

# Dyslexic Advantage

## PREMIUM MAGAZINE



### TAMING THE MONKEY MIND

- GRIT AND RESILIENCE
- POOR LONG TERM OUTCOMES
- READING RECOVERY
- ROGUE HERO SAS FOUNDER  
DAVID STIRLING
- MANAGING MATH
- PAUSING WHILE WRITING



**Dyslexic Advantage** is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization and one of the world's largest online communities for dyslexia.

Our mission is to transform the way dyslexic people are understood, educated, and employed by identifying and using strengths that are the core features of the Dyslexic Mind.

Dear Friends,

Happy June! This issue is dedicated to these wonderful active minds that help make the world be such an interesting place.

Fernette

Link for this issue on Joomag: <https://joom.ag/6EWd>  
password: activemind33

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# TAMING THE MONKEY MIND

The idea of having a "monkey mind", jumping around from one thought to another dates back centuries. It's a term that can be applied to restless poorly controlled thought. We are all susceptible to "monkey mind" when our minds are excited, stressed, worried, or tired, but for some, the monkey mind is a frequent state of mind and learning to control it and harness its powers is an important life task.

Many dyslexic strengths - like curiosity, imagination, multi-perspective thinking, can also lead to maladaptive behaviors - like susceptibility to distraction or trouble persisting at particular goals - depending what is demanded at the time.

What is becoming increasingly clear as scientist make progress in understanding how creative minds work - is that creativity at its most productive is a conductor leading a symphony orchestra. At times, some parts of the mind should come under creative control, while at others let loose to show their full virtuosity.

The task then for us who want to know best how to channel our monkey minds - or for others have more a guiding or teaching role - is to know how to channel the best without abandoning control.

## WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO DISTRACTION AND OVEREXCITABILITY IN DYSLEXIC MINDS

There is an extensive literature about wider spatial attention in dyslexics people vs. non-dyslexics (for example **Geiger, et al. 2008**). Also, some dyslexic strengths in creative problem solving may come from more exploratory behaviors ([Taylor, 2022](#); [Zhou et al., 2021](#)), more productive daydreaming and mindwandering (Dyslexic Advantage), wider associations (divergent thinking) ([Everatt, 1999](#)), and at least some aspects of superior incidental memory ([Attree et al., 2009](#)). What this means is as a group, dyslexic people may notice and discover more, leading to positives in terms of new and additional bits of information, but also negatives in terms of information overload and more potential sources of distraction.

As a group, gifted and dyslexic people may be "twice-blessed". Giftedness alone can be associated with information overload as well as overexcitabilities that also involve perceptual burdens (for review, [Mendaglio and Tillier, 2006](#)).

## SUCCESSFUL CREATIVITY REQUIRES CONTROLLED ATTENTION AND INATTENTION

Frith and colleagues (2020) have a helpful recent review about "creativity under control". Some strategic defocusing may be necessary to allow the mind to access unusual or remotely associated ideas and broaden the search for knowledge or conceptualizations. Mind wandering and daydreaming can also be useful in an incubation period of creative problem solving to create a setting where sensations and thoughts can be experienced without judgment.

Focused attention can be valuable for holding information in mind and getting through problem solving steps on the way to a final problem solving goal. Focus also may serve to organize and prioritize information, inhibiting non-relevant information and distractions to allow problems to be solved. Focused attention can also be involved with guiding memory search and seeking out novel ideas over conventional solutions.

What does not help is lack of attention to follow a problem from beginning to end or susceptibility to distractions and rabbit trails that take you away from the problem you're trying to solve.



# COGNITION



## THE MONKEY MIND WHILE LEARNING AND SOLVING PROBLEMS

If you were to look at popular psychology, business, or cultural solutions to taming "monkey mind" and you're likely to find suggestions about meditation, mindfulness, and self-calming, but in a bigger picture, it's also helpful to see the larger context of one is trying to do and what the situation is at the moment.

But when considering dyslexic people in particular, it's also important to remember the general bias for experiential learning, which also brings with it a lot of information that places extra demands on attention and executive function.

## IMPROVING SUSTAINED FOCUS AND ATTENTIONAL CONTROL

**Environment:** optimize the environment; reduce distractions, stress, and hurry.

**Health Self-check:** identify patterns of inattention and loss of focus. Are there health, sleep, emotional, or situational factors affecting attention?

**Due to Learning Challenges?** Could poor persistence at tasks be due to unrecognized learning difficulties? Would accommodations, modifications, or different form of instruction be helpful?

**Are Interest and Motivation Engaged?** Could poor persistence be due to lack of interest or motivation? Are there outlets for interests, strengths that could support self-efficacy and positive esteem?

**Provide Opportunities for More 'Flow':** Are there activities that create flow? Flow is a cognitive state where a person becomes completely immersed and focused, losing a sense of time. Find ways to do more of that activity - it will improve focus and attentional control.

Focus and attentional control can be trained like building up muscles.

For students, having some success in a hobby, subject, or talent can provide an organic way to develop sustained focus and attentional control. Project-based learning lends itself to developing these skills as well - but students may need scaffolding to organize and narrow their ideas (post-it notes, cards, graphic organizers).

Adults, improved focus and attentional control can always be deepened and extended. [Mindfulness](#), [suppressing worry](#), and [spending more time in nature](#) can all improve focus and well being.

