Dyslexia explained

Your Toolkit to Understanding and Thriving

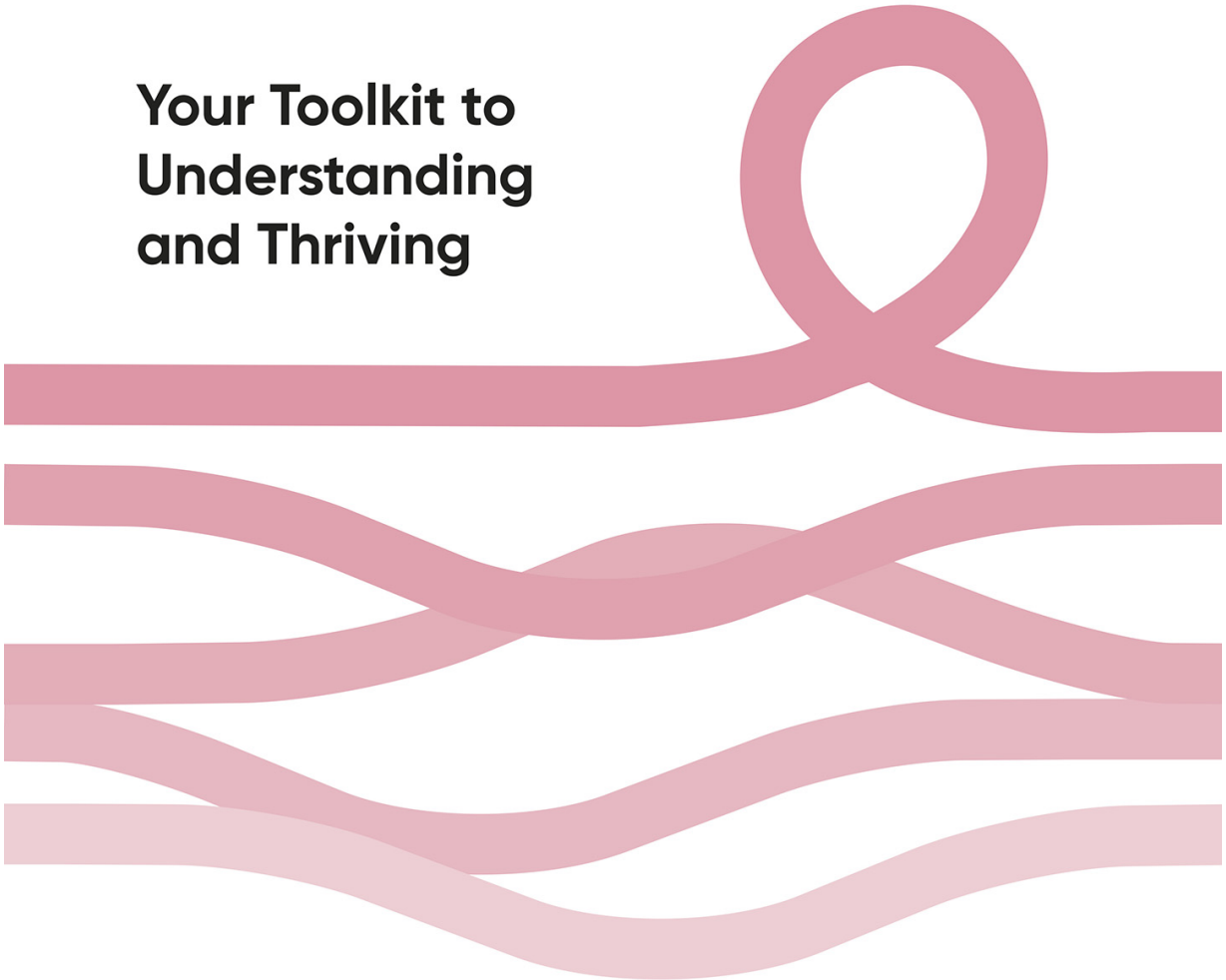


DK

Dr. Jacob Santhouse

Dyslexia explained

Your Toolkit to Understanding and Thriving



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Dr. Jacob Santhouse

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How to use this eBook

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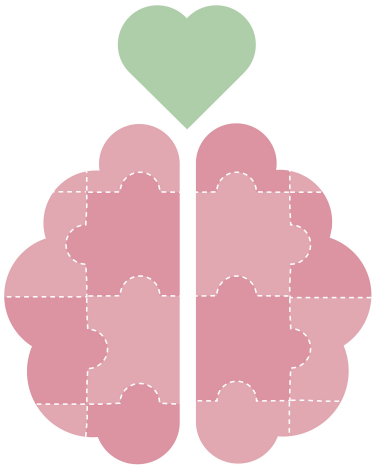
It might be your dyslexia

More times than I can count, I've seen comments, received messages, and had conversations with dyslexic individuals along the lines of "I had no idea that my dyslexia was behind this. I thought that was just me."

Truth be told, it wasn't all that many years ago that I first learned about the real impact of dyslexia and said the same thing. I spent my life feeling different from those around me, until one day I heard someone describe my experience, as if they'd been watching over my shoulder all along.

Since then, my life has profoundly changed. I now see myself with greater self-compassion and feel more confident relying on my unique dyslexic strengths. But that's not all. Gaining a real understanding of what it means to live with dyslexia inspired me to devote my life to helping others do the same.

As a licensed counselor specializing in therapy for dyslexia and ADHD, my mission is to support individuals in overcoming challenges while empowering them to embrace their strengths. I also use my online platforms to raise awareness and educate others about the hidden realities of living with dyslexia. And now, through this book, I hope to share everything I've learned along the way and equip you with the tools and strategies I wish I'd always had.



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Pulling back the curtain on dyslexia

Dyslexia was first mentioned around 135 years ago, but until the past two decades it was largely understood as a language struggle.

Because of this lack of awareness, countless people with dyslexia have suffered alone, assuming something is wrong with them and not fully understanding why they feel different. Now, things are beginning to change. The curtain is being pulled back, revealing the ways dyslexia can impact almost every aspect of our lives, from our careers and relationships to parenting and emotional well-being.

Hiding behind the curtain, and often taking center stage, are the challenges of dyslexia. Some may seem small, such as forgetting names, feeling anxious about reading in front of others, and taking a bit more time to learn new processes—but they can have a big impact on our daily lives. Others are much more serious, such as feeling constantly exhausted, struggling with low self-esteem and confidence, and feeling isolated.

