs in others – miscues may then appear tactless.
- Under extreme stress there may be problems with emotional outbursts, phobias, fears, obsessions, compulsions, irritability and addictive behaviour.
- Problems with personal hygiene.
- Sensitivity to high levels of noise, light, or extremes of temperature.
- Difficulty with concentration.
- Difficulty with speech.
- Visual stress
- The need to have constantly changing activity e.g. short concentration span.
- Tendency to opt out of things that are too difficult.
- Over-sensitivity or under-sensitivity to touch e.g. dislike of being touched.
- Difficulties with understanding humour and sarcasm.
- Difficulty with listening skills.

Without recognition and understanding any of the above, there may be feelings of frustration, stress, depression and isolation.

What adjustments can be made to help?

- Self awareness.
- Staff awareness and understanding of hidden disabilities and how they affects the individual.
- Give summaries and key points rather than full reports.
- If interruptions cause difficulty – place the desk in a quiet location and put a Do Not Disturb Sign on the desk or door when busy.
- Flexi-time can help with distractions e.g. coming in early, staying on late
- Relaxed dress code.
- Develop listening skills.
- Be aware of non verbal communication e.g. gesture, facial expression in self and others.
- Try to be aware of tone of voice.
- Be aware of personal space.
- When beginning a new job, make sure that the individual has clear directions and guidelines are given.
- Provide verbal as well as written instructions.
- If possible give instructions one at a time.
- It may help to actually show the individual how to do something as well as telling them.
- Good lighting is essential.
- Give positive encouragement.
- Be realistic in your expectations.

Case Study: Anne

Anne worked in a technical department, she was very well qualified and consequently held a position where she had to interface with all levels of staff. She was efficient at her job and popular with senior management. However, Anne was also considered to be clumsy and eccentric. On one occasion, Anne was the victim of a practical joke by some of the individuals in the office. This had a devastating effect on her and she was off work for a few weeks with stress and depression.

On her return, she said to her line manager that she had always had difficulty with social relationships. Anne's focus and concentration on required tasks was to the detriment of her understanding of the complexities of the office social interaction. She had been diagnosed with "clumsy child syndrome" as a child and had not linked this with her difficulties with social relationships. The manager had attended some training on Hidden Disabilities and suggested that the condition was possibly dyspraxia. Anne explored the definition of dyspraxia and identified many of the difficulties she had. She had an assessment from an occupational therapist who confirmed her dyspraxic tendencies but also identified areas of strength and ways of working on areas of deficit. Anne joined a local group of adults with the same condition.

She began to work on a programme of social skills, reviewed her dress code and acknowledged her difficulties to the rest of the staff. The new awareness made Anne more relaxed and her social life became more active. Her work colleagues felt more comfortable with her and so the team became more productive and happier.

Concentration Difficulties

What are concentration difficulties?

Concentration difficulties may occur because of the extra effort that is often required by someone with Dyspraxia to complete a task. The additional cognitive “overhead” means memory is stressed and fatigue can easily set in. Distraction from external sources can be overwhelming and the time taken to recover can have a big impact on productivity.

How concentration difficulties can affect people in the work place:

- Short attention span.
- Easily distracted by other people/noises in the office.
- Difficulty focusing and sustaining focus.
- Shifting focus (moving attention from one thing to another).
- Failing to give close attention to detail, making careless mistakes.
- Appearing not to listen when spoken to directly.
- Difficulty following instructions.
- Failing to finish tasks
- Difficulty organising tasks.
- Avoids, dislikes or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort.
- Loses things necessary for tasks (files or books).
- Forgetful in daily routine.
- Inability to keep still in seat.
- Leaves seat in situation in which remaining seated is expected.

- Excessive talking.
- Impulsive – acting before thinking.
- Interrupting others.

What adjustments can be made to help?

- Provide a quiet place to work in the office e.g. away from the doors, in a corner.
- Encourage the use of libraries, file rooms, private offices, store rooms and other enclosed areas when others are not using them.
- Make sure the work area has plenty of natural light.



- A personal stereo with instrumental music can create a 'personal space'.
- Use of earplugs.
- Use of meditation techniques e.g. mantra to call back to task.
- Exercise, Yoga or Tai Chi may help - even a short walk may be helpful.
- Put a 'Do not Disturb' sign on the desk.
- Use of coloured overlays when reading print or printing material onto coloured paper.
- Use of daily schedules and To Do Lists rather than verbal instructions.
- Help individual to make a time table and keep to it.
- Set specific times for specific tasks.
- Provide frequent, regularly scheduled breaks and encourage individual to take some fresh air.
- Have a clock in view and encourage awareness of time
- Flag up reminder on the computer.
- Use lists, charts, flow diagrams to map how to keep on task.
- Organise workspace in a way which is appropriate for tasks.
- Have in trays and out trays.

Case Study: Annette

Annette's line manager had identified that she had attention difficulties. Annette spent too much time on the telephone either making personal calls or making internal calls that were long and chatty, rather than being focussed. She was easily distracted and interrupted her work mates when they were trying to work. Annette was keen to drink coffee and chat to people instead of spending time on her work. When she did actually get down to work, she was hyper-focused and produced reasonable results. The problem was: there was not enough of it.

When Annette was presented with this image of herself by her line manager, she became very emotional and said that she was being criticised for being a 'friendly' person. In contrast the line manager also noticed that



she seemed unable to join in group based work activities, including some of the compulsory training. This was in contrast to Annette's apparent belief in her social skills. On investigation by her line manager, Annette disclosed that she felt she would be "shown up" in any training activity. Annette resented any assertion that she did not do the job that was required of her. The manager suggested she see a specialist consultant; Annette did not feel it was necessary to see anyone but she was persuaded to go.

