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Module 33: Dyslexia in the workplace

When the person with dyslexia moves from education to the workplace, a quantum shift takes place. No longer is the emphasis on how others can help him, but it becomes what he can do for others. This module tackles the practical aspects of satisfactorily completing a job, and meeting the employer's expectations.

What you will learn in this module:

33.1 Awareness

33.2 Reading strategies

33.3 Writing strategies

33.4 Memory strategies

33.5 Organization and time management



33.1 Awareness

When you begin your job in the workplace, you have certain legal rights to inclusivity. For example, it is illegal to discriminate against someone solely on the grounds of dyslexia. Those enlightened companies that operate as a “dyslexia-friendly-workplace” go a step further, and actively encourage integration. These employers recognize that individuals with dyslexia bring many exceptional skills to the workplace.



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33.1.1 Awareness - The Benefits to the Employer



The extra effort the employer puts in goes a long way in promoting and fostering a positive atmosphere – not just for the dyslexic individual, but for the entire workforce. It is a fact that happy people are more productive and less likely to leave for a new position. The company benefits in terms of staff continuity and reduced recruitment costs.

People with dyslexia are often creative individuals, who are highly visual thinkers. They can see the bigger picture when it comes to trouble shooting and problem solving. By virtue of them having overcome a learning difficulty, they are also extremely resourceful with a “can do” attitude, which are great qualities to bring to any job.



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Dyslexic individuals are also “divergent thinkers”, which means they may make unexpected connections, and think of solutions that do not occur to others. Overall, this makes a person with dyslexia a positive asset to any organization.

33.1.2 Awareness - Dyslexia Awareness in the Workplace

Just as the dyslexic student explains their learning disability to their teacher, the dyslexic worker should inform their immediate line manager or boss of their status and challenges.

Even if you put on the job application form that you have dyslexia, you cannot guarantee that this information was passed along. Being open about your dyslexia is not about making excuses or seeming weak – it is an incredibly courageous thing to do. Remember, issues such as taking longer to read a document or difficulty remembering instructions are cognitive characteristics of dyslexia; not a sign of laziness or ignorance.

Consider preparing a response of which you are comfortable to repeat. Keep it simple, and then if people want to ask for more details they can. For example, you might say to a co-worker on a project:



“I have dyslexia. Please put things simply. If you give too much information in one hit, my short term memory fills up and I miss the main point.”

33.1.3 Awareness - Employer Adaptations



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Creating a dyslexia-friendly-workplace is not difficult or expensive to do. Once the employer is aware of the areas which the dyslexic person needs consideration, this is often easy to do. It might be simple things such as providing meeting notes in advance, so the dyslexic person has a chance to read through them before the meeting. It might be giving extra time to complete projects or allowing meetings to be recorded.

But remember, employers are not mind-readers. They need a job done, and done well. Talk to them and explain your difficulties, and take responsibility upon yourself to suggest strategies to overcome those problems.



33.1.4 Awareness - Be Aware of Your Limitations

Undoubtedly, you are aware of those areas that you are most likely to experience difficulties. If you are not, then consider getting a Learning and Psychological Assessment – this is a good idea, since it is likely your last IEA assessment was done some years ago.

Rather than burying your head in the sand, or avoiding tasks involving those skills, develop a strategy to cope. For example, if you know distractions make it harder for you to focus on the job in hand, then explain to your colleagues how you concentrate the best. Let them know that excess background noise stops ideas from flowing freely. Inform them that there are going to be times when you will be wearing headphones, to reduce background noise, to help you concentrate. Done correctly, this will not be perceived as anti-social, and it will help people understand your situation.



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In the remaining sections of this module, we will look at how to overcome any difficulties you may have with reading, writing, and organizational skills.

33.2 Reading Strategies

Reports, letters, emails, product descriptions, and references are just some of the day-to-day tasks that will test the dyslexic person's reading skills. The person with dyslexia may be a reasonably fluent reader. However, there are times when he is under pressure that this ability may become a challenge. Also, many dyslexic individuals still have considerable difficulties, in which case some of the following strategies can help.