But waiting in the wings are the incredible dyslexic strengths, including big-picture thinking, innovative problem-solving, and visual-spatial reasoning. In this book, I'll share practical tools and strategies to help you nurture these strengths and overcome challenges so that they're no longer running the show.

Dyslexia Explained is inspired by both my personal and professional life. As a licensed counselor, I've dedicated more than a decade to studying mental health and learning about

how best to support others and their emotional well-being. I've spent thousands of hours connecting with dyslexic people, reading about dyslexia, and understanding everything there is to know about how it can impact our lives. And most importantly, I'm also dyslexic. Dyslexia isn't just an area of expertise, it's a fundamental part of who I am, and I've spent my life trying to navigate it.

Before we continue, there's one thing I need you to understand: dyslexia is both a learning difference and—in our current society—a learning disability. While it's behind many of our struggles, it can also be the source of some remarkable strengths. Two things, even if they seem contradictory, can be true at the same time. Accepting and embracing that dyslexia can be both a blessing and a curse is key to finding the best way forward. That's why as you engage with this book, I ask you to do so with an open mind.

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How to use this book

The irony of a dyslexic person writing a book about dyslexia for dyslexic individuals is not lost on me.

That is why I've worked incredibly hard to make this book as dyslexia friendly as possible, using colors and typography that enhance readability, concise practical bullet points, and clear visuals that help simplify complex concepts. Throughout these pages, you'll also find little boxes titled "You've Got This!", words of encouragement you can turn to when self-doubt or self-criticism creeps in, and "Quick Win" boxes, easy-to-action tips that you can use to navigate everyday challenges.

Dyslexia Explained is grounded in scientific research, my clinical expertise and personal experience, and the many enlightening conversations I've had with my online community. I've aimed to make this book as practical and informative as possible, focusing not just on how dyslexia impacts your life, but on what you can actually do about it. That's why it's full of accessible, easy-to-use tools and strategies you can put into practice. I strongly believe that with the right tools and strategies in place, everyone with dyslexia has what it takes to thrive. Many of us have spent our lives being told we *can't,* but this book is here to show you that you *can*.

You might want to take notes or record voice memos as you read. There are lots of opportunities to reflect on how dyslexia affects you, and I really encourage you to take some time to think about this. If you want to read this book cover to cover, you're welcome to. But it's written in a way that allows you to jump from place to place and dip in and out, so you can explore the topics that speak to what you're experiencing in the moment. There is no "right" way to read this book—lean

into what works best for you and know that I'm incredibly glad you're on this journey with me.

My hope is that this book will help you better understand yourself, nurture your strengths, provide you with tools to handle everyday challenges, and, most importantly, show you that you are a part of an awesome dyslexic community.

An overview

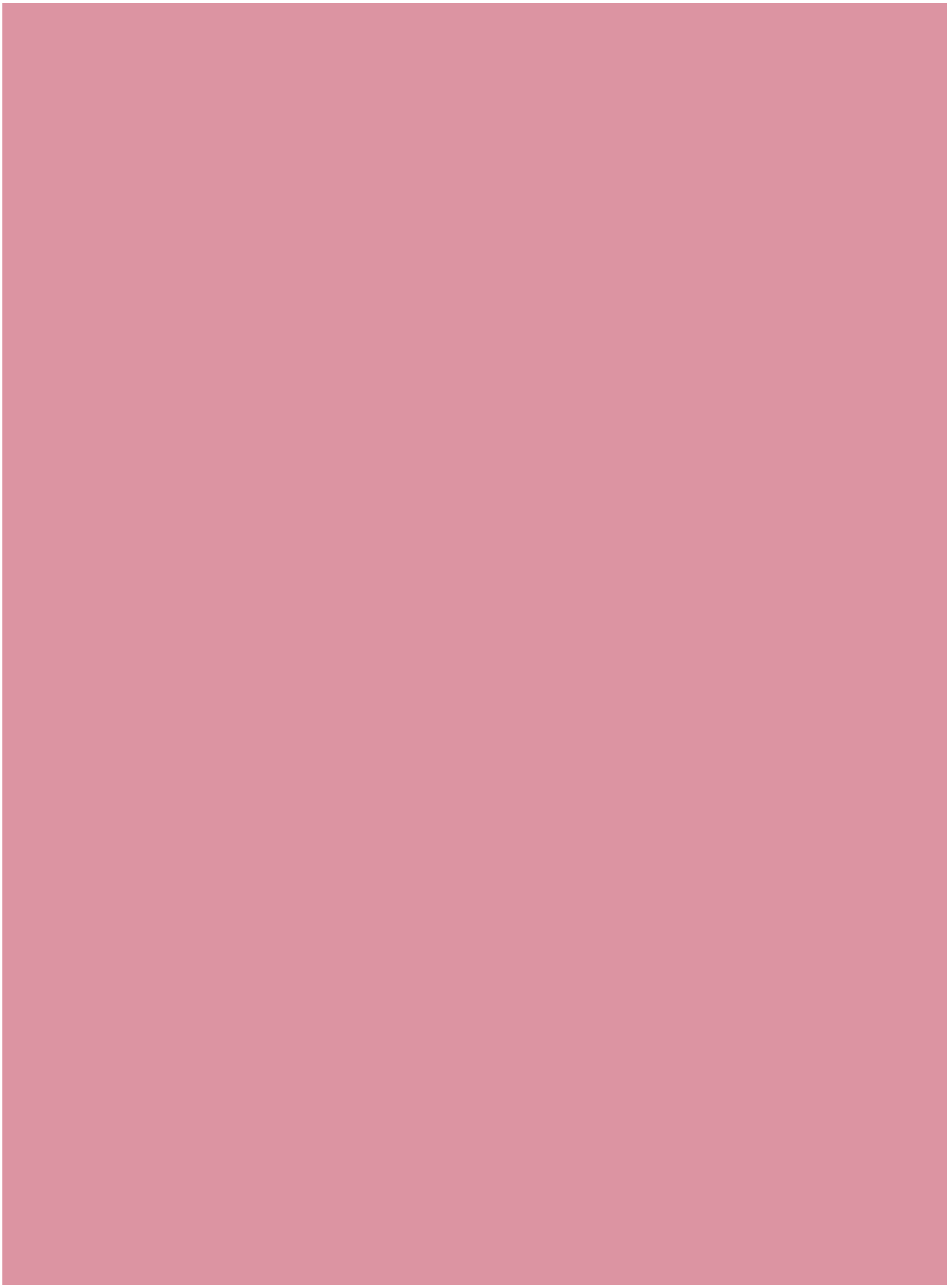
Chapters 1–3: These chapters will provide you with a foundational understanding of what dyslexia is—how it's defined and how it can affect us throughout our lives.