Annette did not conform to the classic models of dyslexia but had aspects of dyspraxia. The specialist asked if she had access to any old school reports. The reports suggested that Annette was of high ability, but had poor attention skills throughout her education. Annette explained she had left

school early because she became bored with it. Annette did not finish her next course at college and had exhibited a restlessness throughout her life. She acknowledged she would like to change this.

Annette was very driven and wanted to succeed at work. Once she had decided to take ownership of her difficulties, Annette worked hard to overcome them.

She had difficulty managing time, so a clock was placed above her desk. She timetabled her day to certain activities and remained on task for set periods of time. She increased the time periods over the next few months and she withdrew coffee from her working day, drinking water instead. Annette used several strategies and improved her job appraisal by a hundred per cent, leading to promotion.



Memory Difficulties

What are memory difficulties?

Some people are good at remembering names of people and others remember a face but not a name. Some people have to link the face of a person or their name to a context.

Memory is a complex subject so we use imperfect models to help understand it. For people with dyspraxia short term working memory is a critical area. Some times the memory is occupied in operating the tactic used to overcome the dyspraxic difficulty it is unable to process any more information. So when someone is working on a difficult task they have no space for additional input, this can lead to communication difficulties and problems with multi-tasking.

Sometimes people are unable to hold on to pieces of information long enough to process them accurately. This may happen for several reasons, perhaps the process is inefficient or slow, the short term memory is overloaded, or the rate of input is too great for the sensory process to translate and hold on to the data so sometimes information is lost before it is processed.

Memory problems may mean that people miss certain nuances in conversation. Conversely, not fully comprehending information may make it more difficult to remember information.

How we remember is part of the style in which we think. Long-term memory is efficient for some people and they can recall what happened in the past as clearly as if it happened yesterday. Short-term memory is efficient for others. Whatever the difficulty,

anyone can improve their memory with strategies.

It is useful to consider that information goes into the brain through our senses and often recalling the senses can help us retrieve information. Stopping to think and recall is often the first step – having a system or a strategy often takes away stress.

Stress is often a saboteur of memory.

How memory difficulties can affect people in the workplace:

Difficulty remembering:

- and following verbal instructions.
- sequences, procedures or systems.
- telephone conversations or telephone numbers.
- to give the correct information.
- the 'office routine'.
- appointments, deadlines etc.
- names, figures, lists.
- P.C. or software instructions.
- passwords and PIN numbers.
- one day, but not the next.
- all that is required to be completed.

What adjustments can be made to help?

With difficulty remembering and following verbal instructions:

- Give instructions slowly and clearly in a quiet location.

- Encourage other staff to write down important information for the individual, either in e-mail or hard copy as back up to verbal instruction.
- Show what needs to be done and then watch the individual doing it.
- Encourage note taking as directions are given. Also checking with a buddy that notes are correct can be helpful for the individual.
- Ask individual to repeat instructions back, listening carefully and confirm that he/she has understood correctly.
- If necessary, a memo to the line manager may help, outlining what the individual is going to do and then getting written confirmation before proceeding.
- Bullet points to clarify text
- A 'memory jog' book may help – recording systems in simple forms e.g. flowcharts/lists as a reminder of infrequent tasks.

With difficulty remembering appointments, deadlines etc.:

- Organise for a work colleague to remind individual of important deadlines or to review priorities on a regular basis.
- Use of a wall planner or diary.
- Use of an alarm watch.
- Use of a computer alarm on screen.
- Use of a daily calendar and alarm feature on a computer, some software has sound as well as putting a written message on screen.

- Use of a tickler file, which has a section for each month and a section for each day, get into the habit of putting in reminders and reviewing it regularly.

With short term memory difficulties, especially names, numbers, lists.

- Use of mnemonic devices and acronyms, for example for data entry – NAPPERS: Name, Address – with post code, Phone number, Problem – take details of call reason, Enter – send data to main frame, Review – confirm details entered, and tell client next stage, Sign Off – thank client and ask if there are any more issues.
- Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic and Time (SMART).
- Organise details on paper so that they can easily be referred to using diagrams, flow charts or cheat sheets.



- Individual could develop ways of testing themselves on new material e.g. learn it parrot fashion.
- Ask colleagues to check with the individual to make sure that they understand.
- Use of multi-sensory learning techniques, e.g. reading material into a tape machine and then playing it back whilst re-reading (hear, see, do).
- Use of computer software, menus and help features.
- Supply summaries. List headings or instructions.
- Encourage use of memory hooks e.g. wearing watch on left wrist as a reminder of left and right.
- Reinforce through workplace display - reminders hanging up around the workplace may help.
- Provide a gradually increased complexity of both tasks and verbal instructions
- Use of Post It notes on the dash board of the car
- Use of a buddy to remind individual.
- Use of a procedure book.
- Use of 'To Do' Lists to start the day.
- Use of a Filofax or Smart Phone/iPod to record telephone numbers, addresses, diary appointments etc all together in one place.
- Use of alarm on Smart Phone/iPod to remind of appointments, birthdays etc.

Case Study: Milly

Milly worked in an HR department. She logged people's holiday, maternity and paternity leave and worked out pay changes and holiday allocation.

Milly enjoyed her job but due to staff shortages and changes of systems her strategies for remembering were on overload and she began to make mistakes. Milly knew she had dyspraxia and dyslexic tendencies but she had created good coping strategies. Her previous line manager had also helped Milly create reminder lists and she had time to create a book to write down reminder scripts. Her new line manager said she had been doing the job long enough and that she ought to know what she was doing and refuse to allocate the time.

She became more tired eventually she broke down. Her line manager took her into her office and suggested she wasn't up to the job because of her cognitive profile.