33.2.1 Reading Strategies - Different Types of Reading(1 of 2)

There are three different reading techniques:



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- Skimming
- Scanning
- Detailed

The purpose of reading is to gain information. Depending on what it is you need to know, it is not always necessary to read every single word. For example, if you want to find a phone number in an address book, you do not read every single name. You turn to the page and scan down until you spot the name you want. Whereas, when following a set of instructions about how to program a computer, it is wise to read every word so that you do not miss any vital steps.

	Skim Reading	Scan Reading	Detailed Reading
Aim	<i>To get the general idea</i>	<i>To find specific information</i>	<i>To read carefully and absorb detail</i>
Example	<i>Reading a magazine article</i>	<i>Browsing a catalogue or address book</i>	<i>An instruction manual</i>
Result	<i>To gain an insight into the written content</i>	<i>To find a specific item you are looking for</i>	<i>To understand details within the document</i>

33.2.1 Reading Strategies - Different Types of Reading(1 of 2)

Skim Reading

The aim of skim reading is to pick up the general idea. This could be a magazine article where you want to get a feel for the information, but do not necessarily need to know every detail. A useful tip for how to skim read is to read the first and last sentence of each paragraph. These usually contain the key points, with the rest of the sentences expanding on the details. Try skim reading the first sentence of every paragraph, and stop to read the detail in paragraphs relevant to your research.

Scan Reading

The subtle difference here is that you are looking for a specific piece of information, a name, or number - remember our example of the address book. Actually, people with dyslexia are



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pretty good at scan reading, because they excel at visual recognition. Therefore, the word they are looking for often stands out.

Detailed Reading

This is the type of reading taught in school. You read every word on the page in order to comprehend what the writer has conveyed. However, by using skimming or scanning techniques you can cut down on the amount of detailed reading, and save it for relevant paragraphs.

33.2.2 Reading Strategies - Reading Tactics

Hopefully, skimming or scanning decreases the amount of detailed reading required. This can still leave you with large amounts of information to read and understand. However, clever reading tactics can help with this task.

- **Jot Down Ideas:** Keep a pen and paper handy. As you read, jot down the key ideas or trigger words. This helps you remember the main topics. Also, keep checking in with yourself to ensure that you understand the information; it is all too easy to fall into the trap of recognizing individual words, but without understanding the whole topic.
- **Large Print:** Large print is easier to read. Try using the zoom function on a photocopier to enlarge reports, and make them easier on the eyes.
- **Dealing with Print Glare:** Stark black print against white paper can be difficult for the person with dyslexia to see. The use of colored overlays can help. Overlays placed on top of existing documents will decrease the contrast between print and page making it easier to read. The use of overlays is controversial, but if it helps you; then use them. If you are generating paperwork, consider printing it on pale blue or cream colored paper to reduce text contrast.
- **Proof Reading:** This means checking your work over to look for mistakes. This can be challenging for the dyslexic person. A handy tip is to read the text backwards.



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Start at the end and work back word by word. With the words out of context your brain makes fewer assumptions, and is more likely to spot a mistake.

33.2.3 Reading Strategies - Assistive Technology

Do not overlook how helpful assistive technology can be. There are many devices or programs that can aid the dyslexic reader. Here are a couple of examples:



Optical Character Recognition

The written document is scanned using a hand-held unit. This converts the text into speech via a 'screen-reading-speech-synthesis system'. This is available as a portable pocket device or an add-on for your computer.

Speech Synthesis – Screen Readers

This is a similar idea to the above, but handles writing that appears on the screen, such as on the internet, scanned documents or word documents. The software converts written words into speech for ease of understanding.



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33.3 Writing Strategies

Writing is an inevitable part of any job. It is a question of how much writing you will be required to do. In Module 7.2, we learned that there are different strategies which can help with reading. The same applies to writing, although the skill which makes the most difference is organization.

33.3.1 Writing Strategies - Organize Your Thoughts

Writing a report requires multi-tasking, and plugs into a number of areas with which the dyslexic person struggles. Not only must you get your ideas down in a coherent manner, but there is spelling, grammar, punctuation and handwriting to consider. Rather than feel overwhelmed before you even start; get organized and create a plan.

