



# Supporting Students with Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and ADD/ADHD

Student Services

**DISABILITY AND  
DYSLEXIA SUPPORT**



Learning and  
Professional  
Development Centre

Keele  
UNIVERSITY



**Specific Learning Difficulties or Differences (SpLDs)** is an umbrella term which refers to a range of (often co-occurring) difficulties which **affect the way individuals process and learn information**, the most common are **Dyslexia, Dyspraxia** and **Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD)**.

SpLDs occur across the range of intellectual abilities, are independent of socio-economic and language background, often life-long in their effects and exist on a continuum from mild to severe. The ways in which individuals experience SpLDs and how this impacts individuals' learning experiences at university, varies from one person to the next.

## 1) How might SpLDs affect someone at university?

**Dyslexia** affects **information processing** and the development of **fluent reading, writing, and spelling** skills, causing difficulties in identifying and manipulating sounds in words and processing ordered sequences of verbal information. Students with dyslexia may experience difficulties which present in the following ways whilst at university:

- A marked discrepancy between ability/understanding and standard of work produced.
- Phonetic/incorrect spelling; poor handwriting; incorrect use of tenses and homophones; omission of letters; use of simple vocabulary; use of long paragraphs consisting of undifferentiated sentences; and, inability to see errors in word processed documents.
- Slow reading speed, a need to read texts more than once to assimilate information and difficulties simultaneously reading, writing, listening, summarising and/or note taking.
- Poor short term memory, especially for language-based information.
- Difficulties with organisation, categorisation and expressing ideas sequentially.
- Pronunciation errors and difficulties finding and locating appropriate words.
- Difficulties with time keeping/time management (e.g. mixing up dates, times, locations).

**Dyspraxia** is a **developmental coordination disorder** which affects **fine and/or gross motor coordination**. Students with dyspraxia may experience difficulties which present in the following ways whilst at university:

- Physical clumsiness (e.g. tripping, falling); poor balance, posture and hand-eye coordination; difficulty standing for long periods of time; and, problems with manual dexterity which can impact ability to type, handwrite (can be slow/untidy), conduct two-handed tasks, manipulate objects and handle lab/electronic/mechanical equipment.
- Difficulties with articulation, expression and pronunciation.
- Difficulties with short-term memory; time management; personal organisation; prioritisation of tasks; punctuality; and, structuring information in assignments.
- Difficulties with social interaction, particularly in group situations, may interrupt others, take things literally and be unaware of group dynamics.
- Perception difficulties, e.g. time, space, weight, direction, over sensitive to light/noise.
- Can be unfocused, erratic, impulsive and prone to stress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, phobias/fears and obsessive/compulsive behaviours.

## Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity

**Disorder (ADD/ADHD)** affects brain operations which are referred to as 'executive functioning skills', including **concentration, attention, impulsivity, hyperactivity** and **social skills**. Most individuals with ADD/ADHD have combined symptoms of inattentiveness, hyperactivity and impulsiveness, whereas some individuals will be predominantly inattentive and some will be predominantly hyperactive/ impulsive. Students with ADD/ADHD may experience difficulties which present in the following ways whilst at university:

- Short attention span, high levels of distractibility/restlessness and poor listening skills.
- Failure to give close attention to detail, thereby making mistakes.
- Forgetful; poor organisational skills; failing to plan ahead; misjudging how long it takes to complete tasks; and, difficulty initiating and completing tasks and projects.
- Having fixed ideas, being inflexible and becoming obsessional about tasks/activities.

## 2) Suggested teaching and learning adjustments

The following teaching and learning adjustments will support students with all SpLDs, however there is an enhanced focus on support strategies for dyslexic students as this is the most commonly presenting disability for Keele students.

### Teaching resources/materials

- **Give students time to prepare** by providing presentation slides (PowerPoint, Google slides, Keynote etc.), handouts and other teaching resources in advance of class sessions (i.e. upload to the KLE and send email reminders). This will allow students plenty of time to access, print and read materials.
- **Provide reading lists as far in advance as possible**, clearly highlighting and emphasizing key chapters and articles as well as core from secondary readings, enabling students to prioritise.
- **Formatting of resources:**
  - **Use a plain, evenly spaced Sans Serif font** such as Arial, Comic Sans, Verdana or Tahoma in size 12+ for printed resources and 24+ for presentation slides. Be aware that printing multiple pages per A4 sheet causes text to shrink.
  - **Use a simple/constant colour scheme** for presentation slides with sufficient contrast between text and background colours, i.e. dark text on a light background. Dark text on an off-white background is best for printed materials.
  - **Use headings on all presentation slides** for ease of navigation. Use **bold**, rather than underlined or *italicized* headings and avoid BLOCK CAPITALS.
  - Use left-aligned, instead of centred or justified text.
- **Space things out** avoiding the use of long, dense paragraphs and cramming material on to pages or slides. Use sub-headings, bullet points, numbering, 1.5-line spacing, limit slides to small numbers of key points and highlight key words/phrases in bold.
- **Support students to revisit and revise lecture content** by using lecture capture technology or allowing audio recording of lectures. If students have a reasonable adjustment in place to allow audio recording of lectures, this must be permitted.