Chapters 4–9: We'll then look at how the challenges associated with dyslexia can impact almost every aspect of our lives, with advice on navigating careers, relationships, parenting, daily responsibilities, emotional well-being, and energy levels.

Chapters 10–13: This section will focus on how to lean into your unique dyslexic strengths. We'll also look at some inspiring examples of dyslexic people throughout history who used their unique strengths to do amazing things.

Chapter 14: The final chapter is all about *you*. I want you to finish this book feeling confident in the incredible dyslexic person you are.

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Chapter 1

What is dyslexia?

Whether you're formally diagnosed or not—knowing you're dyslexic matters. So let's begin by exploring some of the many definitions of dyslexia, how they've changed over time, and the aspects of the dyslexic experience they often fail to capture.

Defining dyslexia

Beyond traditional definitions

How is dyslexia diagnosed?

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Friends of dyslexia

A brief history of dyslexia

Defining dyslexia

Dyslexia is a difference in brain function that impacts roughly one in five people around the world. Although definitions of dyslexia vary across countries and organizations, most share several common themes.

Reading challenges

Struggles with reading show up in every definition of dyslexia. These typically include difficulties with reading speed, comprehension, and accuracy, and also effortful reading. People with dyslexia commonly experience at least one, if not many, of these challenges.

Spelling challenges

Difficulty spelling is also included in nearly every definition of dyslexia. However, the degree to which spelling is affected differs across languages, depending on their orthography (writing systems). This means spelling can be harder in languages like English where letters and sounds don't always match. Languages like Finnish or Italian are often easier, because their spelling and pronunciation are more consistent.

Difficulty working with the sounds in words

Another hallmark of most definitions of dyslexia is difficulty identifying and manipulating the sounds of a language. This can make it harder to break up a word into specific sounds to understand how you might spell it, find the word that you're looking for, or keep words in your mind long enough to use them to think, plan, or speak.

Neurodevelopmental

Many definitions agree that dyslexia is "neurodevelopmental," meaning it's caused by differences in the way the brain

develops and functions. This makes dyslexia a lifelong issue, rather than something that can be fixed or outgrown. It's the result of a mix of genetic, biological, and environmental factors, and children of parents with dyslexia have a 40–60% higher chance of developing it (see Does dyslexia run in families?).

Other language challenges

How we interact with language can also be affected in several other ways:

- Memorizing information can take much more time and repetition.
- Word retrieval can be difficult, which can make it feel as though the word we want is right on the tip of our tongue but we just can't get to it.
- We may accidentally substitute an incorrect word when we can't retrieve the word we mean.
- We often have to consciously think about the process of spelling words and structuring sentences while writing.



You've got this!

The language challenges associated with dyslexia have nothing to do with how intelligent, creative, and wonderfully capable you are, and everything to do with differences in the way your brain functions.

Beyond traditional definitions

With a focus on language difficulties, definitions often overlook many of the daily challenges of living with dyslexia. Let's expand our understanding of how dyslexia can affect us.

Working memory

If you have dyslexia, you may struggle with working memory, your brain's system for holding and manipulating information (see Running out of mental space). This can make it difficult to follow multistep instructions, keep track of what you're saying while you say it, or remember what you've just heard or read.

Emotional impact

As many as 40–60% of people with dyslexia experience anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, and other mental health challenges. This is often not caused by dyslexia itself, but by the challenges of navigating environments that are not designed to support people with dyslexia (see chapter 8).

Executive functioning

Dyslexia can also affect executive functioning, the system in your brain responsible for planning, prioritization, impulse control, attention, and emotional regulation. This can show up as becoming easily distracted while reading or writing, putting off mentally exhausting tasks, or struggling to plan out a project you need to complete (see Executive functioning).

Automaticity

Learning to automatically follow processes—such as following a recipe without checking the steps over and over again, or tying your shoelaces—is often more challenging if you have dyslexia

and can require more time and repetition (see Automaticity challenges).

Symptoms vs. traits

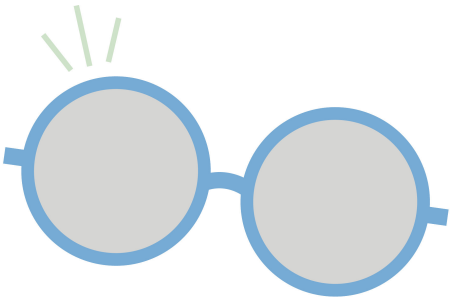
Even though these challenges play an important role in shaping the dyslexic experience, they are often left out of traditional definitions of dyslexia because they are considered "traits," not "symptoms."

A trait is a characteristic someone has because of how their brain is wired, such as working memory challenges or excelling at big-picture thinking. Traits are commonly experienced by people who have a diagnosis, but aren't considered diagnostic criteria.

Symptoms are used to establish a diagnosis. For example, slow reading is a symptom of dyslexia—this doesn't mean everyone with dyslexia experiences this (there is some variation), but it's still part of the diagnostic criteria.

While many people experience similar traits, they are not part of receiving an official diagnosis. This is partially because of the focus on language difficulties in traditional definitions of dyslexia and also because many dyslexic traits are shared with other kinds of neurodivergence.

It's incredibly important to understand what traits are, because they are the parts of the dyslexic experience that often show up most in our daily lives. This is why the main focus of my book is to explore these traits in more detail and examine how they affect everything from education and work to family life and relationships. So come along as we take the conversation further.



How is dyslexia diagnosed?

Reaching a dyslexia diagnosis often involves three key steps: interviews, assessment, and review. The process can feel intimidating, but it's designed to build a complete picture to make an informed and helpful recommendation.



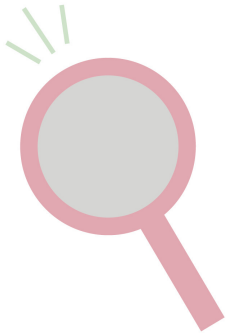
Step 1: Gathering relevant information

The diagnostic process typically begins by interviewing the individual being assessed for dyslexia and, when age-appropriate, their caregivers. This is to gather relevant developmental information, such as when they hit key language milestones, school records, specific challenges, and family history of neurodivergency.