As with suggestions for children, the first step is finding some activity which is satisfying and enjoyable. It can be inside or outside of work. Devoting time to it, reflecting on how you approach problems or tasks, and organizing and prioritizing information will all improve these skills for other activities in the future.

## UNDERSTANDING ATTENTION, WORKING MEMORY, DYSLEXIA, AND CREATIVE MINDS

An important thing to understand about attention, working memory, and dyslexia is that there are trade-offs for having certain attentional patterns: the typical pattern for dyslexic people is to have more diffuse attention and lower working memory compared to non-dyslexics.

Diffuse attention is susceptible to weaker focus and greater distractibility, but it also correlates with higher creative achievement. Low working memory can put individuals at a disadvantage in terms of analytical problems solving, but may also have an advantage in insight-based solutions and cognitive flexibility while problem solving (the positives of a monkey mind) (for more on this, [here](#), and [here](#)).

There are some great positives that come with dyslexic thinking; the better you know yourself, the better you can leverage your gifts.

# MANAGING TOO MUCH INFORMATION IN MATH WITH CARD SORTS AND CATEGORIES

Too often math classes start off with a lot of math problem-solving that can result in students in getting lost. Sometimes the problem is that math explanations overload working memory; other times, students struggle because they can't listen for understanding at the same time they are trying to take notes, leaving them to figure out what was being taught in math after they get home.

## THE SEA OF MATH PROBLEMS

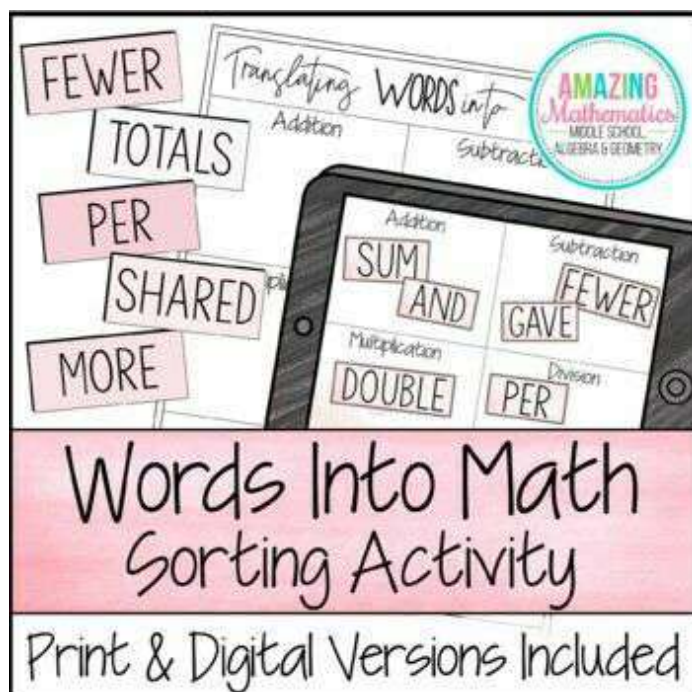
Often students may find themselves in a sea of math problems. They may have followed the reasoning when concepts were first introduced, but quickly find themselves drowning in dozens and dozens of problems that confuse them in terms of the different ways they are solved.

## CARD SORTS FOR MATH EXAMPLES AND NEW VOCABULARY

As card sorts can be used for structured literacy and recognizing phoneme patterns (example [HERE](#), Words Their Way), word sorts can also be used for all sorts of purposes in math.

For example --->

From [Amazing Mathematics](#) (Teachers Paying Teachers)





The [Math Equals Love](#) blog has other great examples of card sorts that can be used for math:

Expression	Meaning	Equivalent Expression	Value
$-2^4$	opposite of 2 to the 4th power	$-(2 \cdot 2 \cdot 2 \cdot 2)$	-16
$(-2)^4$	-2 to the 4th power	$(-2)(-2)(-2)(-2)$	16
$-(2)^4$	opposite of 2 to the 4th power	$-(2 \cdot 2 \cdot 2 \cdot 2)$	-16
$-(-2)^4$	opposite of -2 to the 4th power	$-((-2)(-2)(-2)(-2))$	-16

negative inside parentheses = negative      negative without parentheses: OPPOSITE

EX2 I can use the order of operations to simplify expressions.

I think in the future, I would make this activity into some sort of card sort instead. I also wish I would have had a place where students formally recorded the difference between a negative inside parentheses and a negative without parentheses. I did a better job of this with some of my classes than others.

[Math Giraffe](#)'s card sorts for quadratic equations.

The idea behind all these card sorts is to reinforce the concepts and patterns students need to learn before getting lost in the details of individual problem-solving. Such an approach also helps dysgraphic students who will struggle with working through written problems.

Discriminant  $b^2 - 4ac$

If the discriminant is zero, then there is one real root.

$9x^2 - 6x + 1 = 0 \quad +4 = 0$

**One Real Root**

If the discriminant is positive, then there are two real roots.

$-5x^2 + 8x = 0$

**Two Real Roots**

If the discriminant is negative, then there are no real roots (only imaginary).