Milly requested an advocate at a further meeting with her manager and the Equal Opportunities Representative. The new line manager had not understood the severity of Milly's memory difficulties or the nature of and dyspraxia and dyslexia, or the ramifications of the disability legislation. Milly needed tools of association and connection to act as memory prompts. Two days were allocated to Milly to help get a new system in place. She received help and made visual prompts. Then she was allocated an amount of time each week for review and organisation. Efficiency went up and Milly stopped making mistakes. The manager became more aware of Milly's need for adjustment to accommodate the differences in the way her memory worked.

Organisational Difficulties.

What are organisational difficulties?

Organisational difficulties can sabotage the most brilliant employee or employer.

Organisational skills come naturally to some people and seem a total mystery to others. Conflict may arise between employees when there is a significant difference between organisational styles. A chaotic desk may project the wrong image of an efficient office, and apparent chaos may mask or sabotage a creative employee who is an asset to the company.

People with organisational difficulties often need to adopt specific strategies to help them establish a routine or a ritual to tackle tasks and maintain a system. It is often helpful to try and implement small achievable tasks rather than try and change everything straight away. It is also important to experiment and develop ways of doing things that best suit the individual.

How organisational difficulties can affect people in the work place.

- Workplace is disordered.
- Inability to prioritise.
- Assignments not completed when required.
- Frequently lost or mislaid materials or equipment.
- Confused ideas in written material/ incorrect setting out of information.
- Poor organisation of ideas.
- Projecting the wrong image.



- Muddling up of time, day or date and therefore missing meetings or appointments.
- Directional difficulties e.g. getting lost, muddling left and right.
- Stress.
- Conflict between work colleagues.

What adjustments can be made to help?

Organisation of Property.

- Provide storage equipment e.g. plastic trays, wire baskets/boxes for certain papers, pots for pens and pencils to keep work area organised and tidy.

- Provide a drawer just for stapler, Post-it notes, labels, scissors, spare pens/pencils/notebook, calculator etc and Encourage individual to return these items to the drawer at the end of each day.
- Encourage staff to have an efficient filing system and to make time to file papers away regularly, using a colour or symbol code.
- Have a guide to the filing system near the filing cabinets.
- Colour code items e.g. 'traffic light' systems may be useful: red file papers on hold/yellow file-waiting for extra information/green file – papers to go.
- Colour code information from different departments.
- Encourage the return of important items/files to the same place each time. When removing a file, a cardboard marker inserted into the space can be a useful reminder as to where it came from.
- Provide shelves or pin boards so that items can be seen clearly.
- Make sure work areas are well lit.
- Encourage individual to throw things away once a week – perhaps aiming for a minimalist look, keeping only what is needed.

Organising of self.

- Encourage the individual to set time aside for planning each day
- Use of a wall planner.
- Prioritise what is important or get

someone else to advise.

- Encourage the habit of making and keeping to a daily, dated To Do List (there is great satisfaction in crossing off items as each one is completed).
- Each item on a To Do List should have enough information to remind individual exactly what the task is.
- Use of a diary or use a calendar.
- For regular tasks such as taking down phone calls, or taking notes at a meeting, help individual to create a layout for each task with appropriate prompts. This will save time and ensure all the required information is gathered.
- Extra time should be allowed for unforeseen occurrences.
- Get individual to decide how long tasks should take and to use a timer to keep on track (stop watch, kitchen timer, watch alarm).
- Individual should allow certain amounts of time for certain activities.
- Encourage individual to make a regular daily appointment with self for planning e.g. when travelling to and from work, tea and lunch breaks.
- Use of templates for formatting documents is helpful.
- Use of good reports/successful phrases as model examples is helpful (don't reinvent the wheel).
- Encourage work rituals e.g. check e-mails, establish a 'To Do List', delegate tasks, clear desk at end of day,

return files to where they came from

- Thinking and ideas can be organised with Mind Maps, Spider Diagrams or Flow Charts.
- Talk through ideas with individual in order to clarify their thinking.
- Ask individual to make calls rather than receive them so they are prepared before the call e.g. jot down points before hand use a special note book.
- Give plenty of warning regarding deadlines.
- In the early days of a new job setting a well structured plan for each day will help establish pattern



Case Study: Tom

The work Tom produced, although erratic, was of a high standard and his patches of brilliance were appreciated by his line manager who had worked with him for several years.

When a new line manager, Chris, came into the post, he found Tom's attitude to be *laissez-faire*. His time keeping, untidy desk and personal appearance were not the image the new manager wanted for his section. Tom was challenged by Chris's expectations and fear began to affect the standard of the work he produced. Tom felt that the new line manager was getting at him and Chris felt that Tom was a "passenger". Tom had a warning about his time-keeping and started not coming into work.

The Human Resources department became involved and Tom acknowledged that his lack of organisational skills affected not only his work life, but also his private life. He found it hard to organise his living space, money, shopping, washing etc. He knew his personal appearance, hygiene and communication style were a challenge to his working colleagues. He was worried about money and was now terrified he would lose his job. Tom was referred to an occupational therapist who recognised that he had dyspraxic/Asperger Syndrome tendencies.

Tom found it useful to have a diagnosis for his difference and felt that he had a parameter of understanding that he could do something about. The conditions were discussed with the line manager and a game plan and programme of intervention was organised.

Tom did not wear a watch as he found it

uncomfortable and so he bought a fob watch. He also had two large clocks, one for home and one in front of his desk at work so that he became more aware of time.

All the paperwork that was on Tom's desk, in cupboards and files was taken into a meeting room with a large table and sorted out. Coloured files classified important information into sections. 60% of the paperwork was thrown away and 30% directed to other areas. The outcome of this was that Tom had a more manageable volume of paper. The same rigorous approach was taken with computer files and emails.

Then a timetable was created by Tom and Chris to ensure that essential work was completed each day. A weekly meeting was scheduled and Chris became more aware of

Tom's comprehensive knowledge and abilities. Tom produced excellent and valuable work and Chris gave Tom more leeway. However Tom found that without the support and structure, his systems broke down and he realised that in order to work to his full potential, he really needed support and understanding.