Step 2: Diagnostic assessment

During this phase, the individual being assessed is given several tests to explore their cognitive and academic profile. Tests often involve word reading and decoding, reading fluency, reading comprehension, phonemic awareness, and word retrieval—the specifics may vary depending on country of residence.



Step 3: Analysis and diagnosis

In the final stage, the results of Step 1 and Step 2 are analyzed by at least one—but ideally more than one—professional to determine whether they indicate the presence of dyslexia. An official diagnosis is then shared with the individual being assessed, ideally along with personalized recommendations for tools, accommodations, and interventions.

Comprehensive assessment vs. screening Screening

When seeking a diagnosis, you'll typically encounter two different paths: screening and comprehensive assessment.

While they are very different, both are valid and come with individual benefits.

Screening

Screening comes in many different shapes and sizes. It can involve anything from a 10-question assessment to several long meetings.

Pros: Faster, more accessible, and more affordable.

Cons: Not an official diagnosis—screening is often designed to identify the likelihood of dyslexia. It can sometimes provide documentation that's accepted in certain contexts, but it's not universally recognized, and some schools and workplaces may require a comprehensive assessment.

Comprehensive assessment

Typically considered the official path to diagnosis, comprehensive assessment is more standardized and extensive. It follows the three-step process and concludes with an official diagnosis and documentation.

Pros: More detailed and thorough, recommendations for personalized accommodations and tools are more specific, and documentation is universally accepted.

Cons: Less accessible, far more expensive, and it can be difficult to find a provider.

Knowing you're dyslexic matters

It's estimated that 60–80% of people with dyslexia are either unaware that they're dyslexic or remain undiagnosed. This represents hundreds of millions of people worldwide.

Whether you're formally diagnosed or not, knowing you're dyslexic matters. Here's why.

Self-esteem

Dyslexia is often closely intertwined with our sense of identity—even if we don't know that we're dyslexic. If you've always experienced reading and spelling difficulties, poor grades, and criticism from teachers or peers, it's easy to assume that you're incapable or lack intelligence. This can lead to poor self-esteem—especially if you don't understand how your brain works. Knowing what's behind your struggles paves the way for more self-compassion.

Access to tools

If you're unaware that you have dyslexia, you probably don't have access to the tools that could help you do things more efficiently, and you might not even realize these tools exist. When we better understand our struggles, we can advocate for tools that meet our needs and improve our efficiency. Self-advocacy is important because schools and workplaces usually don't offer additional support unless you have a formal diagnosis.

Validation

It's easy to blame yourself when you are struggling and don't understand why. You may feel as though things shouldn't be so hard or wonder why you're so tired. This can make you feel confused; in some ways you see how capable and intelligent you are, but in others, you struggle so much. Finding out that you have dyslexia can be validating because it provides an explanation for what you're going through. When you understand that dyslexia is part of who you are and not a character flaw, you can move forward with more self-acceptance.

Should you get diagnosed?

The decision to get diagnosed is a personal one and not something I believe everyone needs to pursue. Self-diagnosis is valid, especially since an official diagnosis is not always accessible. Unless you need access to specific accommodations for work or school, an official diagnosis won't logistically change anything. If you're struggling to decide, here are some questions to ask yourself. Remember, there are no right answers. The goal is to answer honestly so you can figure out which option makes the most sense for you.

Would I benefit from accommodations for either school or work?

Do I need official documentation to feel comfortable advocating for my needs?

Would a concrete explanation for why certain things have been such a struggle be validating and heal parts of myself?

If I woke up tomorrow with an official diagnosis, would my life be different?

Would the process and possible financial strain of comprehensive assessment be worth the benefit?

If you answered yes to three or more of these questions, you might want to consider seeking a formal diagnosis.

Myths about dyslexia

There are numerous widely held myths about dyslexia, many of which lead to confusion about what dyslexia really is and how it shows up. Here are some of the most common ones.

We grow out of it

Dyslexia is lifelong. It is neurobiological, meaning it originates from the brain's structure and function. The impact of dyslexia might change throughout our lives, but the fact that we are dyslexic does not.

We see words backward

Dyslexia has nothing to do with vision and everything to do with the way that the brain processes language. We see the same thing on the page as everyone else. And, contrary to popular opinion, colored overlays or colored glasses do not help (although they can ease visual stress).

We can't read

We are very capable of reading, in fact, many people with dyslexia love to read. While reading often demands greater effort and is more time-consuming, it is still very possible.

We lack intelligence

Dyslexia is not linked to intelligence at all. Among dyslexic individuals, you will find people of varying levels of intelligence. This is one of the most harmful myths because it reinforces the common self-perception that we are “stupid” or “incapable” because of the struggles we face.

We are lazy

Completing certain tasks might take us longer, but this has nothing to do with laziness or lack of effort. Differences in our brain make these tasks more effortful and time-consuming.

It is rare

Dyslexia is actually very common. It is present in 10–20% of the population, likely making it the most common form of neurodiversity.