- **Know What you Want to Say:** It may sound obvious, but be clear on the message you need to get across. For a letter this might be one idea. For a project it might be several ideas, so keep breaking things down into smaller and smaller units – then give each small unit a purpose. You will find Concept Maps help with this. (See Module 7.4: Memory).
- **Brainstorm the Main Ideas:** Create a list (or Concept Map) of the main points you want to get across. Number them in order of importance, and then use this numbering to construct the document.

Where possible, work in a quiet place that is free from distractions so that you can concentrate.

33.3.2 Writing Strategies - Note Taking in Meetings

Taking notes is a challenge. You must combine listening and understanding, with writing. Ask permission first, but consider recording the meeting with a tape recorder or on your smartphone. This is another area where assistive technology can help.



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- **FM Listening Systems:** A dyslexic friendly employer may be open to the idea of using an FM listening system. This involves the speaker wearing a personal FM microphone, and the listener wearing an ear-piece receiver. This streams the speaker's voice directly into the listener's ear, which improves their ability to hear and understand. Many larger conference centers are equipped with these devices for delegates with hearing loss. It is not as unusual as you might think.
- **Variable Speed Tape Recorders:** Again, ask permission first, but these devices enable you to record speech and then play it back. The added benefit is that you can slow the voice down to eliminate distortion, enabling you to take notes at a comfortable speed.



33.3.3 Writing Strategies - Assistive Technologies

Writing is an area where assistive technology can be of real assistance. There are a large number of devices and apps, which can be beneficial. To give you a sample of their range and scope, here are some that tackle different aspects of the writing task.

- **Computer Pen and Paper:** You take notes using a special computer pen and paper. Touching the pen to the computer paper highlights the areas of text, and then the pen reads the notes back to you.

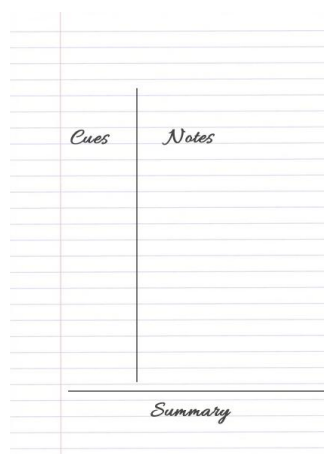


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- **Abbreviation Expanders:** This works on a similar idea to predictive text on your phone. It stores the letters for common words and then expands them in the document.
- **Customized Keyboards:** The use of color can make a big difference in helping people with dyslexia to make sense of text. Likewise, a keyboard can appear as a confusing jumble of tiles, but different colored keys can help with key selection. Use either a ready-customized item, or colored overlays that change the appearance of the keyboard.
- **Proof Reading Software:** This is a dyslexia-specific-spell-checker. Dyslexic individuals commonly misspell certain words. The software knows this, and is alert for them. It also analyzes the context in which a word is used to spot those pesky there/ their errors.
- **Speech Recognition Software:** This eliminates writing altogether. You speak into a microphone and the words are translated into text on the screen.
- **Talking Spellcheckers:** This system displays the incorrect and corrected spelling. It also speaks it, so the reader can see and hear the error.

33.3.4 Writing Strategies - Cornell Method of Note Taking





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And finally, for those times when you have to take notes; try the Cornell method - split the page into three areas: a narrow column down the lefthand side of the page, a wide column on the right hand side, and a footer at the bottom of the page.

The idea is to make the bulk of the notes in the wide column, and provide cues and reminders of the content in the narrow column and footer. Thus, you write “cue” or “trigger” words in the left hand column. Once the page is full, you add a brief summary of the content in the footer space.

This method enables you to easily use the notes at a later date. You do not have to wade through each page to find the significant points – they are there in the cue words and the summary.

33.3.5 Writing Strategies –Using the Cornell Method of Note Taking: An Example

Now let us look at an example of using the Cornell method of note taking during a meeting about fire drills

- Evacuation, Important to plan ahead, be prepared. Do not leave things to last minute, and legal requirement to have escape plan in place for employees. Make sure escape routes are clear and posted in all rooms. Make sure all staff are familiar with evacuation procedures to prevent panic in a real event. Have a responsible person assigned to take roll call. Make sure they know what their duties are and have access to a registry of personnel in their department. Appoint a deputy in case of absence. Essential to practice evacuation regularly (How often? - check on this with line manager). Check list of staff with disabilities and make sure there are adequate provisions for them to escape.
- Roll call,
- Disabled staff



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Fire drill planning

33.4 Memory Strategies

Dyslexic individuals often have problems with short term memory. Specifically, this may impact writing reports in the workplace, because of the difficulty recalling points already made and those to come.