He established patterns and rituals into his life, both at work and at home. When work went well, Tom found it easier to maintain order in his personal life and vice versa. Tom joined a local group of adults with dyspraxic tendencies and found them supportive. He considers Chris's intervention to have been very useful because he now feels that he has more control of his destiny.



Reading Difficulties

What are reading difficulties?

The process for learning to read is complex and if any of the mechanics for reading are not fully functional, fluent reading may be difficult. Dyspraxia can affect all aspects of the muscular control of the eye.

In contemporary society if someone has not learned to read and write, assumptions may be made about their abilities. Yet differences in the way people process information may have affected their ability to learn. However reading difficulties are experienced by many more people than those who cannot read at all.

Although basic reading skills may have been mastered, reading may still remain a problem. Competent and efficient members of staff may take longer than expected to read documents. Reading out loud may embarrass them because their reading is stilted or lacking fluency. Adults employ many strategies to hide their discomfort with reading words.

How reading difficulties can affect people in the work place.

- An individual may not read with accuracy.
- Reading and understanding may be laboured.
- Reading may be slow.
- Each page may need to be reread to allow full understanding
- Novels, newspapers and magazines may not be a problem, but technical or abstract documents maybe a challenge.

- Pronunciation or confusion of specific words may occur.
- Focus and concentration on reading material may be a problem in the bustle of an open plan office.
- Too much reading may cause head aches or visual stress.
- Misreading may impede understanding.
- Text that is too small, fancy fonts or glare (especially from white paper) may make print blur.
- Comprehension may be poor.
- Decoding skills may be weak.
- The individual may be embarrassed/ suffer from lack of self esteem.

What adjustments can be made to help?

- Give both verbal and written instructions.
- A text to speech programme output may be added to the individual's work computer.
- Place written memos on individual's voice mail.
- Important parts of a document may be highlighted and read first.
- A structured reading programme may help.
- Another employee could be asked to read for the individual or provide a resume.
- Encourage the individual to organise their work so that plenty of time is left to read and complete the task.

- Look at other ways of obtaining the same information avoiding reading.
- See if the information is available on audio or video tape.
- Discussion of material with colleagues may help.
- Provide summaries and/or key points.
- Provide information through drawings, diagrams and flow charts.
- Write notes, symbols or prompts in margins to review information quickly later.
- Some find reading at a 30° – 45° slant easier than reading on a flat surface.
- Read in a quiet place.
- State of mind is important; for some reading a document is threatening.
 - relax.
 - read in stages.
 - get comfortable.
 - sometimes background instrumental music is helpful.
 - in the office use a personal stereo or ear phones to block other peripheral sound.

Reading Shortcuts.

- Enlarge the text.
- Use double spacing on the computer.
- Raise font size.
- Use easy to read fonts e.g. Arial.
- Use cream or pastel coloured paper as opposed to white to read from; this may be easier for the eyes.
- Highlight salient points as you are reading on hard copy and on the computer.



Case Study: George

George was an engineer. He had good people skills and was valued by his company. George was promoted and transferred to a new area where he had several others working under him. He was challenged by his new job and enjoyed it greatly. The only drawback was the volume of material he was now expected to read and he read very, very slowly. He did however maintain that he read better than others. He solved his problem by taking work home to read. The volume of reading grew and he found he now spent all Sunday reading. Then his first child was born and time took on a new framework. George no longer had Sundays to read. He found that he did not keep up to date with material and his work could not be completed efficiently. He felt he was out of control and visited the doctor for stress. He was given anti-depressants which made him sleepy. George began to think he was not up to the promotion.

When his parents came to visit him they were shocked at how George looked and discussed it with his wife. She told them about the Sunday reading and the difficulty since the arrival of the baby. George's parents confirmed reading had been a problem throughout his school life and in fact he had always said he became an engineer so he didn't have to read. At school it had been suggested that George was dyslexic but he had received no formal assessment. George's family persuaded him to have a psychological assessment. Dyslexia was diagnosed and the psychologist suggested some visual motor difficulties could be at the root. He also saw a specialist optometrist who

suggested he have glasses with coloured lenses and a prism to help his eyes work as a coordinated team. George could not believe the improvement in his reading.

George went into work and saw his manager who had been concerned about the fall-off in George's work. It was agreed the line manager would prioritise what had to be read and identify what was not a priority. He also highlighted important passages. Some reading was delegated to other staff members who could then report the content to George. The manager also suggested George take time out to read in a quiet office while his staff take his phone calls. George felt this was unfair on his staff. So the quiet office was offered to all staff for an hour each week while the rest of the team fielded calls. The staff all found this useful and the staff productivity and morale went up. Another person in the team disclosed that he had dyslexia and George helped with resolving his difficulties.

George's manager who had initially been sceptical about the idea of cognitive processing profiles became a convert and promoted the process of staff training in Neurodiversity for all employees.



Self Esteem

What is Self Esteem?

The way an individual feels about themselves determines both the way they behave and the way they interpret the meaning of the behaviour of others towards them. If an individual in the workplace does not have any confidence or feel good about themselves, it will affect levels of motivation and perception of the feelings of others towards them. It is useful to consider two definitions:



Self concept: is a global term which includes all aspects of how we feel about ourselves. It is with us from the very beginning of our lives, affected by all our experiences, acceptances and rejections, successes and failures.

Self image: is the picture we hold of ourselves, all our abilities and attributes. It includes ideas about our appearance, intelligence, physical skills and about our place in society. Self image is built and modified through our perceptions of the way other people, who are important to us, behave toward us.

How poor self esteem for a person with dyspraxia might affect someone in the workplace

- Avoiding situations that cause exposure of self.
- Believing that other people expect them to fail.