It is more common among boys than girls

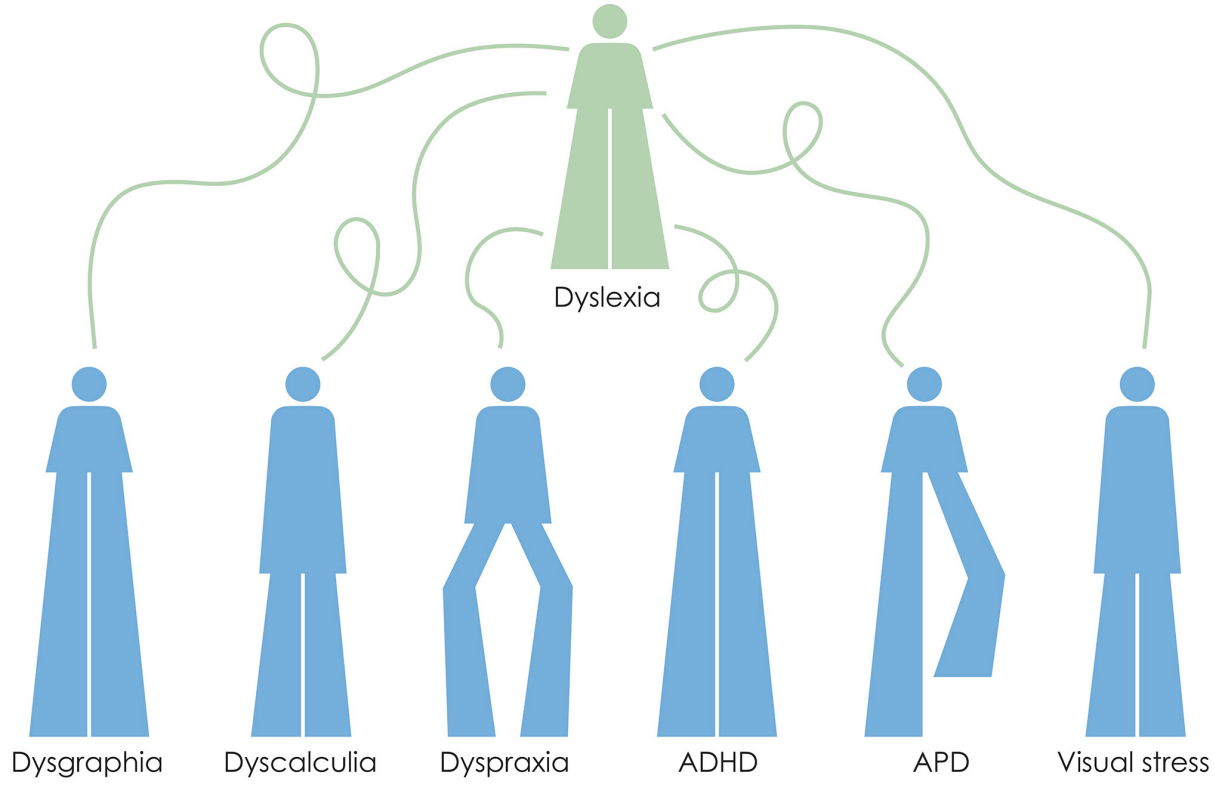
The presence of dyslexia is very similar between boys and girls. Historically, boys have been more likely to be diagnosed due to disruptive behavior and the male bias in research, but not because dyslexia is actually more prevalent in boys.

Friends of dyslexia

Dyslexia loves company. It often shows up alongside other types of neurodiversity. This can make it difficult to determine whether challenges are caused by dyslexia or something else, like ADHD.

It's important to be aware of the conditions that can occur alongside dyslexia, particularly if you're seeking specific accommodations. For example, if you think you only have dyslexia but you also have ADHD, you are less likely to access tools and medication tailored to your needs.

While this doesn't apply to everyone, I do recommend spending some time reflecting on your experiences and asking others for their observations, so you can access the right support.



Here are some of the most common diagnoses that show up alongside dyslexia.

	Prevalence in dyslexic individuals	Definition	Common struggles
Dysgraphia	30–50%	A learning difficulty that affects writing and fine motor skills	Spelling, grammar, handwriting, and other parts of the writing process
Dyscalculia	40–60%	A learning difficulty that affects how the brain interacts with numbers	Understanding math concepts, learning times tables, counting without losing track, solving mathematical problems
Dyspraxia	25–40%	A disorder that affects fine and gross motor skills	Planning and performing physical tasks, coordination and balance, learning new skills
Attention deficit/ hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)	25–40%	A disorder that affects attention regulation, impulse control, and executive functioning	Holding information in your head, prioritizing or planning, focusing, impulsivity, and more
Auditory processing disorder (APD)	25–43%	A disorder that affects how the brain processes sounds	Telling sounds apart and focusing on a conversation in a noisy environment, asking people to repeat themselves, delays in processing what you hear
Visual stress	30–46%	A visual difficulty that affects reading	Focusing on a word (letters might look blurry or like they are moving), eye strain, headaches, light sensitivity, concentrating on reading

Read detailed description

A brief history of dyslexia

It wasn't until the 1800s that dyslexia was first referenced. If that seems surprisingly recent, remember that learning to read wasn't common practice before this.

1877

Neurologist Adolph Kussmaul coined the term "word blindness" based on his observations of patients who had difficulty reading, and in some cases writing, despite having no intellectual impairments or vision problems. His initial studies focused on people who had experienced traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and developed reading difficulties after (a condition now called acquired dyslexia or alexia).

1883

Ophthalmologist Rudolf Berlin coined the term "dyslexia," from the Greek words "dys" (difficulty) and "lexis" (words), to describe a pattern he observed in adult patients who struggled with reading.

1896

Physician W. Pringle Morgan wrote in the *British Medical Journal* about a 14-year-old boy who was very bright and capable but still struggled to read. This marked the start of a shift in dyslexia research, moving the focus from adults with TBIs to children.

1901

Ophthalmologist James Hinshelwood published a study in which he theorized that "word blindness" resulted from a brain region responsible for reading functioning differently. This began the move toward understanding dyslexia as a difference in brain functioning.

1930s–1940s

Samuel T. Orton, a neuropsychiatrist and pathologist, Anna Gillingham, a psychologist and educator, and Bessie Stillman, an educator, collaborated to develop the multisensory instructional approach to reading and writing known as the Orton-Gillingham method.

1968

The World Federation of Neurology issued the first official definition of dyslexia as a disorder characterized by difficulty learning to read despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence, and sociocultural opportunity.

1998

Sally E. Shaywitz et al., published a study that used fMRI scans to compare brain activation in dyslexic and nondyslexic participants. Significant differences between the two groups cemented the theory that dyslexia arises from differences in brain functioning.

