



Dyslexia Assessment and Consultancy

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DIAGNOSTIC AND WORKPLACE NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

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A. DYSLEXIA ASSESSMENT

Do you need a dyslexia assessment?

You may perhaps be wondering if you are dyslexic, and whether you should have your difficulties properly assessed. A full dyslexia assessment is expensive, and so, before investing in this, you may like to do some preliminary research and reading about dyslexia, and perhaps a screening test. Here are some suggestions for things that you can do to make yourself better informed:

1. Visit the following the websites:

- www.bdadyslexia.org.uk
- www.workingwithdyslexia.com
- www.dyslexia-adults.com

If you do not have Internet access, telephone the British Dyslexia Association and ask them to send you information: 0845 251 9002.

2. Read a book on the subject.

Introductory books which avoid jargon are:

- *Dyslexia in the Workplace: an Introductory Guide.*
Authors: Diana Bartlett and Sylvia Moody. Publisher: Wiley-Blackwell.
- *Dyslexia: How to Survive and Succeed at Work.*
Author: Sylvia Moody. Publisher: Random House (Vermilion).

See end of article for more book recommendations.

3. Do a screening test.

You should be able to find a screening test online. Such a test may give some indicators that you are dyslexic, and encourage you to go on to have a full assessment. However, screening tests have limitations, the most serious being that they do not always pick up the more subtle types of dyslexic difficulty. So if you come out as 'not dyslexic' on a screening test, *this does not necessarily mean that you are not dyslexic*; it may simply be that you have compensated for your difficulties sufficiently well to fool a relatively simple test.

What is dyspraxia?

Dyspraxia is the term used to describe difficulties with spatial skills and physical co-ordination. Other commonly-found characteristics are poor organisational ability and weak social skills. Your dyslexia assessor should be able to determine if you have significant dyspraxic problems.

For more information:

- Telephone DANDA 020 7435 7891.
- Visit: www.danda.org.uk
- Read: *Living with Dyspraxia.* Author: Mary Colley. Publisher: Jessica Kingsley.

What is ADD?

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is often associated with dyspraxia. It is characterised by a short attention span, distractibility and impulsiveness. If physical restlessness is also present, it is referred to as ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

For more information on ADD, visit www.danda.org.uk or www.adders.org. Your dyslexia assessor should be able to determine if there are indications that you have ADD.

What is dyscalculia / specific maths difficulty?

Dyscalculia is a term used to denote difficulties with understanding simple number concepts. It is also often used to describe difficulties with such tasks as mental arithmetic, copying or reading numbers correctly, and remembering calculation procedures. However, it is often more useful to see these latter types of difficulties as being basically dyslexic, i.e. due to weaknesses in memory and visual tracking. They may then be referred to as 'specific maths or number difficulties'.

What is visual stress?

People who suffer from visual stress find that print seems to 'jump about', patterns are stressful to look at, and white paper seems to 'glare'.

Visual stress is often associated with binocular instability, which is a problem with the way in which the eyes are co-ordinated. People with binocular instability typically have difficulty in keeping their place on the page, and develop headaches or eye-strain if they read for long periods.

Your dyslexia assessor should be able to determine if there are indications that you suffer from visual stress and /or binocular instability.

How can you find a qualified dyslexia assessor?

A dyslexia assessor will belong to one of the following groups:

- clinical psychologist
- educational psychologist
- occupational psychologist
- research psychologist
- specialist dyslexia tutor

However, it is by no means the case that every member of these groups specialises in assessing adult dyslexia. Begin your search for a suitable assessor by contacting the

helpline of the British Dyslexia Association (see page 1). When you contact the assessor, double check that he/she specialises in *adult* dyslexia. A diagnostic assessment usually has to be arranged privately, but it is possible that your employer will be willing to fund it.

What should I expect in a diagnostic assessment?

You may be feeling a little nervous about having an assessment, perhaps worrying that it will reveal something dreadful about you. But, as far as you can, contain your nervousness: the most likely outcome of an assessment is that difficulties that you have been struggling with for a long time will be recognised, categorised and explained, and that you and your employer will be given advice on how to manage them.

The assessment tests are *not* the sort of tests which have a pass or fail mark; they simply measure your ability on different scales, just as a tape measure measures your height. If you feel you are becoming fatigued during the session, request a few minutes' break.

The tests fall into two groups: cognitive (e.g., verbal ability, memory) and literacy. The profile of results on these tests will indicate (a) whether you have dyslexic and/or dyspraxic difficulties, and (b) point up your strengths.

Some of the above tests will be timed, but this does not mean that you have to race through them. The assessor will want to get an idea of your *normal* rate of reading and writing. So, unless otherwise instructed, work at your usual pace.

At the end of the assessment, the assessor will explain the assessment results and their implications, and give *general* advice about the sort of help and support that would be of benefit to you. You will receive a detailed report of the assessment results.

B. WORKPLACE NEEDS ASSESSMENT (WNA)

What is a workplace needs assessment?

If you are in the workplace, and have had a diagnostic dyslexia assessment, then you should follow this up with a workplace needs assessment (WNA) in order to receive appropriate help and support. The WNA looks in greater detail at the support you need in the form of training and equipment for your particular job, and also makes recommendations for help that your employer could provide.

How can I arrange a workplace needs assessment?

There are two ways of arranging a workplace needs assessment, each of which has advantages and disadvantages.