33.4.1 Memory Strategies: Concept Mapping

There are highly effective strategies that enable the person with dyslexia to pre-plan their written work, and overcome their memory glitches. The principle technique is one called “Concept Mapping.” [This is similar to a method created and patented by Tony Busan, called Mind Mapping.]

Concept Mapping allows the dyslexic person to jot down disjointed information in a random manner, and then reorganize it into a coherent piece of written work.

33.4.2 Memory Strategies: What is Concept Mapping?

Traditional note taking is a linear process, and something the dyslexic mind struggles with.

Concept Mapping is a multi-sensory and visual way of taking notes that appeals to the way a dyslexic person sees and perceives information. It is multisensory in that different colors are used. The more colors the better. It also incorporates shapes, cartoons, and symbols.



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So what does a Concept Map look like? Well, in simple terms it looks like a lot of thought bubbles connected with lines. Of course, the bubbles do not have to be bubble-shaped. They can be anything that appeals to the dyslexic person, and will help them remember. Likewise, the connecting lines can be any color. Ultimately, the trick is to link similar ideas either with similar colors or shapes.

33.4.3 Memory Strategies: Creating a Concept Map (1/2)

This can be as simple or as complicated as you like. For the full Concept Map you will need:

- A large sheet of paper
- Colored markers
- Alternatively, you can use Post It notes.

Getting Started



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To get started, at the center of the page write the key idea (i.e. the reason for the report). For example, if creating a document about evacuation procedure during a fire drill, you would have, “Evacuation” as your central idea.

Now brain storm, and think of the associated actions required for the evacuation. These actions or ideas go in their own individual bubbles spaced over the page. For example: “Escape routes”, “Role call”, “Phone fire brigade”, “Secure building”, “First aid”, “Return to building”.

Now you are ready to delve into the details. Choose one bubble and brainstorm more ideas related to the action or idea. Looking at the “Escape Routes” bubble, you might add off-shoot bubbles that reads “Routes for specific areas”, “Signage”, “Responsible persons”, “Checking room empty”.

33.4.3 Memory Strategies: Creating a Concept Map (2/2)

When you have exhausted all of your ideas, move onto the next bubble, and repeat this brainstorming process. Now you are ready to drill down again.

Choose one of these off-shoot secondary bubbles and brainstorm again. For example for “Escape Routes” > “Routes for Specific Areas”, you might add: “Kitchen”, “Staff Room”, “Bathrooms”, “Offices”, “Warehouse”.

You get the idea?

Do not worry if your Concept Map looks messy, it goes with the territory! The point is to organize your thoughts in a way that links together related content.



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33.4.4 Memory Strategies: An Alternative Way of Using Concept Maps

In 7.4.3, the Concept Map created relied on having a clear starting point i.e. to create evacuation instructions for a fire drill. However, sometimes things start out the other way around, in that you have a mass of information that needs to be organized. Concept Mapping works just as well when applied in “the opposite direction”.

You may have unstructured notes (perhaps taken at a conference) that you need in order to write a presentation. Simply skim read each paragraph to identify the key idea. Jot this down in a bubble.

Move onto the next paragraph and identify the main theme. Jot this in another bubble.

As you work through the information, you identify individual ideas and concepts, and put them in their own bubbles. Once you have completely read through the original notes, turn your attention to the page of bubbles.

Look for common themes or ideas. It helps to assign a color to each theme, and circle bubbles with a similar theme with the same color. Thus, you can see at a glance the



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information that is linked by a common thread. You may wish to draw a line connecting all these bubbles together.

Once you have done this, you can start to organize the structure of your written work. Look for the most important information, and mark it with the number “1”. Keeping themed areas together and numbering them in order of importance from highest to lowest. When you start to write, this will provide the skeleton structure for the finished piece.

33.5 Organization and Time Management

When you work as part of a team, your colleagues rely on you. This means you have to be organized, meet deadlines, and be able to access information; all of which require organizational skills and good time management.