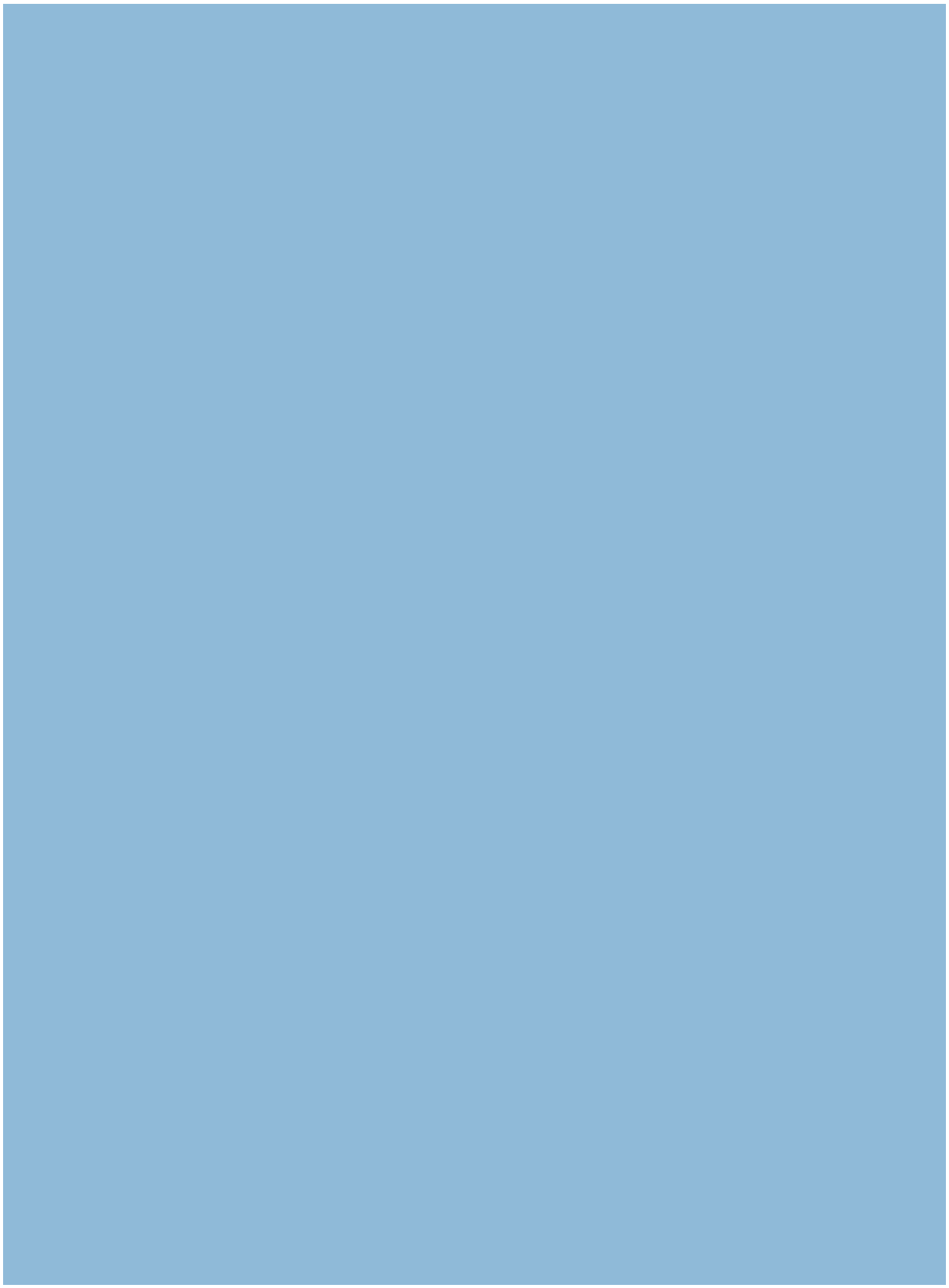
2010s

There has been a growing awareness of dyslexia as part of the neurodiversity movement, which recognizes differences in the brain as natural forms of human diversity rather than problems to be fixed.

2021

The International Dyslexia Association published dyslexia assessment guidelines that included a recommendation for assessing working memory and executive functioning, thereby acknowledging their significance to the dyslexic experience.

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Chapter 2

The dyslexic brain

Living with dyslexia can take a toll on your self-confidence. When everyday tasks feel inexplicably difficult, it's easy to believe that you are incapable, unintelligent, or even broken. But this couldn't be further from the truth. Let's take a look at what's actually going on inside your brain to help you move forward with self-acceptance and find the tools you need to thrive.

The dyslexic brain

A strengths-based approach to dyslexia

The dyslexic brain

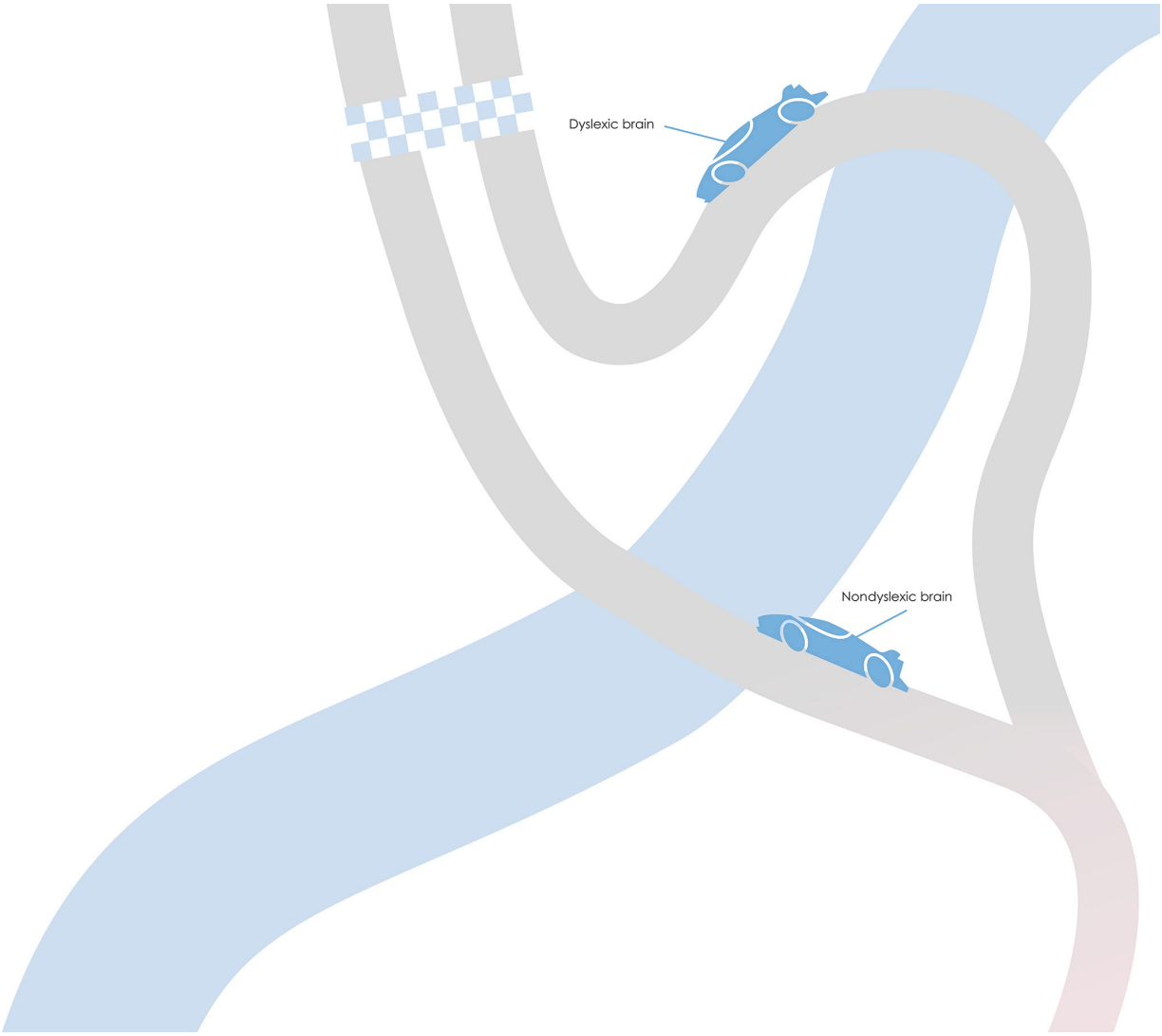
Scans show us that there are clear differences between the dyslexic and nondyslexic brain, though scientists are still debating exactly which parts are affected.