- Apparently caring little about what others think about them.
- Undervaluing self.
- Dress, language, gestures, body language may be affected.
- Perceived demands may exceed assessment of capability.
- Motivation is stifled.
- Language pattern and demeanour become negative.
- Increased fatigue and sickness.
- Increased time off work.
- Cycle of despair.
- Lack of understanding of disability.
- Lack of confidence about making disclosure.
- Dissatisfaction regarding job and colleagues.
- Skills not utilised.
- Focus is on the negative.
- Fear of tackling something new.
- Fear of being laughed at.
- Holding back even if keen to push self forward.

What adjustments can be made to help?

- Support of a strong advocate or mentor.
- Clear understanding of the disability by individual, line manager and colleagues.
- Reassurance that it is OK not to be perfect at everything.

- Early intervention to remove the threat of failure and ensure success.
- Managers to take or share blame for failure.
- Awareness so that problems do not go unnoticed.
- Develop and improve the individual's self concept.
- Individuals are often motivated by the confidence of others.
- Remember that people rarely do anything wrong on purpose.
- People get most attention when they fail. Change this by giving lots of praise.
- Set achievable, realistic goals and opportunities for success.
- Break down tasks into small steps and prioritise them.
- Emphasise quality rather than quantity.
- Give clear, brief, ordered instructions.
- Ensure instructions are understood by asking for them to be repeated or confirmed.
- Initially give extra time to ensure success.
- Listen to individual's concerns.
- Act on feedback to build up confidence.
- Provide a supportive environment from other colleagues.
- Explore options for difficult tasks.
- Confirm and praise when there is improvement.
- Ensure the individual feels valued and secure.
- Encourage individual to take ownership for hidden differences and focus on skill to overshadow difficulty.
- Create a positive vision of the future and realistic steps to reach it.
- Encourage individual to try achievable new tasks.
- Give effort to even small insignificant tasks.
- Praise, Praise, Praise and even reward people!



Case Study: Joseph

Joseph was a trained tool maker. He had developed his skills over a formal apprenticeship and was proud of his experience. However as the industry declined with more and more manufacture being shipped offshore, Joe was made redundant.

He could not find another job that matched his skills but he did however work for a local charity with young children on a voluntary basis. When a paid job became vacant, Joe applied for it and was successful. It was at a much lower salary than he had received in his last job, but he enjoyed working with the youngsters. He got on with most of them, but found some to be arrogant and because of their inexperience, quite scathing about Joe's role in a 'dead end job'. The principals of the charity treated Joe in contrasting ways, some as an equal, others took a superior role.

It came to a head when Joe's reading and writing problems became public. He had been sent a note regarding rearranging an event and he hadn't taken any notice. Joe arrived with a minibus full of young people to an event that did not exist – all because he had not read the note.

Some of the charity board wanted to dismiss Joe, others could see that he had a positive influence on many of the young people and were keener to give him a second chance. Joe was aware of his difficulties, but could not see a way through them. He began taking the paperwork home with him and spending hours working at it. His efforts were criticised, but no one knew how long he had taken to complete what he had done.



Overnight, Joe became sick. His doctor was called and Joe was off work for two months. He couldn't face going back to work and at the same time couldn't face staying away as his whole life was there.

Joe was placed on a recovery programme with a therapist and he also went onto a specialist dyslexia spelling and reading programme. It took a long time, but his self esteem grew enough to get him back to work, initially part time.

The biggest difference was the comments made by the committee members who had covered for his absence. They made comments such as, "We didn't realise how much you did". Joe was respected for what he could do, not just criticised for what he couldn't do.

Stress

What is Stress?

Stress is an individual experience. Activities that are stressful for some are enjoyable for others. Stress is caused when the perceived demands placed on an individual exceed their assessment of their ability.

If stress is an interaction between environmental factors and the individual's perceived ability, it is not surprising that people with hidden disabilities can have feelings of stress or anxiety in work situations. They will often have a history of academic failure, blighted success and an erosion of self-esteem. If the line manager and work colleagues do not understand the nature of hidden disabilities, stressful situations may develop. If difficulties are not addressed and understood with all parties taking ownership of their responsibilities, everyone suffers.

A positive climate within an organisation can do much to prevent work stress among employees. A whole organisation approach requires a flexibility and openness that encompasses differences. For many people, understanding their disability creates a new beginning and gives the opportunity to take ownership of their difference.

How does stress affect people with hidden disabilities in the work place?

- Sickness absences.
- Lateness.
- Inconsistent work standards.
- Capability issues.
- Poor appraisals.

- Fear of taking holiday. Taking work home.
- Staying late or arriving early.
- Poor peer relationships.
- Blame line managers, colleagues or the organisation.
- Continual job moves.
- Depression, disaffection or defiance.
- Fear of censure.
- Ripple effect within peer staff.
- Polarisation of views.



However, stress may create an acknowledgement of need and the result may be a learning curve for all concerned.

How may an organisational framework reduce stress?

- Recruitment adjustments can provide confidence for job applicants.
- An amended job description 'levels the playing field'.
- An environment of acceptance of difference.
- Awareness across the organisation of the nature of disabilities.
- An understanding of the Equalities Act.
- Support of an individual's ownership and understanding of their needs.
- Specialist knowledge within the Human Resource Department.
 - to support individuals.
 - to support line managers.

- A clear chain of actions to support disclosure e.g. organisational awareness routes for assessment, mentoring.
- A re-framing for capability issues.
- Making “difference” a positive contribution to an organisation.
- A “whole organisation” cascaded approach.
- Clarification of responsibility of employer and employee.
- Listening and responding.
- H.R. awareness of too much or too little holiday or sickness leave being taken and finding out why.

How can reasonable adjustment help reduce stress?