$3x^2 - 5x$

**No Real Roots**

From [Ashleigh's Educational Journey](#):

# TYPES OF Word Problems

Equal Groups		
Product Unknown $3 \times 5 = ?$	Group Size Unknown $3 \times ? = 15$ , $15 \div 3 = ?$	Number of Groups Unknown $? \times 5 = 15$ , $15 \div 5 = ?$
There are three boxes with five coins in each box. How many coins are there in all?	There are 15 coins shared equally into three boxes. How many coins are in each box?	There are 15 coins to be placed five to a box. How many boxes are needed?
Arrays		
Product Unknown $6 \times 4 = ?$	Group Size Unknown $6 \times ? = 24$ , $24 \div 6 = ?$	Number of Groups Unknown $? \times 4 = 24$ , $24 \div 4 = ?$
There were six rows of desks with four desks in each row. How many desks were there?	If 24 desks were arranged into six equal rows, how many desks will be in each row?	If 24 desks were arranged into equal rows of four, how many rows were there?
Comparing Problems		
Product Unknown $3 \times 4 = ?$	Group Size Unknown $3 \times ? = 12$ , $12 \div 3 = ?$	Number of Groups Unknown $? \times 3 = 12$ , $12 \div 3 = ?$
Jonah ran four miles. Treasure ran three times as many miles as Jonah. How far did Treasure run?	Jonah and Treasure ran 12 miles. Treasure ran three times as far as Jonah. How far did Jonah run?	Jonah and Treasure ran 12 miles. Jonah ran four miles, and Treasure ran three times as many miles as Jonah. How far did Treasure run?

From the [IRIS Center at Vanderbilt](#):



## Research Shows

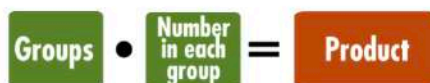
- Students with mathematical difficulties and disabilities struggle more than their peers when solving word problems.  
(Stevens & Powell, 2016; Jitendra et al., 2015; Fuchs et al., 2010)
- Schema instruction—explicit instruction in identifying word problem types, representing them correctly, and using an effective method for solving them—has been found to be effective among students with mathematical difficulties and disabilities.  
(Jitendra et al., 2016; Jitendra et al., 2015; Jitendra et al., 2009; Montague & Dietz, 2009; Fuchs et al., 2010)
- Teaching students how to solve word problems by identifying word problem types is more effective than teaching them only to identify key words (e.g., “altogether,” “difference”).  
(Jitendra, Griffin, Deatline-Buchman, & Szczesniak, 2007)

At right is an example of an equal groups problem.

Allow students to work “open book” with a correct answer in view until they have learned the patterns well.

### Description

- Involves multiplying or dividing groups where there is an equal number in each group.
- Students might solve for any unknown in the equation.
- Can be used with a variety of types of numbers (e.g., whole, fractions, decimals).
- Students often encounter these types of word problems on standardized tests during 3rd and 4th grades and on into middle school.



### Examples

*Example 1:* Tara has 6 bags of oranges. There are 4 oranges in each bag. How many oranges does Tara have?

Solution equation:  $6 \cdot 4 = \square$

*Example 2:* Matthew has 20 comic books. His bookshelf has 5 shelves. He wants to put an equal number of comic books on each shelf. How many comic books will he put on each shelf?

Solution equation:  $5 \cdot \square = 20$

Breaking down math work in ways such as this minimize the demands on working memory and increase the likelihood of success for all students.

# A DYSLEXIC'S GUIDE TO WRITING



"We have so many tools to take care of the spelling, but not the tools to bring a fresh and new perspective to the world. Focus on your voice and your message, and the rest will follow." - Tess Gadd

Tess Gadd is an interface designer based in Cape Town who also writes a [popular blog](#) on Medium. She shared three strategies she uses to overcome challenges with writing.

## 1. PROOFREADING TOOLS

"Enter [Grammarly](#). I have been using the pro version for a year now, and it has made such a difference to my writing. Not only does it pick up mistakes, but it is also improves my ability to edit and proofread my own work."

## 2. READING TOP TO BOTTOM AND BOTTOM TOP

"When reviewing my article structure, I will read from top to bottom. Then when checking to see that my individual sentences make sense, I read from bottom to top, sentence by sentence. This helps me catch mistakes that Grammarly may have missed, or arguments that don't make sense."

## 3. FOCUS ON YOUR WRITERS VOICE

"Failed school assignments, confused friends on WhatsApp, giggling colleagues in boardrooms while you write on the whiteboard: as a dyslexic, your writing confidence would have undoubtedly been knocked quite a lot in your life. It is rather unfortunate that people link one's ability to spell correctly with one's intelligence....If a writer were just someone who could write cohesive sentences and never make spelling mistakes, it would be a pretty dull field, wouldn't it? There are AIs that can happily write perfectly structured sentences and scripts





## DYSLEXIA FOR TEACHERS ONLINE COURSE

### For General Classroom Teachers

How Dyslexia Presents

What Good Remediation Looks Like

- » Evidence-Based Strategies that Work
- » Ways to Support with Accommodations
- » Gifted, ELL, Social Emotional & more!

