

Handout 1.7: Dyslexia-friendly classroom

Writing on the board

- Do not give large amounts of dictation or work to copy off the board – use handouts.
- Make sure handwriting on the whiteboard is clear and large enough to see from the back of the classroom.
- Finish the sentence with a red full stop to draw attention to the need for punctuation.
- Leave space between each line. Try alternating colours to separate sentences.

Handouts

- Many pupils with visual processing problems prefer off-white or cream paper to reduce glare and subsequent eye strain. An alternative is to use grey or blue ink.
- A larger font size (14) is helpful as is a clean font such as Ariel or Comic Sans.
- Use clear unambiguous pictures with keywords or labels.
- Avoid 'busy' worksheets and text books with pictures, speech bubbles and diagrams splattered around. Keep things simple and in a logical progression.
- Use colour where possible or teach pupils effective ways to use highlighter pens.

Use of highlighter pens

- Highlight key words or facts.
- Spelling support – highlight only the difficult part of a word.

Homework

1. Include homework instructions on class handout (or other written slip)
2. If written on the board ensure enough time is given for pupils to write it down.
3. Check accuracy for pupils with known problems, or if appropriate write it down for them.
4. Make homework instructions available on the school website so pupils (or parents) can check.
5. Learning can be made easier by pre-teaching new words and then setting them as homework, prior to the lesson the words will be used in.
6. When marking use a different colour pen to mark overall content from that used to highlight errors. Choose two or three recurrent errors rather than highlighting everything.
7. Set a time limit – pupils to indicate how much they finish, and then continue if they want to.
8. Spellings – are you testing or teaching? Mark appropriately.

Set dyslexia-friendly spelling homework – one word family or spelling rule at a time. Do not mix rules and only include one high frequency exception. Make this a bonus spell – not part of the test. Try using a set spelling template that also focuses on another aspect such as cursive writing. If no easy alternative, for example for topic words, then grade the list to ensure some success – familiarity, phonic, some spelling rule, irregular.

Other strategies – different learning styles

- Put key words (with pictures and explanations) on the classroom wall.
- Try mind-mapping as a class activity when teaching new concepts as well as for essay planning.
- Get pupils to write their own mnemonics to remember key facts.
- Ask them to imagine themselves in a given situation – slave or slave trader.
- Use a buddy system – put someone with good handwriting with someone with imagination.
- When reading, suggest pupils cover read text with a piece of paper to help a pupil keep their place, or use a reading ruler.
- Praise positive aspects of all pupil work and behaviour.

- Thank pupils for taking part (even if the answer was not right) or for good behaviour that you have not asked for. No one likes to be taken for granted.
- Many dyslexic pupils have slow processing speed. Give them time to think. Allow them to prepare answers to questions by giving them the question in advance.
- Remember dyslexic pupils often have to put twice as much effort in to produce the same amount of work. They therefore become tired and may be restless and fidgety.

General recommendations

- Check with pupils if they mind reading aloud in class. When reading is necessary, give them the text beforehand so they have to time to prepare.
- Don't choose pupils to answer questions – let them volunteer. To encourage full class participation tell some pupils the question in advance so that they can prepare an answer.
- When having class discussions reinforce the answers given by pupils by repeating them back to the class in order to give those with auditory processing issues time to think.
- After explaining in detail what is required, hold up a finger for each instruction and summarise. For example, 'So that's five things you have to do. First open your exercise book, then rule off after the last piece of work, then write the date, then put the title and then the learning objective.' You can then check that dyslexic pupils can say back all the instructions.

Readability of text

The majority of pupils' with dyslexia will have difficulties with reading.

Don't expect a child to answer questions correctly or understand work they have difficulty reading. Ensure your worksheets are clear and at a suitable reading level for all your pupils especially those with dyslexia or SpLD.

Support them in class by checking the readability levels of your worksheets and books. There are a number of ways to do this:

1. Five finger rule

This is a quick and easy way to check if the text is suitable for the individual pupils. Give the pupil the text to be read.

The pupil raises a finger each time they cannot read a word. They stop when all five fingers are raised on ONE page or passage.

This means the text is too difficult for them to read.

2. Online readability

Alternatively you can copy and paste you text into the box and get the online website the give you all the information you need.

Here are two websites you may find useful to do this:

www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_and_improve.jsp

www.harrymclaughlin.com/SMOG.htm

Sample material from the DIY training pack *SEND for Classroom Teachers* by Gareth D Morewood.

Order from www.optimus-education.com/shop