33.5.1 Organization: The Importance of Good Organization

Organizational ability touches all areas of the workplace. This includes accessing passwords, completing projects on time, and providing colleagues with the products they need. Unfortunately, for the person with dyslexia these are often challenging areas.

The dyslexic person’s short term memory issues may lead to problems with sequencing information and prioritizing. Throw into the mix the dyslexic person's need for extra time when reading or writing, and it is easy to see how work flow issues might arise.

Indeed, another concern is many dyslexic individuals have a poor perception of the passage of time. Their day-to-day time keeping may be poor, let alone meeting long term deadlines. With a little forethought, planning, and perhaps the use of assistive technology, all of these issues can be overcome.

33.5.2 Organization: Planning

Keep Two Diaries: A short-term diary and a long-term diary.



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In the short-term diary, record meetings, appointments, and daily goals. In the long-term diary, mark down deadlines, and milestones on the way to meet those deadlines.

For example, for your “Fire Evacuation” guide, set the first milestone as creating the Concept Map, another milestone for writing the introduction, and another for completing the section on taking a roll call. In other words, you are breaking a large task into smaller units, and keeping on track by checking off when those targets are met.

Use the short-term diary in a similar manner. On a day-to-day basis, list the tasks you need to complete by the end of the day. If your time-keeping is especially poor, you can even ascribe them set times e.g. 9 – 10 am – Concept Map, evacuation guide. This focuses your attention on the passing of time, and helps keep you on track.



Do not forget to make your diary highly visual. Create the short-term diary as a Concept Map using different colors for different tasks, different times of the day, or to highlight different activities such as meetings and written work.

33.5.3 Organization: Color Coding



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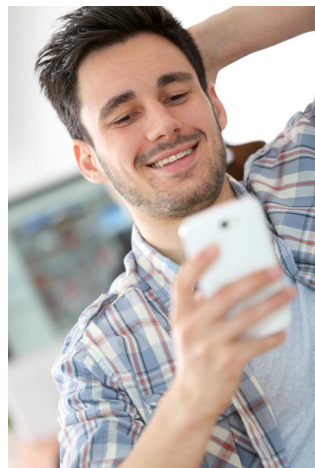
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You may have more than one area of responsibility. In this case, it is crucial to organize your work in order for you to locate each project with ease.

Color coding can help, such as using different colored binders or different colored paper for each area. The more visual it is, the better. So, welcome colored highlighters, stickers, and colorful Post-It notes as your friends and allies.



33.5.4 Organization: Keeping Track of Tasks





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The creative mind of the person with dyslexia is likely to find inspiration at the most unusual or inconvenient of times. In order to preserve those valuable ideas, you may need to dictate them onto your smart phone.

Likewise, do not try to remember what you need to do – write or dictate a list. Review the list at regular intervals to check your prioritization and ensure those tasks are getting done.

Make use of low cost apps, such as “*Say It and Mail It*”, which allows you to speak into the app and have it sent as an email. There is nothing to stop you from using this feature to email yourself reminders.

33.5.5 Organization: Assistive Technology

This may (or may not) come as a surprise, but it is not only people with dyslexia that have problems with time management and organization. Because of this, there is a rich variety of apps to help with voice messages, dictation, and note taking.

There are devices that can improve organization for contact lists, scheduling, and deadlines.

- **Free Form Database Software:** This enables you to write without prior planning and structure, and then retrieve key points at will. To find the relevant section in the document, simply type a fragment or keyword into the search function, and the program “fetches” the relevant section.
- **Electronic Memo Devices:** Yes, a smart phone has major functionality, but you may wish to consider a device dedicated to your work needs. There is a large range of options available including *Memo to Me*, *Parrot Voice Mate*, and *Palm*. Do your homework to see what suits you.
- **Graphic Organizers and Outliners:** These are a sort of hybrid between free-form software and Concept Maps. They allow you to dump information in an unstructured way and then reorder it into categories.



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33.5.6 Organization: Key Points

And finally, the key points to remember about organization are:

- Plan ahead
- Set goals (short term and long term) and check them off as you go
- Divide large projects into smaller units, and create milestones
- Use color to organize
- Use assistive technology to your advantage.

[EXAM LINK](#)