### CLOCK HOURS & GRADUATE CREDITS



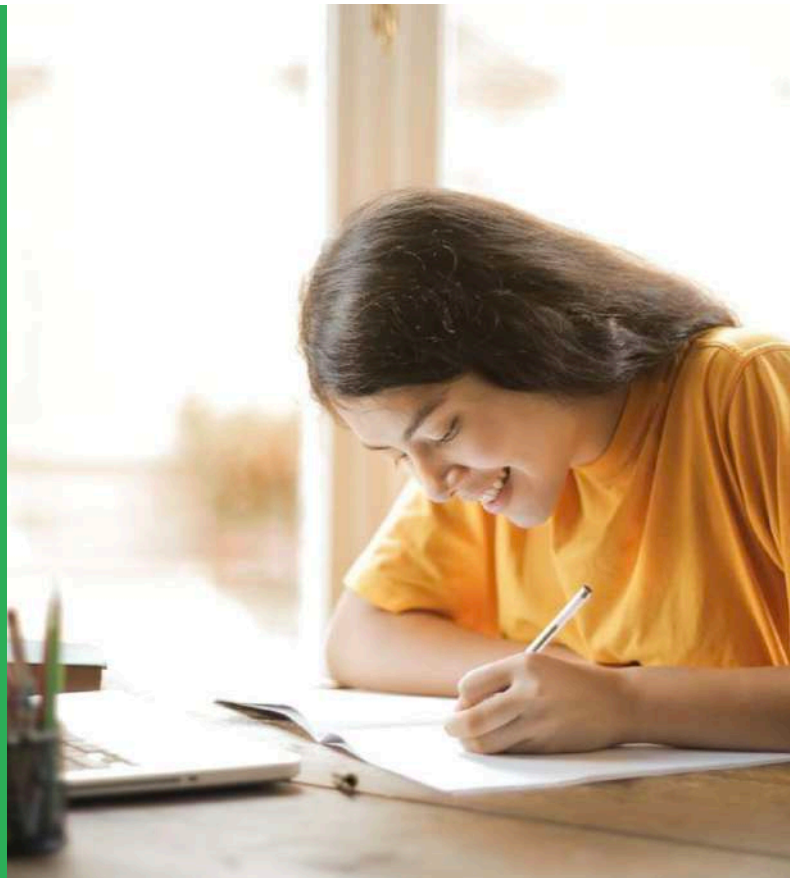
Dyslexic Advantage &  
Seattle Pacific University

## HOMESCHOOLING DYSLEXIA ONLINE

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groups

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Membership and  
Q & A Forum

**Reading, Writing,  
Math, Technology**





## INSPIRATION

with only a few prompts. We have so many tools to take care of the spelling, but not the tools to bring a fresh and new perspective to the world. Focus on your voice and your message, and the rest will follow."

### WHAT IS AN INTERFACE DESIGNER?

It's a person who designs all the visual elements and screens that people will interact with when they interact with digital devices - like phones, tablets, or desktop computers. I have heard that user design is a great job for dyslexics. Good design for dyslexics is often good design for everyone - uncluttered, intuitive, and beautiful.

As an example of what Tess does and curates, check out her [post](#) on the varieties of multimedia-based learning experiences.

She has a wide variety of suggestions on how learning can be made more engaging.

For instance, scrolling websites that allow viewers to uncover content at their own pace. In the website below, scrolling allows you to see creatures that live at greater ocean depths (<https://neal.fun/deep-sea/>)

The image above is an example that Tess shares about image juxtaposition. By moving the slider back and forth, viewers can look at the impact of flooding (original images [here](#)).

At right is a clickable interactive simulation designed to educate about color vision. By adjusting different sliders we can see how perception changes with different colors.

Visit the actual simulation [here](#).

What an important and creative job to improve education!

# POOR OUTCOMES FOR READING RECOVERY

**"Initial gains from first-grade intervention didn't last and kids performed worse in third and fourth grade..."**

Over 2 million students in the US have been taught reading with based Reading Recovery, a short-term intervention program that uses pull-out one-to-one tutoring to first grade students. It was one of the few programs supported by the What Works Clearing House to improve general achievement (see report [here](#) - link goes to a public google drive which contains the report).

However, **new data** suggests that at long-term following, students who received Reading Recovery performed worse than their peers by the 3rd and 4th grades:

## Conclusions

- **Long-term impact estimates were significant and negative**
  - This suggests that Reading Recovery students who scored just below the OS cutscores had 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade state test scores that were about .18 to .31 standard deviations below the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade scores of students just above the OS cutscore that did not participate in Reading Recovery.
- **Impact estimates were consistent across all models and estimation techniques**
- **RD validity checks did not reveal any problems with the model**
- **Moderation analyses were largely insignificant**
  - Only one model suggested that negative impacts might be smaller, but not positive, in schools with lower baseline achievement.

The researchers at the University of Delaware gave possible reasons for negative results:

## Some Potential Explanations of the Negative Results

- **Hypothesis 1:** Reading Recovery produces large impacts on early literacy measures, but it does not translate to skills needed for continued success in later grades.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Reading Recovery produces large impacts on early literacy measures, but these gains are lost when students do not receive sufficient intervention in later grades (>40% of RR students had no additional intervention in 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade).
- **Hypothesis 3:** Given that students are often re-assigned to different experiences based on current performance (i.e., future treatment assignment is negatively correlated with prior treatment assignment), it may be inevitable that impacts of any intervention will be washed out, or reversed, by subsequent experiences (e.g., different supports, classroom instruction, intervention).

Of note, Reading Recovery had received \$55 million dollars to perform this scale-up study. It involved 1400 schools and 80,000 students.

Central to the Reading Recovery program is the idea of cues to make educated guesses at what a word could be (using context, syntax, or graphic cues, for instance), rather than learning how to decode. For more background as to the history and critique of this approach read [this article](#) from APM reports.