Most of the research on the brain differences behind dyslexia has focused on children and language difficulties, but these studies still offer useful insights. What many of them agree on is that people with dyslexia show a pattern of both over- and under-activation of parts of the brain involved in the reading system.

Underactivity in parts of the brain responsible for interacting with language means people with dyslexia often have to rely on other less efficient parts. Imagine trying to drive the most direct route to your favorite ice cream shop, only to find the bridge you need to cross is closed, forcing you to take much longer, less efficient back roads to get your ice cream.

Some researchers believe that these differences are potentially responsible for several of the strengths we often see in people with dyslexia, such as big-picture thinking, problem-solving, and innovation (see A strengths-based approach to dyslexia). But more research is needed to fully understand how the impact of these differences in the brain extends beyond reading.

Dyslexic people often have to rely on less efficient paths.



Dyslexia impacts four key areas of the brain.

The left temporo-parietal region (TPR)

Responsible for connecting sounds and letters, the TPR helps us decode words by using methods such as "sound it out." This region is often underactive in the dyslexic brain and may communicate less than normal with other parts of the brain involved in the reading network. This can make it harder to

decode words, and other parts of the brain often have to step in to compensate.

The occipital temporal region (OTR)

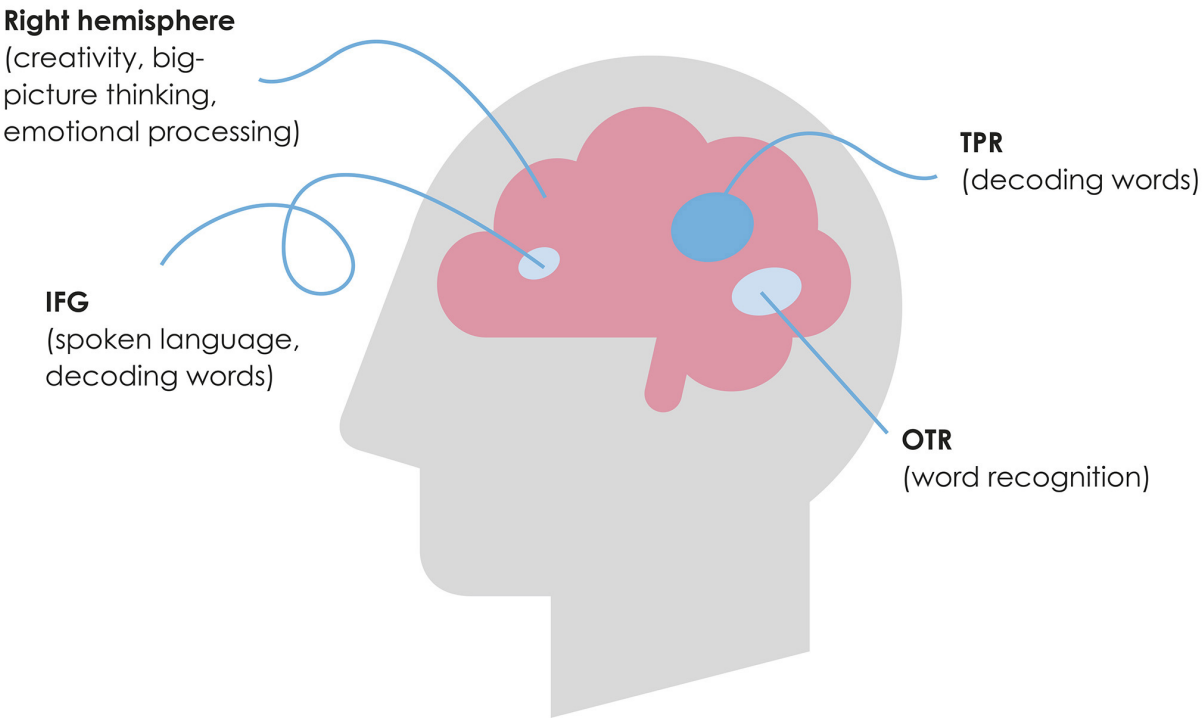
Home to the visual word form area (VWFA) of the brain, the OTR helps us recognize written words, and connect the sound and meaning of a word to the word itself. Research shows that the OTR is often underactive in people with dyslexia, which leads to the brain relying on less efficient methods to recognize words. Like the TPR, this region also appears to show weak connectivity with other parts of the brain involved in the reading network.

The inferior frontal gyrus (IFG)

The IFG helps us with spoken language, articulation, and aspects of phonological processing, such as sounding out words. Studies have found that the IFG often appears overactive in individuals with dyslexia during certain phonological processing tasks. Some researchers believe it compensates for underactivity in the OTR and TPR, serving as an alternative—but less efficient—pathway for recognizing and sounding out words.