- By providing a supportive environment.
- Creating good communication.
- Being responsive.
- Focusing on difficult tasks with specific strategies for solutions.
- Setting small goals.
- Being aware of individual need.
- Awareness of difference.
- Management support and concern for employees promotes a positive climate.
- Help groups, designated contact member of staff.
- Welfare support.
- Correct etiquette.

Case Study: Sandra

Sandra has worked in a care role for many years. For the past ten years she has been working on the night shift in a residential care home for adults with emotional difficulties.

Sandra is respected by all the other staff for her skills with the residents. She seems to have an empathy with all of them and somehow seems to anticipate what their mood is and when trouble is brewing.

Because of her obvious practical skills, Sandra was promoted to be in charge of a team of three at night.

She had always had difficulty with the process of writing. At school her writing was so untidy even she found it hard to read. She avoided ‘putting pen to paper’ and could just about manage a birthday card to relatives. For two years Sandra managed the increased responsibility through asking one of the others in the team to complete any paperwork that was required.

Then a change in management occurred at almost the same time that more detailed and extensive reporting was required. Sandra was directly responsible for the reports from the night shift. Each individual had a log which was to be maintained. There was an overall report to be completed each week as well as a quarterly report.

Sandra was told that she had to complete the paperwork as she was the responsible member of staff. At first she thought she could get help with this at home, but the records had to be kept on site for access and confidentiality. So Sandra stayed behind to complete the paperwork. She tried to make her writing as clear as possible.

Her new boss was unhappy about the standard of the reports and pressurised Sandra to improve the quality and provide more content. The difficulties made Sandra very stressed. She took a couple of files home to update them and was formally admonished. The stress became too much for her and she started to take odd days off work. Then she was off for two weeks. The doctor's note said she was suffering from stress.

It was at this point that the difficulty with writing became public. The Human Resources team organised an assessment for Sandra. The psychologist said that she had dyspraxia. After the characteristics of dyspraxia were explained to her, Sandra wept with relief.

The management put in place a tick-box system with forms for Sandra to complete for

each resident each night. When more extensive information was needed, Sandra used a Dictaphone which was listened to by the day shift supervisor and relevant notes were made on the file. Sandra also attended a literacy class with support for her dyspraxia so that she could increase the amount she could do on her own.

The major points of relief for her stress were:

- Recognising the special specific nature of her dyspraxic difficulties.
- Being told by her management that she was respected for her strengths and that they would work to bridge her difficulties.
- Understanding that her job was not at risk.
- Declaring her dyspraxic difference to the other staff and finding them helpful and practical about it.



Time Management Difficulties

What are time management difficulties?

When we are under pressure, juggling with many things to do, we need to sort our actions. However, some people have difficulty with managing their time effectively. We are all guilty of wanting to 'put things off until tomorrow' or saying, "I'll just have a cup of coffee before I..". If time is not managed effectively, individuals become inefficient and stressed.

People with hidden disabilities often leave things to the last moment and this can accelerate a creative surge and some brilliant work may be achieved. However, from the point of view of day to day management in the workplace this may not be satisfactory.

How time management difficulties can affect people in the work place.

- Work output may decrease.
- Causes stress.
- Causes undue pressure.
- Distractions in the office exacerbate the problem.
- Creates bad feeling.
- Interruptions intensify the problem e.g. people dropping by.
- Breakdown in communication.
- Organisational planning is jeopardized.
- When under pressure, people are more likely to mishear or not understand.
- Personal organisation structures break down.
- Goal posts are moved and people lose direction.

What adjustments can be made to help?

Difficulty coping with interruptions.

- Use of a Do Not Disturb sign on desk or door.
- When interrupted, the individual should pause and write down what he was doing for easy reference when resuming work.
- Doing one task at a time and finishing before starting another.
- Making calls rather than receiving them. When individual is leaving a message, key points should be decided on in advance.
- Being available some times but not at others. Sticking to a routine so that others know when the individual is available.
- Encourage the individual to be assertive with people.
- Use of body language to indicate that he individual does not want the other person to stay e.g. standing up when they enter their space.
- Discourage the individual from having a comfortable seat by his desk for colleagues to sit on.
- Provide an isolated desk for quiet work time.
- Encourage the individual to try saying, for example, "I'm sorry I cannot spare the time right now. I'm right in the middle of an important job. But I will be free at 10.30".

Difficulty planning the workload and the day

- Set a key daily objective. Write it down. Post it up. Keep to it.
- Encourage the use of a daily diary with a long term overview.
- Encourage the individual to leave enough time in his diary for unplanned tasks.
- Being realistic when planning is important.
- Blocking enough time in the diary for urgent and important tasks.
- Planning the day beforehand if possible will help.

- Allowing enough time in the morning for readjustment of plans in the light of post, emails etc.
- Get the individual to avoid blocking out 4 hours for a boring task - 45 minute slots are more realistic.
- If possible the most challenging work should be done when the individual is at their best (some people are better first thing in the morning, others in the early afternoon).
- Regularly used data such as addresses, telephone numbers, should be backed up.
- Encourage an efficient filing system so time is not wasted looking for papers for meetings etc.
 - Breaks should be used wisely. The individual should have lunch and reward themselves with breaks.
 - Staff could take turns in the office to have quiet times in a quiet place to complete urgent tasks.
 - A Do Not Disturb sign could be shared.
 - Encourage staff to take colleagues' calls when they are pressured.



Case Study: Ash

Ash was a recent graduate employed in a Social Services department.

Ash managed quite well at university with his flat mate, who was on the same course, providing him with prompts for when coursework was due and for lectures. Ash chose a number of his course options so that he was studying with his friend.

In the workplace, he found he was very much expected to manage his own workload. Ash had both long term cases to deal with and immediate crises when people telephoned in.