Now Reading Recovery has long stated that it also covers the five essential elements of reading instruction (phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension), but the intervention may be too brief or shallow to impact reading from 1st to 3rd or 4th grade.

## READING

Their research also provides a cautionary look at which programs are used to intervene with struggling readers:

<b>Table 1a: Prevalence of Common Interventions</b> <i>(in RR &amp; Control for Grade 2 Across All Cohorts)</i>						
Intervention	RR			Control		
	<i>n</i>	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	<i>N</i>	%
Guided Reading with Leveled Books	2789	7044	39.6	827	2475	33.4
Leveled Literacy Intervention	1809	7044	25.7	404	2475	16.3
Other Reading Interventions	911	7044	12.9	263	2475	10.6
SPED Services for Reading	519	6627	7.8	57	2308	2.5
Comprehensive Intervention Model	763	7044	10.8	173	2475	7.0
Lexia Reading	274	7044	3.9	67	2475	2.7
Read Aloud Small Group Curriculum	216	7044	3.1	62	2475	2.5
Orton Gillingham	95	7044	1.3	25	2475	1.0
Read Naturally	83	7044	1.2	14	2475	0.6
Imagine Learning	89	7044	1.3	26	2475	1.1

Wow - it looks as if the most common ways schools intervene is to just use guided reading with leveled books. No wonder so many dyslexic students fail to read in the public schools system!

Lexia comes in at 4%, "Orton Gillingham" and Wilson Reading, 1%, and Language! at 0.1%.

It would be interesting to see a comparison of curricula most often used at established dyslexia private schools.



**Table 1b: Prevalence of Common Interventions**  
(in RR & Control for Grade 2 Across All Cohorts)

Intervention	RR			Control		
	<i>n</i>	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	<i>N</i>	%
Fundations	123	7044	1.7	41	2475	1.7
Wilson Reading System	70	7044	1.0	3	2475	0.1
Reading Mastery	52	7044	0.7	15	2475	0.6
Path to Reading Excellence in School Sites	25	7044	0.4	10	2475	0.4
Kentucky ESS	19	7044	0.3	13	2475	0.5
Read 180	9	7044	0.1	2	2475	0.1
Reading Plus	5	7044	0.1	1	2475	0.0
Fast ForWord	32	7044	0.5	2	2475	0.1
SRA Corrective Reading	10	7044	0.1	6	2475	0.2
SuccessMaker	32	7044	0.5	11	2475	0.4
LANGUAGE!	4	7044	0.1	0	2475	0.0

With all the emphasis on early identification and intervention, this longitudinal study provides important cautionary information. Likely, many students do not receive appropriate remediation. It's easy to imagine thousands of children being tracked into low-level books and never given a strategy to decode words. Few might have any hope of becoming proficient fluent readers, unless they happened to receive appropriate intervention later through another school or tutoring.

Many questions could be asked after this study. I wonder if the instruction to guess at meaning in the early years result in their missing specific decoding intervention that could have helped in 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades?

Hopefully the ongoing wave of dyslexia laws and teacher training will change the status quo here in the US. Do be vigilant about the need to continue to remediate as students get older. Words and sentence structure get much more complex and additional instruction may be necessary to set them up for higher education if they choose it.



## PAUSING WHILE WRITING

There are many reasons why students may pause while writing, but more if students are also dyslexic.

Those who remember their thoughts and experiences as nonverbal sensations will need extra steps to put their knowledge and understanding into words. Dysgraphic students will have difficulty writing and those with small working memories, may overload with all the work required for getting ideas in their head down on the page.

### A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE WRITING PROCESS

When Brock and I were testing students, our battery for comprehensive testing included the timed writing of the lower case alphabet, sentence and symbol copy (the latter from the Coding subtests of the WISC), sentence combining, spelling test, descriptive writing of a picture, then 10 minute writing to a question prompt. If a student had significant fine motor difficulties, we might refer them to a pediatric occupational therapist.

As it turns out, how students perform on these tests can tell you a lot about what makes writing difficult (it can also qualify them for extra time as an accommodation).

## ALPHABET

First, the alphabet. Many people might expect that alphabet writing is a task for young children, but difficulties in timed alphabet writing were quite a sensitive test for picking up dyslexia and dysgraphia.

It's important to be timed because when older students (even adults) rush, then errors happen...like the wrong letter comes out.

Timed alphabet writing also puts pressure on sequential memory so sometimes you'll see college students substitute a "g" for where a "j" should be, a reversal error, or omission. By looking at irregular shapes and sizes, you can also identify students with impaired letter writing automaticity. These students will be especially susceptible to working memory overload and so-called "careless mistakes", but they aren't careless...they are due to working memory overload and typically dysgraphia. Learn more (including some norms) [here](#).

## SENTENCE AND SYMBOL COPY

Watching a student copy a sentence can be enlightening. Students with dyspraxia or fine motor difficulties will struggle with this, but also those who cannot visualize letters (sometimes referred to as eidetic dysgraphia). Those in the latter group may copy sentences well, but struggle with writing to dictation.

But you can also observe how often students look up at the model while copying. Students who have a good visual word form memory look up every 2-3 words, while those with very poor visual word form memories (usually due to dyslexia) may look up every letter! These are the students who will usually struggle greatly with spelling.