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- **Provide accessible file formats** for use with text-to-speech/screen reader software:
  - **Microsoft Word documents are generally the most compatible**; however, it is wise to provide teaching resources in a variety of formats, e.g. Word and derived PDF files/derived PDF versions of slides, as well as original slide formats. **Google Docs are also very accessible** and can be emailed to students directly as well as embedded in to the KLE.
  - **Create presentation slides from blank templates** (using 'text boxes' and 'title boxes') so that all material on slides is recognised by screen reader software.
  - The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) website has a [style guide](#) with instructions on designing resources for use with screen reader software or alternatively use Microsoft's guide for designing [accessible PowerPoint slides](#).
  - There is an easy-to-use function within Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and Excel to check how accessible documents are ([instructions here](#)).

## Teaching practice

- **Provide clarity and structure:**
  - **Recap key themes** of the previous teaching session at the start of class.
  - **Provide a clear overview** for each session and what will be covered.
  - **Explicitly outline Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)** and revisit ILOs at the end of each session.
  - Use an audible and clear presentation style; provide examples and clarify language when introducing new topics; and, pause and summarize regularly.
  - A document provided in advance of classes with key arguments, concepts and new/difficult vocabulary is ideal, as is a glossary of concepts for each module.
- **Multi-sensory teaching** and presenting information in a variety of formats is essential, i.e. using different media (e.g. videos); visual aids (graphs, pictures, flow charts, diagrams); allowing experiential learning and physical interaction with learning materials; and, building in plenty of opportunity for discussion, questions and feedback.
- **Give students time to assimilate information** and formulate responses to questions, with the chance to discuss ideas in pairs before feeding back ideas to the whole class.

### Assessment and feedback

- **Give students time to prepare and provide clarity and structure:**
  - As appropriate, provide assessment questions, details and deadlines **as far in advance as possible** using specific instructions and concise/simple language.
  - Always use **clearly defined assessment criteria** which link to the module ILOs.
  - **Notify changes** to assessments or deadlines in plenty of time.
  - Give examples of different assessment types and discuss the structure of these with students, how material should be presented and the expectations for each.
  - Provide regular opportunities for formative feedback.
  - Give very direct feedback in typed format, using specific examples of how a point could be improved, setting comments against assessment criteria.
- **Consider the SpLD when marking:**
  - If a dyslexic student is marked down for minor spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors, this may be considered discriminatory. Be prepared to discount such mistakes provided that meaning remains clear.
  - Be clear that comments on spelling/grammar/punctuation are to foster skills development and not to penalise. However, if you have marked for content/ideas only (and not spelling/ grammar/punctuation) also make this clear.
  - Attempt to ignore structural flaws, such as organisation and sequencing of information where possible and focus on marking based on content.
  - These documents produced by [University of Wolverhampton](#) and [Bangor University](#), provide detailed advice for marking the work of dyslexic students.
- Students may **require specific adjustments for exams and other assessments**, including the **provision of alternative forms of assessment** where necessary. Discuss requirements with your local Disability Liaison Officer (DLO), examinations officer and as required, contact Disability and Dyslexia Support (DDS) for advice.

### Additional adjustments for students with dyspraxia and ADD/ADHD

- Try to ensure that teaching rooms are well lit by natural light and **background noise is kept to a minimum**, e.g. by closing doors and turning off noisy background equipment.