The first way is to arrange the assessment through the government's *Access to Work* scheme. The advantage of this route is that Access to Work will pay for the assessment. Disadvantages are that your assessment may not be carried out by a dyslexia specialist, a skills training programme may not be specified, and your employer may not receive advice about reasonable adjustments. In other words your assessment may be essentially an IT assessment only.

The second route is to go through a *private dyslexia organisation* which specialises in carrying out workplace needs assessments and in writing reports in a form acceptable to Access to Work. If you do approach a private organisation (or practitioner) to get a needs assessment, it is essential to check that they are qualified to offer this service. Your local British Dyslexia Association helpline should be able to help you find a suitable assessor.

The disadvantage of the private route is that you, or your employer, will have to fund the assessment. Advantages are that the assessment will be carried out by a dyslexia/dyspraxia expert, who will be able to specify a detailed skills training programme (a crucial element in the support package) and advise your employer on reasonable adjustments and legal obligations.

Whichever route you go on for the *assessment*, you can still apply to Access to Work for the *funding for the training or equipment* you require.

How can I check the credentials of the assessor?

When arranging a workplace needs assessment you (or your employer) need to establish that the assessor is experienced in *workplace consultancy* and will be able to recommend a *workplace skills training programme* as well as IT support. Below are some suggested specific questions which you could email to the assessor:

- What proportion of your practice is given to workplace dyslexia consultancy?
- Can you produce a workplace needs report acceptable to Access to Work?
- Will your report contain recommendations for workplace skills training as well as IT recommendations?
- Can you advise my employer on reasonable adjustments in the workplace and related legal issues?

What should I expect in a workplace needs assessment?

In a workplace needs assessment, you will not be asked to do any tests. Rather, the

assessor will ask you in detail about the nature and demands of your job, the strengths you bring to it, the difficulties you have with it, the coping strategies you use, and the support given (or not) by your employer. He/she will subsequently contact your employer to discuss reasonable adjustments which the latter could make in order to help and support you at work. Even if your employer has commissioned and paid for the needs assessment, you are still entitled to be given a copy of the report.

What should my workplace needs report tell me?

Your assessment report should include recommendations for *all* of the following:

- A detailed workplace skills training programme which covers all aspects of literacy which are directly related to your work - for instance, research skills, writing reports, reading technical manuals.
General work skills should also be covered, e.g., dealing with job interviews or work reviews, contributing to meetings, understanding instructions, time management, organisational skills.
An initial training programme should ideally be around 30 hours spread over a period of at least three months. The name of a recommended trainer should be given.
- IT recommendations including advice on how the IT training should be carried out. It is not useful for training to be delivered in just one day, or one half-day; rather it should be spread out over several short sessions. The trainer should be knowledgeable about dyslexia and deliver the training in a manner and at a pace suitable for a dyslexic learner. The name of a recommended trainer should be given.
- Detailed recommendations to the employer about reasonable adjustments, i.e. what actions the employer can take to support the programme -- for example, giving time off for training, providing a quiet workspace, allowing extra time for tasks to be completed.

If the report you receive does not include *all* of the above sections, you should take up the matter with the assessor, or with the organisation that has provided the assessor, and request relevant additions to the recommendations, and even a further assessment, if necessary. It is important to stress this point, because it frequently happens that dyslexic employees, after going through the long process of diagnostic and needs assessments, do

not receive a comprehensive training package. Adequate training can make all the difference between keeping and losing a job.

USEFUL BOOKS

For employers and dyslexia professionals:

Dyslexia and Employment: a Guide for Assessors, Trainers and Managers.
Edited by Sylvia Moody. Wiley-Blackwell.

Edited by award-winning author, Sylvia Moody, this jargon-free guide to good practice in dyslexia workplace consultancy, and related legal issues, provides comprehensive coverage in four clearly-distinguished areas:

- **Professional dilemma** chapters discuss tricky issues which have arisen during consultancy work.
- **General perspective** chapters present the viewpoint of workplace professionals such as HR managers and trades union representatives.
- **How to do it right** chapters offer advice on how to carry out diagnostic, workplace needs and legal assessments, and how to devise training programmes.
- **Information Point** chapters provide brief information on general topics such as dyslexic difficulties in the workplace, disclosure of difficulties, and the application of the Disability Discrimination Act.

With contributions from leading experts on workplace consultancy, this definitive guide will be of interest to dyslexia professionals, managers, legal professionals, trades unions, work coaches, mentors and careers advisors.

Endorsement from Jenny Lee, National Adult Dyslexia Coordinator, Dyslexia Action:
This is a comprehensive, invaluable and extremely readable book giving in-depth information and guidance on a wide range of issues affecting professionals who work with dyslexic employees. For me, it is a rare find; the authors do not shy away from the most controversial issues, indeed they confront them head-on, revealing their (and our) dilemmas. They share their internal debates and in doing so both reassure us and give practical advice born out of real experience. This excellent book is a must for workplace consultants and indeed anyone working with dyslexic people. I strongly recommend it.

For a general introduction:

Dyslexia in the Workplace: an Introductory Guide. Diana Bartlett and Sylvia Moody. Wiley-Blackwell.

For employees:

Dyslexia: How to Survive and Succeed at Work. Sylvia Moody. Random House (Vermilion).

Living with Dyspraxia. Mary Colley. Jessica Kingsley.

Help organisations:

The British Dyslexia Association 0845 251 9002 www.bdadyslexia.org.uk DANDA
(dyspraxia/ADD support) 020 7435 7891 www.danda.org.uk

Website with comprehensive information: www.workingwithdyslexia.com

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