



Dyslexia Assessment and Consultancy

Email: info@workingwithdyslexia.com Telephone: 020 7582 6117

DYSLEXIA IN THE WORKPLACE

Dr Sylvia Moody

The term 'dyslexic' is generally used to describe people whose poor literacy skills present a marked contrast to their general ability to learn and to reason. However, most dyslexic people find that their difficulties are not confined to dealing with written English; they may also have weaknesses in, for example, memory, sequencing ability, physical co-ordination, time management, and organisational skills. These weaknesses affect efficiency at work in a number of ways, as detailed below:

Literacy skills

A dyslexic person will find it hard to follow written instructions, to read quickly with good comprehension, and to write memos, letters and reports in clear accurate English.

Memory and concentration

Dyslexic people may have difficulty in correctly remembering telephone numbers, messages and instructions; they may find it hard to take notes or recall what was said at meetings; and they may also have poor concentration and attention. If attentional difficulties are particularly marked they may be described as 'attention deficit disorder'.

Sequencing skills

Poor sequencing ability makes it hard for a dyslexic person to file documents in the correct sequence, to write down numbers correctly, and to look up entries in dictionaries or directories.

Specific maths / number difficulties

Typical maths or number difficulties reported by dyslexic people are: doing mental arithmetic; remembering calculation procedures; saying, reading, writing and copying numbers correctly; keeping their place in tables of figures; making accurate measurements. Such difficulties are sometimes termed 'dyscalculia'.

Spatial skills

Dyslexic people easily get lost in strange surroundings, and may lose their bearings even in familiar places. They find it hard to analyse complex visual arrays, such as maps, charts or tables of figures. In professional examinations they may have difficulty with questions presented in a multiple-choice format.

Physical co-ordination

Poor physical co-ordination (dyspraxia) can result in slow and untidy handwriting, poor presentation of written work or figures, inaccurate keying on a calculator or telephone, and difficulties with using office equipment, such as a date stamp, guillotine or photocopier.

Speech

Perhaps because they feel largely 'locked out' of the world of the written word and cannot 'discharge' their thoughts in writing, some dyslexic adults become voluble talkers – though they often feel that they talk in an over-elaborate and disorganised way, especially in meetings or on the telephone. By contrast, other dyslexic adults are shy of speaking in public because of the embarrassment they feel about being unable to express their thoughts clearly.

Organisational skills

Dyslexic employees may be poorly organised: they may miss appointments, get the times and places of meetings wrong, fail to meet deadlines, and generally live and work in a muddled or chaotic fashion.

Emotional reactions

Dyslexic people have to deal not only with their own frustration about their various inefficiencies but also with other people's lack of understanding of their difficulties. As a result they may feel a mixture of upsetting emotions – frustration, anger, embarrassment, anxiety, lack of confidence – and, as a result, may sometimes behave in an aloof, defensive or aggressive way.

Help for dyslexic difficulties

Finally – the good news. There is no reason why dyslexic (or dyspraxic) employees should not improve their efficiency in all the areas described above. What is required is a detailed assessment of the difficulties and a comprehensive training programme. The programme should cover: work-related reading and writing skills, memory strategies, time-management, work organisation, efficient work methods for specific tasks, oral skills and dealing with emotions. IT support should also be recommended.

Positive aspects of dyslexic difficulties

There is no pain without gain. Dyslexic people who try to succeed in their work despite their difficulties know the meaning of hard work, long hours, and determination. They have a 'grit' which earns the respect of any employer who has an understanding of dyslexia.

Further, the very fact that dyslexic people are not quite in the general mould of analytical thinking may mean that they develop other, more holistic, ways of dealing with workplace tasks. Many excel, for instance, in lateral thinking; they are creative and innovative, and are aware of links and associations that may escape the more linear thinker; they often have good powers of visualisation, excellent spatial and practical skills, and an untaught intuitive understanding of how systems work.

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 - as well as to dyslexic employees and job-seekers.

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).

Dyslexia: Surviving and Succeeding at College. Sylvia Moody. Routledge.

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

Comprehensive information sheets on dyslexia in the workplace and newsletter:

www.workingwithdyslexia.com

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symoody@aol.com