When you have a student who looks up every letter while copying, it tells you that it is almost pointless just having students copy sentences or write spelling words to memorize them. They are copying letter by letter - rather than taking in the whole word at once. Better to have them develop verbal mnemonics or see if repeating the spellings aloud (auditory memory) are better ways to learn words. Symbol copying will also confirm difficulties with writing automaticity as well as general speed of pencil tasks (writing, doing math, etc.).

## WRITING

### SENTENCE COMBINING

Sentence combining is a helpful thing to test because many struggling writers need to be taught explicitly about sentence combining because syntax is not picked up through reading complex text. Sometimes a weakness in advanced syntax can frustrate dyslexic writers who want to say much more than knowledge of syntax allows. Once taught explicitly with examples, students may understand it quickly, then incorporating advanced syntax in their writing.

If an older student seems to have an immature writing style using only short declarative sentences, she or he may benefit from work with sentence structure - including sentence combining and perhaps diagramming. Learn more about sentence combining and structure [here](#) from Intervention Central.

### SPELLING

Studies of dyslexic students show more frequent pauses when writing because of difficulty knowing which words to spell (for instance [here](#)). Students may 'dumb down' their writing trying to choose words that they are more certain they will know are spelled correctly, but as a result, give the impression to others that their thinking is 'simple'.

As mentioned previously, watching a student copy sentences can give you an idea what their visual span is for spelling words. Brock and I have very different visual spans. If I look at a long word printed as a large font size like

"**kindergarten**", I can focus on the "r" and see all the letters in the word, while Brock says if he focuses on the "r", he can't see what the entire word is.

In my family, lots of us won spelling bees while growing up without studying, whereas Brock has many family members who are dyslexic and make frequent spelling mistakes if they don't use spellcheck.

Once out of school, the ability to write in straightforward prose can be an asset; but before then, simplifying your words and having a tendency to use few words underestimates your knowledge and intelligence. For all these reasons, we are enthusiastic proponents of students writing with assistive technology. This might be using [Grammarly](#) or [Google](#) or whatever default spelling assistant is on a phone, tablet, or computer.

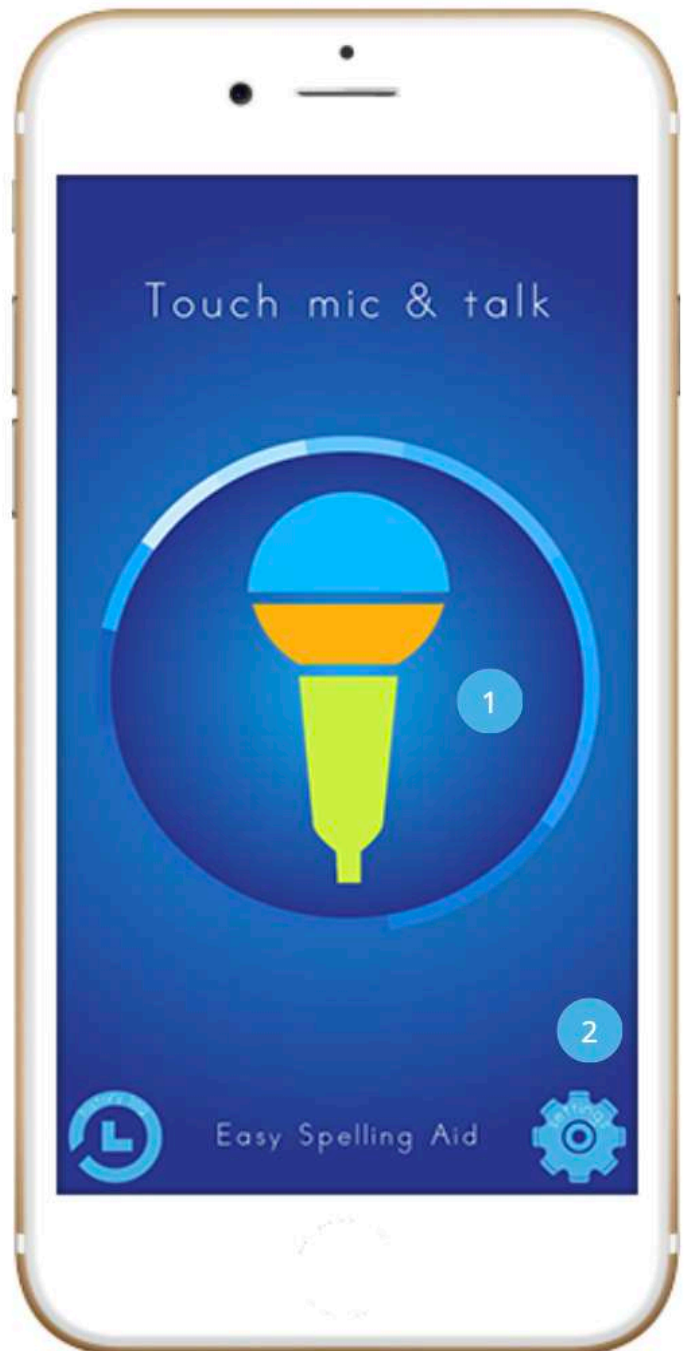
For a very simple app word look up, some like [Easy Spelling Aid](#) which also translates for English Language Learners. Say the word and get the correct spelling. The app also seems tuned to recognizing young voices.

It's available for [Apple](#), [Android](#), and other platforms for \$7.99.