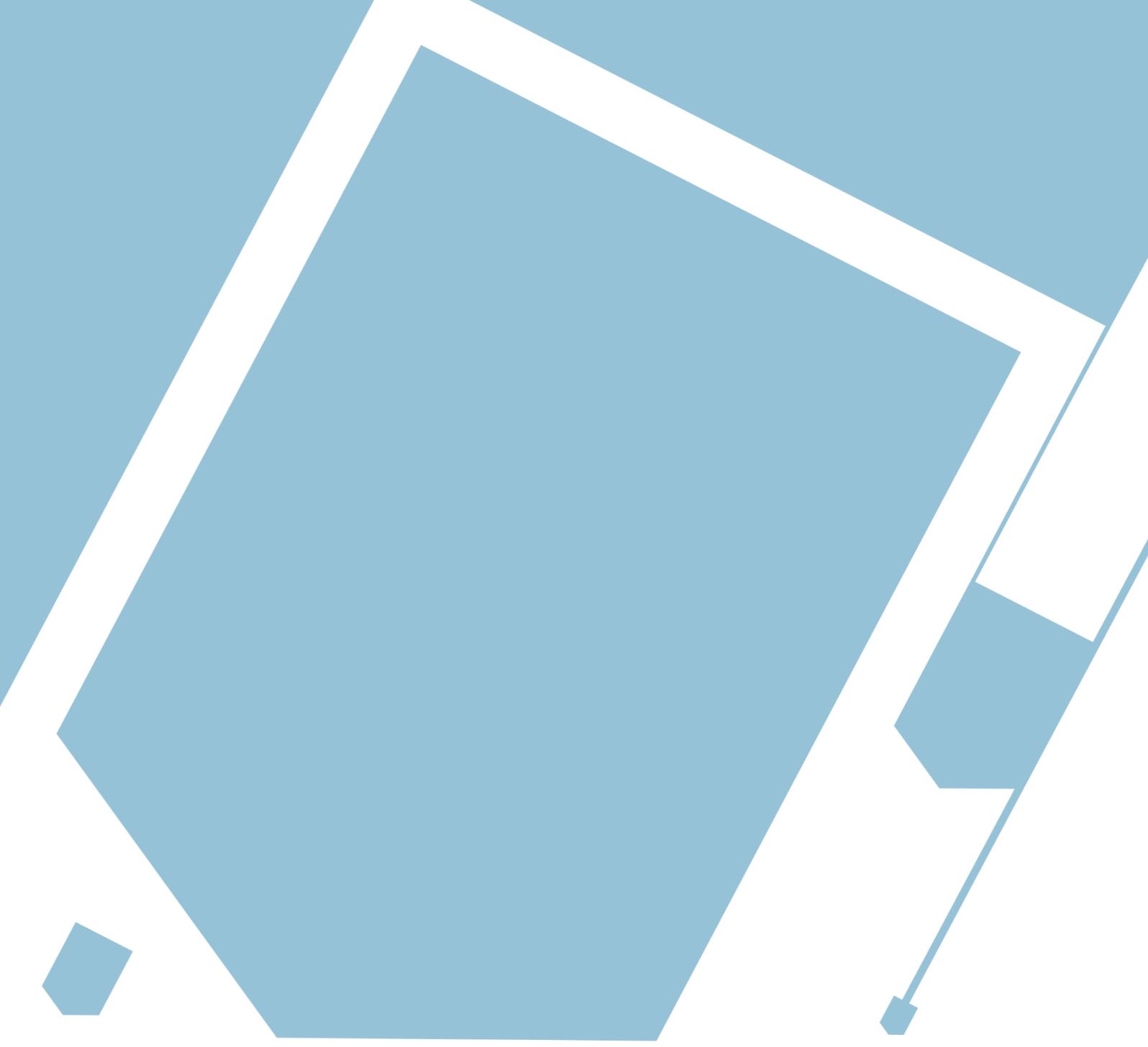
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- **Support for working in groups** may be required to create a shared understanding of how group discussions and projects should be carried out in a way that respects all members. This may involve supporting the establishment of ground rules, monitoring group dynamics, or intervening when communication fails or any member is excluded.
- **Planning, organisation and time management support** may be required, including in the use of diaries/organisers and planning software; helping to create structures and plans for study and revision; methods for taking, organising and cataloguing notes, papers, files; and, the use of mnemonics, flow charts and mind maps.
- **Hardware considerations and support for practical tasks** may be important for students with dyspraxia, e.g. a Kindle or iPad for reading, laptops for note taking in class, ergonomic keyboards and larger computer screens may be required. Handling lab/electronic/mechanical equipment safely is also a consideration, as well as strategies to mitigate tripping or falling during field trips and practical sessions.
- Provide a **short break in lectures** over an hour for students with ADD/ADHD.

### 3) Bibliography and additional reading

- [Attention Deficit Disorder Association](#) website
- Bangor University: [Guidelines for marking and feedback for students with SpLDs](#)
- Berry, J. (2008): [Guidance on marking the work of dyslexic students](#)
- British Dyslexia Association (BDA): [Dyslexia Style Guide](#) (producing accessible docs)
- [Dyslexia Action](#) website
- [Dyspraxia Foundation](#) website
- Microsoft: [Guide to creating accessible PowerPoint presentations](#) AND [Guide for checking the accessibility of Microsoft PowerPoint, Word and Excel documents](#).
- School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS): [Specific Learning Differences Advice](#)
- University of Wolverhampton: [Dyslexia Assessment Policy](#)

*This resource was produced in 2018, updated January 2022  
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