Ash missed meetings and deadlines. His manager became frustrated and felt that he did not recognise the importance of the work. On occasion he saw Ash doing routine tasks when an urgent report was required. Ash did not seem to have control of his workload. His 'piling system' was the joke of the office. His workmates knew that if they were away for a day or two, one of Ash's piles would migrate to their desk.

It all came to a head when Ash missed his quarterly review meeting as he had forgotten what the day was. One of the topics scheduled for review was timekeeping. Ash had little concept of time or planning. He

explained that he could not work out what the time was on an analogue clock and he couldn't tell how much time was left or had been taken on a digital one. He tried to keep a diary with appointments but he forgot to look at it. Ash also wrote appointments on Post-it notes and then lost them.

He explained that because he found it hard to work out how long a task should take (blaming lack of experience) he didn't know if he should start it immediately and, as it seemed to him that he had too much work anyway, he felt he might as well leave it until later.

Ash was introduced to an electronic diary system on his PC. This allowed him to put all his meetings into a structure and to set alarms for them. He was also introduced to the idea of a day book which would contain all his notes. This one book would travel with him everywhere. Ash was then helped to construct a To Do list. This was also on his computer and followed the principles of coding items as 'very important', 'important', etc. Every day a member of the administration team spent ten minutes with Ash revising his list, making sure items completed were deleted and others added. They also checked his email and his day book for appointments to be added to his diary.

After a while Ash took charge of his own diary and To Do list. He expanded the coding system to include urgency as well as importance. The process has worked and some days Ash is surprised at how much he has done.



Visual Differences

What are visual differences?

Many people wear glasses to rectify focusing problems. Other visual difficulties may not be so easily solved. Problems in eye/brain co-ordination may cause visual stress, especially in the work place where efficient vision is essential. Visual difficulties may be a feature of hidden disabilities and these difficulties need to be recognised and addressed.

The eyes and the brain work together to create vision. There is a great deal of research analysing the complexities of the way this works and sometimes doesn't work. Difficulties may occur due to 'mechanical' or optical problems.

An optician or behavioural optometrist should be able to identify these, and often provide some mechanical correction.

However if the difficulty is associated with how the brain interprets visual information it may need to be identified by a specialist teacher, psychologist or occupational therapist. It may be related to unresolved visual stress difficulties and may create difficulties in the workplace, which can often be resolved with simple solutions.

If there is any sudden visual difficulty further investigation is strongly recommended.

How can visual differences affect people in the work place?

- Blurring and/or double vision when reading.
- Tiredness or fatigue after close or intensive work.

- Headaches, eyestrain or nausea when reading.
- Eye rubbing or blinking with visual exertion.
- Short working spans.
- Poor concentration and distractibility.
- Closing or covering one eye whilst working.
- Colours may be seen in the text.
- Pattern, glare or grids may be seen in the text.
- Misaligned digits in number columns.
- Problems keeping place when reading, tendency to skip lines
- Need for a finger or marker to keep place.
- Excessive head movements whilst reading.
- Lack of comprehension whilst reading.
- Slow reading speed.
- Letter or number reversal or omission.
- Visual discomfort when reading large amounts.
- Misreading information.
- Poor recognition of precise shapes, colours, size.
- Difficulty in retaining shape in memory.
- Inability to visualise words.
- Bad letter formation and recognition.
- Visual transport problems i.e. difficulty when copying.
- Cannot tell that a word "looks wrong" and difficulty with proof reading.



- Discomfort from the glare of a monitor screen.

What adjustments can be made to help?

- Experiment with colour:
 - Transparent coloured overlays or glasses may reduce glare when reading.
 - Use cream or pastel paper to write on.
 - Provision of information printed onto cream or pastel paper.
 - Change background colours on PC.
- Use of a finger or ruler to help track along lines when reading.
- Occluding the non relevant text so information isn't too busy.
- Reading in natural light or with a muted bulb, avoiding glaring light.
- Individual could try sitting with the reading book or writing material at a 45° angle.
- Encourage regular breaks.
- Reading away from distraction, to help focus and concentration – a quiet room may help.

- Use of reading software on the computer.
- Provide verbal instructions rather than written ones.
- Provide memos to be placed on your voice mail.
- Highlighting key information in a different colour may help.
- Another employee could read to the individual or give a resume of information.

- Use of technological support like a reading pen (such as Quicktionary) or a reading software.
- Encourage the discussion of information with colleagues.
- Provide summaries and/or key points.
- Use of a dictaphone/tape recorder.
- Use of left justified text and clear font e.g. Arial, may help.
- Encourage the use of double spaced text.
- Auto Correct in Word can be cued to pick up regular spelling mistakes.
- Use of Proof Checking software (designed for people with dyslexia.)
- Reading text aloud may be helpful for some individuals.

See also the pages on Reading Difficulties and Concentration Difficulties.

Case Study: Maureen

Maureen had an assessment for her bad back and was provided with a special chair and keyboard. She continued to have difficulties and was becoming very tired while working during the day on her computer. Maureen suffered from regular headaches. She was diagnosed with dyspraxia at school, but felt that her spelling and reading were of an acceptable level. She had always been open about her area of difficulty.

Maureen worked at a 24 hour call centre and worked different shift patterns, which were arranged around the needs of her family. Specialists were called in to carry out an assessment because Maureen's speed of working and time away from work were causing her employers to question whether she was in an appropriate job.

When the specialists went to visit Maureen she was working with a large screen divided into 4 quadrants. She was required to transfer information as she spoke on the helpline from one quadrant to another. The specialists watched Maureen take several phone calls. She sat on the edge of her seat, leaning forward towards the screen.

All the information on the screen was in 10 pt font and Maureen found it hard to see the small text. Then she put data into the machine and moved information from one quadrant to another. Maureen did not sit correctly on the special chair because she was peering at the font. She said she often had headaches and text danced and blurred on screen. She had her eyes tested, but the optician said she did not need glasses.