Sometimes teachers allow students to take work home to finish, but then when the longer piece comes back, teachers don't know how much of it could have been written by a parent or sibling. It's much better to have them writing with their classmates. The app can be used with students writing by hand or working on a chromebook, tablet, or laptop.

## DESCRIBING A PICTURE

One reason we like including at least a brief (5-10min) picture description activity is because students can always write something. Sometimes students are completely blocked with a verbal prompt, but if there's a picture with something interesting (you can use one of those "Find What's Wrong with This Picture" pictures (example [here](#)). Students may have to try to use words that they don't know how to spell and it can help get an estimate of every day phonemic and sight word spelling skills. Syntax difficulties may also be noticed if students don't use any sentences with clauses.





## WRITING

### WRITING TO A WRITTEN PROMPT

Finally, writing to a written prompt is the most difficult and the writing that is asked of students day in and day out. There are many standardized tests of writing that never ask students to write, and as a result, students can get high scores in "writing", but struggling with writing a single paragraph in 15 minutes.

Writing to an open-ended prompt can be a struggle for creative dyslexic students with immature executive function networks. Open-ended prompts are the most difficult because they struggle knowing where to start. If students are able to get something down in response to written prompts, then you'll be able to assess all the previous subskills, but also examine executive function and organization.

If students struggle both with narrowing topics and elaborating, then give them practice at these activities without having them write entire essays each time.

For instance, collect together statements that support a paragraph on "why dogs are better than cats" or something else and have the student generate a topic statement based on supporting statements. Diane Hanbury King's [Writing Skills](#) books have practice activities such as these. After topic sentences are mastered, then students can practice making supporting sentences when they are given the topic. Dysgraphic students should be allowed to answer verbally and not write out all the words.

Another activity that breaks the process down would be selecting topic and supporting sentences in model essays like the activity using an approach like seen on the opposite page.

Some people may dislike the step-by-step templates used to create essays because of their simplicity and predictability, but these can be a godsend to struggling writers who may have trouble getting any information down on a page.

## Five-Paragraph Expository Essay Model

Essay Title	My Dog, Romeo
<p><b>Paragraph 1: The Introduction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Topic Sentence (Main Idea for your paper)</li> <li>• Subtopic Sentence (Reason #1 to support Topic)</li> <li>• Subtopic Sentence (Reason #2 to support Topic)</li> <li>• Subtopic Sentence (Reason #3 to support Topic)</li> <li>• Concluding Sentence that restates the Main Idea</li> </ul>	<p><b>My dog, Romeo, is the best pet anyone could have. He is beautiful and easy to care for. Playing with him is lots of fun. He always takes care of me. There isn't a better pet anywhere.</b></p>
<p><b>Paragraph 2: Reason #1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restate Subtopic Sentence (from the Introduction)</li> <li>• 3 examples/details that support your Subtopic</li> <li>• Concluding Sentence that restates Reason #1</li> </ul>	<p>Romeo is a beautiful tricolor Sheltie. He is mostly black with white and a bit of brown. Caring for him is easy because I simply have to make sure he has fresh water and food every day. I exercise him by throwing his toys. Romeo is a good pet because he is nice looking and doesn't require much care.</p>
<p><b>Paragraph 3: Reason #2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restate Subtopic Sentence (from the Introduction)</li> <li>• 3 examples/details that support your Subtopic</li> <li>• Concluding Sentence that restates Reason #2</li> </ul>	<p>Romeo is lots of fun to play with. He loves to play catch. He follows me around the house with a toy and drops it on my foot so I will kick it. He can catch just about anything, but his favorite is chasing a Frisbee. I really have fun playing with Romeo.</p>
<p><b>Paragraph 4: Reason #3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restate Subtopic Sentence (from the Introduction)</li> <li>• 3 examples/details that support your Subtopic</li> <li>• Concluding Sentence that restates Reason #3</li> </ul>	<p>Romeo takes care of me. He always follows me when I leave a room. When I am sitting on the couch, he plops down right beside me. When we are outside in the woods, he always makes sure that I keep up with the rest of the family. He always watches out for me.</p>
<p><b>Paragraph 5: Conclusion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restate Topic Sentence (Main Idea for your paper)</li> <li>• Summary Sentence for Reason #1 (Subtopic)</li> <li>• Summary Sentence for Reason #2 (Subtopic)</li> <li>• Summary Sentence for Reason #3 (Subtopic)</li> <li>• Concluding Sentence that restates the Main Topic &amp; includes your opinion</li> </ul>	<p>As you can see, Romeo is a great pet. I am proud of him, and he doesn't require much care. Playing with him is always enjoyable. He watches over me and keeps me safe. Romeo is absolutely the best pet anyone could ever have!</p>

*\*\*\*Remember that after you have your ideas down in this format, you can make your writing stronger by combining sentences, varying sentence structure, adding figurative language, and using a thesaurus to locate powerful words.*

# ROGUE HERO: MASTERMIND OF THE SPECIAL AIR SERVICE, DAVID STIRLING

**"The boy Stirling is quite mad, quite, quite mad.  
However, in a war there is often a place for mad people."  
- General Bernard Montgomery**

A recent documentary on the founding of the British Special Air Service mentioned that the unconventional mastermind was, in fact, dyslexic.

David Stirling has a very non-linear and unpredictable start to his adult life. He started at Cambridge, but was thrown out in his first year because of a variety of poor performances and vices including gambling. He tried to make his way as an architect, then artist, then became interested in the possibility of becoming a mountaineer and reservist in the Scots Guards.

