



New College  
of the Humanities

## **Dyslexia and Pre-lingual deafness**

### **Introduction**

Dyslexia can be regarded as an unusual balance of skills: a dyslexic person may be very gifted in some areas, but have incongruous weaknesses in others. Dyslexic people often think in a holistic, non-linear way that does not lend itself to the linear nature of words. Dyslexia is known to have a physical basis, and is characterised by a variety of symptoms, most of which stem from weakness in short-term memory.

### **Typical problems for students are:**

- having difficulty remembering and following complex instructions
- being slow at reading and misreading words
- having difficulty getting ideas down on paper in a structured form
- making errors in writing - omitting words or parts of words, transposing words or letters
- spelling - being unable to spell a word 'spoils the flow' and may restrict the vocabulary used
- handwriting - the handwriting process may be arduous and the script may be hard to read
- being unable to learn by rote (facts, names)

### **Pre-lingual deafness**

For any student that is pre-lingually deaf, tutors need to be aware of the impact that this disability can have on language development. Without hearing, the deaf person

develops language, both spoken and written, at a slower rate. Many words seem 'foreign' in written form, since (s)he has nothing auditory on which to base them. This often leads to similar difficulties with written English as those experienced by students with dyslexia:

- mis-reading words
- poor spelling and grammar
- having a limited vocabulary

Students with specific learning difficulties and those who are pre-lingually deaf are at considerable disadvantage in a text-based environment, in particular where writing is the medium of assessment. They have difficulty both with the expression of their ideas in written form and with the correct use of language. To remedy this, it is recommended that where possible, assessors award marks that reflect the candidate's understanding of the subject, rather than the level of her/his linguistic skills. However, it is not intended that academic rigour be sacrificed and, where marks are allocated for presentation or language, no consideration should be allowed.

Applying this guideline to all students is intended to help academic staff to:

- provide helpful feedback to students
- refer students who need help with the preparation of written work to the Student Wellbeing Coordinator for external referrals
- award grades that reflect knowledge, understanding and skills in the areas that are being assessed, rather than linguistic skills

### **Marking written work**

1. Unless the assessment is of language or presentation skills, a dyslexic person's written work should be marked for content - indications of subject knowledge and skills. It may be easier to assess a dyslexic student's work for ideas, understanding and knowledge if you read it quickly. This is because dyslexics tend to think holistically, in a non-verbal way. Consequently their work is often disordered, with poor sentence structure, spelling and punctuation.

2. Comments will be more useful if they indicate what the student has done well, rather than state shortcomings. Dyslexics and those that are pre-lingually deaf are

often unable to see their mistakes and adverse criticism is unlikely to help. Positive feedback will enable the student to build on his/her strengths.

3. Comments will be most effective if they give straight-forward guidance in full sentences, and are easily legible. Dyslexics find it hard to read between the lines. Also, those with weak language skills may not recognise abbreviations and may be unable to decipher handwriting.

4. If you choose to ignore language errors, let the student know that you are doing so. The student might interpret the absence of corrections as indicating a significant improvement in his/her writing skills.

5. If you do correct written language, explain why the correction is better. You cannot and should not correct everything. If possible, ask the student what is helpful.

6 If you feel that the written language or structure is seriously poor then advise the student to get help from a specialist tutor via an external referral with the Student Wellbeing Coordinator.

Staff should already be aware of students with disabilities, via a Highrise notification. Please check the student's page for any notes added by the Student Wellbeing Coordinator. If you cannot see any documentation for a disability, and you have concerns about the student, please contact the Student Wellbeing Coordinator to request further information.

### **Suggestions for an accessible curriculum**

- Provide material in electronic form and in advance. This enables students to access it in their preferred format e.g. speech output, large font
- Provide summaries in bullet-point form
- Encourage use of audio recording devices
- Employ a variety of teaching methods supported by written and audio visual materials
- When designing assessments think of reasonable alternative methods that will allow all students to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes
- Where there are time constrained assessments during the year, remember that disabled students may need the same provision as for formal

examinations, e.g. additional time, use of PC. Discuss with individual students what provision is appropriate

- If you are teaching deaf students, bear in mind that they will find watching a speaker and looking at information on a screen difficult. Providing written, back-up notes could be a solution to this
- Deaf students will need a clear view of the person speaking, ensure that you face them whilst talking to them and in group discussions ensure that only one person speaks at a time
- Use a microphone where induction loops are fitted so that anyone with a hearing aid can benefit

### **Texts suitable for dyslexic students**

Printed materials:

- 12 point minimum; a clear, sans serif font
- Avoid italics and underlining
- Avoid use of upper case for whole words or sentences
- Left-justify only
- Avoid dense blocks of text - use headings, short paragraphs, line spacing and wide margins to break up text
- Use bullet points where possible
- Check the print quality of any photocopies used - poor quality presents more difficulties to those for whom reading is already difficult

PowerPoint slides:

- Use a plain (non-white) background
- Check with your student(s) that colours are suitable
- Maximum of 6 lines per slide (excluding title) with 6 words per line