The consultant suggested that the font was too small and the white glare of the screen was causing visual stress. It was arranged for Maureen to receive her information in a larger font size and the background colour on the screen was changed to make it more comfortable for her. The areas of the screen on which she was working were highlighted so that she could find her place more easily. When reading from paper text Maureen also found it useful to use a coloured overlay. Because the screen was easier to access, Maureen found her back improved. However, it was also suggested she had a break from the screen at regular intervals, which she did. Her work output and attendance improved. She was happier.



Writing Difficulties

What are writing difficulties?

Writing difficulties may be divided into different areas:

- Poor handwriting.
- Grammar, punctuation and spelling difficulties.
- Poor organisation of ideas.
- Inappropriate style or presentation.

How writing difficulties can affect people in the work place.

- Illegibility of handwriting.
- Speed of handwriting.
- Difficulties with minute taking.
- Taking down messages/instructions and being unable to read them back.
- Loss of credibility.
- Embarrassment.
- Confused relaying of ideas.

What adjustments can be made to help?

Difficulty when writing by hand.

- Ask someone else to handwrite for the individual.
- Use of forms or templates with lines and boxes to take down messages will help to give a clear structure of what and where the individual needs to write.
- Encourage the development of the individual's own style of clear shorthand to speed up minute/message taking.

- Use of a Franklin spell checker (phonic) or dictionary (if very weak use ACE dictionary).
- Where possible, the individual should use the phone rather than writing but keeping records of calls.
- Use of a dictaphone
- Where possible a computer should be used.
- Use of voice activated software.

Spelling and grammar errors

- Colleagues, friends or family could proof read work for the individual.
- If appropriate clerical support could be used.
- Use of a spell checker on the computer, dictionary or spell master.
- Use of a grammar reference book.
- Encourage the use of Word, Auto Correct and Auto Text
- Texthelp software on computer (proof reading programme with homonyms) may help.
- Use of voice activated software may help some individuals.
 - Spelling and grammar reminders in a notebook can sometimes help.
 - Encourage the individual to use a notebook with subject specific vocabulary and phrases.



- Encourage use of e-mail – less formal English is required than in a letter.
- The individual could dictate to another member of staff.
- Use of templates.
- Use of models of other people's work.
- Acronyms should be avoided unless the individual has a glossary.
- Encourage familiarity with 'office speak' or appropriate vocabulary.
- Keep the individual up-to-date with office acronyms.

Poor Organisation of Ideas.

- Empty pages or starting a document are often threatening.
- Encourage formation of ideas in the form most useful for the individual.
 - Spider diagrams.
 - Mind-maps.
 - Lists.
 - Talking it through.
 - Taking notes.
 - Getting an overview.
- Create a structure based on templates
- Use a consistent structured method e.g. WEEE **W**hat do you want to say - **E**xamples - **E**xplain - **E**valuate.
- Encourage the individual to take advice from those who are good at producing similar types of document – and to ask for help.

Case Study: Tony

Tony had few qualifications but had proved his ability in the workplace. He had good interpersonal skills and was well liked by colleagues. Senior management were impressed with his perception, his contributions in meetings and the way in which he dealt with customers. His abilities took him rapidly up the promotion scale until he became a manager for a large team.

In this new role Tony had to produce a large volume of reports. Soon he began to suffer from stress due to the pressure of his new job. Senior managers who had been impressed by Tony's verbal skills were shocked by his poor written skills and the lack of management reporting on his staff. Although popular with his team, Tony did not back up his personal interaction with written documentation, instruction and report writing. When he took minutes at meetings, the finished minutes did not reflect what had taken place. Consequently an undercurrent began to invade the relationships and the positive aspects of Tony's performance began to deteriorate. Tony began to stay late to do more paperwork and then he became unwell.

When challenged about his written work, Tony acknowledged to his senior manager that he had been diagnosed as dyspraxic while he was at school. This was largely why he had poor qualifications. Senior management felt challenged by Tony's performance. Some felt that he should have been asked to leave and others felt that his contribution was still worthwhile.

A specialist was asked to work with Tony to help him improve his written work.

Tony said that he either spent ages writing too much, which drew complaints about lack of focus, or writing too little, which meant that people complained that his reports were superficial. He never felt that anything he wrote reflected his true ability and he could not organise his ideas in a way that others found useful.

The specialist and Tony spent time analysing his thinking style and his approach to writing and spent several sessions, over weeks, on report writing skills. Templates were drawn up so that Tony could enter key information easily. The specialist showed Tony how to manage priority with “to do” lists and to link tasks into a well planned diary. In this way, Tony did not get behind with his reports.

Tony learned to talk to attendees before meetings to get an idea of issues people proposed to cover. He did a synopsis of these conversations so he had key information already written down and these provided a more comprehensive frame to his minutes at meetings. He asked staff to keep bullet point notes of things they achieved and had difficulty with. Then he held meetings with them to build up work profiles.

Technology was helpful and Tony benefited from a proof reading computer programme. He also had a mind-mapping programme to help him organise his thinking. Tony did well and his abilities and perception once more became the focus of his skill and he moved up the management ladder.



The creation of this material by the Dyspraxia Foundation has been financed by the Skills Funding Agency through the Adult Community Learning Fund managed by NIACE.

Copyright in this material is vested in the Crown but it is made freely available for others to use under the terms of the Open Government Licence.

Full details are available <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/>



Adult and Community Learning Fund



Dyspraxia Foundation
8 West Alley
Hitchin
Herts
SG5 1EG
Tel: 01462 455016
Email:
info@dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk

Key 4 Learning Ltd
Old Village Stores
Chedwoth
Cheltenham
Glos
GL54 4AA
Tel: 01285 720964
Email: office@key4learning.com