David was in America working as a cowboy when the World War II began. He returned home and rejoined the Scots Guards, but initially found the military didn't agree with him. He found regimental discipline tedious. A chance discussion with a fellow soldier almost ended his life prematurely when he decided to make a parachute jump in the Middle East (the first ever attempt to do so), but his parachute got caught on part of the plane and he suffered a severe spinal injury.

Later he would credit that time in the hospital with time to think - and dream up a stealth raiding force. At the time, the idea was very radical. Military engagements at the time involved armies approaching each other on a level playing field and fighting until one side gave up.

Many credit David with having the force of personality and unconventional tactics to get the idea of the SAS approved. While still on crutches, he broke into British Middle East headquarters to pitch his plan directly to high command.

When guards saw him breaking into the building, they gave chase. The first room he broke into was an instructor who previously tried to throw him out of the military, but fortunate for him, the second room he ran into was the deputy commander of the Middle East, who was willing to read his plan and decided it had merit.

David was intrigued by the idea of creating a stealth force to surprise German and Italian troops by raiding military installations from the North after crossing the Sahara Desert. He would put together an unconventional group of adventurers and independent thinkers. He selected their motto, "Who Dares Wins," which is the motto the SAS still uses today.



Apparently, there were still some who were skeptical of David's plans. When HQ decided that his group would have their supplies delayed, David stole what supplies his group needed.

David's first parachute raid resulted in heavy losses, so he changed his tactics, using jeeps at nighttime instead and he and his team would wreak havoc behind enemy lines. On one night in July 1942, David led his squadron driving 18 jeeps destroying 37 Axis aircraft (mostly bombers and transports).

Under David's leadership, the SAS had destroyed over 250 aircraft on the ground, dozens of supply dumps, wrecked railways and telecommunications, and put many enemy vehicles out of action.

References:

[SAS Rogue Warriors currently free on Amazon Prime](#)

[Rogue British Officer Who Broke All the Rules - War History Online](#)

[David Stirling Phantom Major - National Army Museum](#)

[SAS in WWII](#)

# GRIT AND RESILIENCE

**"The worst problem any dyslexic has to face is not reading, writing, or even spelling, but a lack of understanding..." - The Reality of Dyslexia**

Grit is the ability to persevere in the face of setbacks, challenges, pain, and adversity. Resilience is similar, but different in the sense it describes an ability to "bounce back" from difficulties. Both, as it turns out, are important for the achievement of long-term goals and mental well-being.

When students in dyslexia specialty schools were studied over the course of years, researchers **found** that grit and resilience scores increased over time in these schools - and that correlated with lower levels of anxiety and depression and improved academic performance.

Want to assess your grit? Click here ---> [\*\*GRIT SCALE\*\*](#)

*Here is an animated explainer video summary of Angela Duckworth's research on Grit.*





Duckworth's recommendations to grow grit:

1. Develop a fascination with your goals.
2. Strive to improve each day by practicing deliberately.
3. Remind yourself of the greater purpose.
4. Adopt a growth mindset.

And resilience? Here's another quick video about the 7 C's of resilience.

They are:

1. Competence
2. Confidence
3. Coping
4. Control
5. Character
6. Connection
7. Contribution



Work on grit and resilience start with a good understanding of a growth mindset.



Because of the pandemic, [MindsetWorks.com](https://www.mindsetworks.com) has a number of free downloadable resources ([HERE](#)) for all ages (prek-adult) and parents, teachers, and professionals.

An example of one resource for 7-10th graders is a goal setting lesson plan like the one on the opposite page. Dyslexic students are often under tremendous stress in their schooling, often causing them to have doubts in their abilities; more time should be taken to support their big picture hopes and dreams. Nothing fosters success more than success - so if their daily lives aren't filled with at least some successes, then things should change.



## GROWTH MINDSET GOAL ACTION PLANNING FRAMEWORK

### Current State

Where am I now? To meet this goal, what new skills or knowledge will I need to learn?

### Identify Obstacles

What fears or barriers might be holding me back?

What obstacles might happen as I work toward my goal?

How do I sabotage myself and limit my own success?



### What is my SMART goal?

**S**pecific  
**M**otivational  
**A**ctionable  
**R**ealistic  
**T**ime-bound  
**GOALS**

### ACTION PLAN: TASK ANALYSIS

Task	Planned Completion Date	Notes
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

### Support System: Get plugged in!

Who could give me feedback on my progress and strategies?

Who can support me?

How often will I review my goal and plan?

### How will I know I achieved my goal?

#### Motivation Evaluation

How challenging is this goal for me?

a. Not at all... b. Somewhat... c. Very...

Can I do it?

a. Yes, definitely b. Probably c. Maybe d. Probably not

How motivated am I to achieve this goal? WHY?

a. Not at all... b. Somewhat... c. Very...

Who else wants me to achieve this goal and why?

What or who is inspiring to me (maybe has already been successful at this goal)?



At [Mindful](#), check out their suggestions to help teens build a sense of self worth.

The article gets into detail, but their five tips (which I love) are:

1. Get physical (regular exercise)
2. Focus on self-compassion, not self-esteem
3. Avoid social comparison
4. Capitalize on specific skills
5. Help others



"Who dares wins."

- OBE David Stirling