

Information to keep in mind when marking examination scripts of students with dyslexia

When marking these scripts it is important to keep in mind the nature of the difficulties these students experience. By definition dyslexia is a difficulty with language particularly when dealing with the written word. Because of the nature of examinations the dyslexic student has to respond in the medium (the written word), which creates their greatest difficulty. Many students with dyslexia tend to read inaccurately so the exam problem can start at the level of reading the question. (In preparing for examinations they will have covered issues like the structure and layout of the paper with their Dyslexia Support Tutor). They are hugely disadvantaged if the layout of the paper changes or the style of the examination changes.

Dyslexic students are also disadvantaged when the examination paper is printed on both sides of the page. Ideally they should have two examination papers so they can see the entire paper at a glance. The level of contrast on the exam paper can make reading difficult as black print on a stark white background is particularly tiring for some students. It is preferable that they are allowed a spare examination booklet where they can jot down thoughts that come into mind while writing and also plans for answers. These booklets should be handed up with their formal answer book and may prove helpful to an examiner who has the difficult task of deciding whether or not a student really understands the concepts and has the necessary knowledge to pass the paper.

It is easier for a dyslexic student to read documents in 1 ½ line spacing and Aerial Size 14 print but exam papers are seldom to this scale which results in a slower rate of reading and more blurring and distortion of words and sentences. Imagine how difficult it is for a student who reads:

**I den tify t heben fits ofde leg ation forbo thethe or gan is at ion an ditsem
Poyes an dour l ine th ereson sfo ran lac kof de gation th at myocur
ffrom th eit her pesuriors o rsubdinor ates p e r sp ecive**

when the following is what was actually written on the exam paper

Identify the benefits of delegation for both the organisation and its employees and outline the reasons for any lack of delegation that may occur from either the superiors or subordinates perspective

Because the words do not flow, as they should students with dyslexia have a great tendency to omit connecting words, which can be critical at exam time. They have great difficulty with complex sentences and this is why some of them need a reader at exam time.

Many dyslexic students benefit by having extra time at examinations. Since reasonable accommodation has been provided in WIT, the students allowed extra time, get it at the end of the examination. However it's not always beneficial as the noise from the main body of the students leaving on the scheduled time and some invigilators asking the 'extra time' students to 'hurry up' is a huge distraction. It may be more beneficial if the extra time was granted at the beginning of the examination.

These students have great difficulty getting their thoughts on paper. Not only is the medium a problem but also the level of stress. All students experience a certain amount of exam stress but they cope. However, stress and anxiety are constant companions for the dyslexic student and the extra stress related to the exam situation makes it even more difficult for them to display their level of knowledge. In the exam situation, the dyslexic student has to work out the best trade off between speed and accuracy and getting as much of their knowledge on paper as possible. They may adopt the strategy of giving their answer in point form to convey their level of knowledge and not get bogged down in the mechanics of English which is not what the examination is supposed to be examining. The result is often that the person correcting the paper 'assumes a good level of written English' and penalises for its absence. (West T. 1991). In fact the exam is meant to measure knowledge in the subject area, not linguistic ability.

Students with dyslexia take far longer to complete assignments than other students and still the final product can have a clumsiness of expression. In the exam situation the quality of their written work deteriorates even further. This is due to factors like time restriction and dependency on retrieving information from memory. The resulting work can be littered with all or some of the following:

- spelling errors (a word may be correct in one sentence and wrong in another or may have various spellings throughout the work)
- a student may consistently omit word endings
- words may be omitted from sentences
- sentences may be rambling and it can be difficult to identify the point being made. Rather than dealing with a particular point and going on to a new one they often repeat or paraphrase what was dealt with earlier which results in confusion for the person correcting the work. In a conversation or tutorial situation a tutor can say 'I think what you're saying is

It is a challenge for examiners to decide whether a student doesn't understand the concepts involved or simply has difficulty conveying their knowledge. If in doubt then it seems reasonable to consider an oral examination with the student to clarify the situation. To complicate matters it must be remembered that people with dyslexia have 'good days' and 'bad days' and they don't seem to have any control over them so it is always important to take a student's track record into account.

<http://hometown.aol.co.uk/lspencetraining/index.html>