The right hemisphere

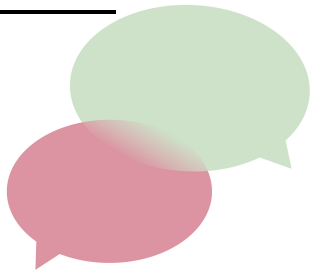
While it's clear that the dyslexic brain differs from the nondyslexic brain in the right hemisphere, pinpointing the exact areas involved is a bit more complicated. Research is generally inconsistent, with factors such as age, gender, and task affecting which regions are overactive and their level of activation. Our best understanding is that people with dyslexia seem to use the right hemisphere in a compensatory way to make up for underactivity in the left. While the right hemisphere can support reading and language processing, it does so less efficiently and requires a lot more effort.



You've got this!

If you struggle to quickly recognize words (even familiar ones), this could be your brain relying on alternative pathways instead of the usual reading centers. While this can make the process slower and more exhausting, it means your brain is innovating and finding its own unique ways to adapt!

How to work *with* your brain (and not against it)



There are few things as satisfying as finding a tool or strategy that works harmoniously with your brain. When something works for you, it should feel intuitive and relatively effortless, even if there is a learning curve while you adjust. These principles will help guide you toward the tools that work best for *you*.

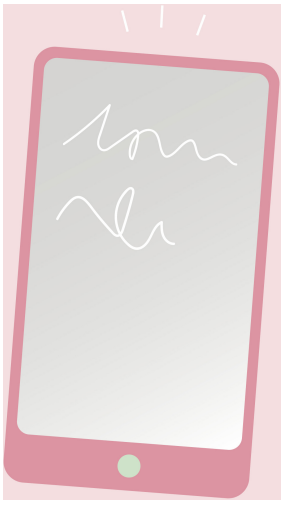
Adapt to the way your brain works

The dyslexic brain relies on less efficient systems for interacting with language. And so, it's important to find tools to help make up for this. For example, it is likely that the dyslexic brain relies more heavily on the IFG, which better supports spoken language than written, so using a tool like speech-to-text can reduce the mental workload.

Pace yourself

Some tasks will require a lot more mental energy than others (these are often language-heavy). Structure your schedule and to-do list by spacing out demanding tasks rather than using your energy all at once.

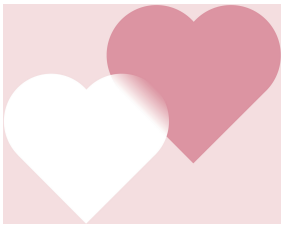
Discover what works for you



Remember that *your* dyslexia is unique to *you*. Get curious and take time to explore how your brain works and the strategies that best support you. For example, while some people find reading effortless (or so I've been told), many people with dyslexia can find it exhausting. If that applies to you, try using text-to-speech tools to listen instead.

Keep your mind fresh
Divide tasks involving lots of reading and writing into manageable chunks and give yourself short breaks in between. For example, spend 30 minutes reading and then pause for five minutes; you could get up and stretch, make a cup of tea, or look out of the window before returning to the task.

Practise relentless self-compassion



When you feel disheartened or exhausted by the extra effort you have to put in, remind yourself that your brain is not broken. Your brain functions differently—and that's okay. I often do this out loud, assuming nobody is sitting too close to me.

A strengths-based approach to dyslexia

While the differences in how dyslexic brains function result in several challenges, studies are increasingly finding that they might also lead to some outstanding strengths.

The Dyslexic Advantage organization, run by Brock Eide, MD and Fernette Eide, MD, promotes a strengths-based approach to dyslexia—the idea that dyslexia is a difference in brain functioning that can lead to both challenges and advantages such as exceptional spatial reasoning skills and big-picture thinking. This idea has been taken further by Dr. Helen Taylor, who suggests that dyslexia might be better understood as an "exploratory specialization." She argues that while dyslexic individuals often struggle with the "exploitation" of information, which refers to optimizing known knowledge or strategies, they often thrive in "exploration," discovering new or unfamiliar ideas and solutions.

Your brain isn't broken—it's brilliantly unique.

Neurobiological differences

One possible reason why dyslexic individuals often thrive in "exploration" is the neurobiological differences that have been observed in the dyslexic brain—several regions seem to be more active, likely compensating for underactive areas. Some experts believe that this overactivity can result in greater connectivity across networks of the brain, making people with dyslexia more likely to excel in visual-spatial reasoning, out-of-the-box thinking, and even creative problem-solving!

Another factor that may help explain this is that dyslexic individuals tend to rely more on the brain's right hemisphere. In the early stages of learning to read, children often use both the right and left hemispheres of their brain. As nondyslexic readers become more fluent, their brains shift from relying on the right hemisphere to using parts of the left, which are more efficient for reading. But this shift is less likely to occur in dyslexic individuals, who seem to continue to rely on regions in the right hemisphere to interact with language and information. Some of the regions in the right hemisphere play an active role in many of the dyslexic strengths we'll cover in the last chapters of this book (see Big-picture thinking).

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Chapter 3

Living with dyslexia

The impact of dyslexia changes throughout our lifetime. During our school years, reading and spelling challenges often get the most attention. But as life progresses, it's not uncommon for other struggles to take center stage, from making mistakes at work and struggling with life admin to anxiety and low self-esteem.

The dyslexia iceberg

The dyslexic journey

School and beyond

Social impact

Menopause

Retirement

Accommodations

The dyslexia iceberg

Let's uncover the hidden layers of dyslexia. This analogy can help you explore how dyslexia has shaped your life so far, so you can seek the right support moving forward.

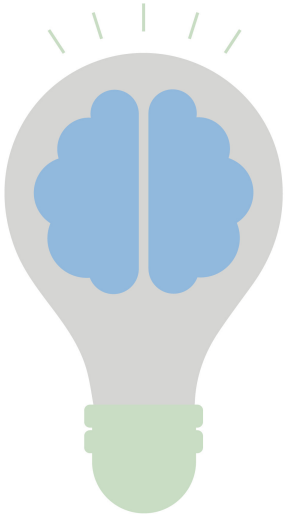
The conversation around dyslexia often focuses on visible struggles, such as spelling mistakes and slow reading. But these are just the tip of the iceberg. Below the surface are hidden struggles and strengths that people don't always see.

The lack of awareness of what living with dyslexia really looks like means many people don't realize how much it has shaped their lives. When we understand the parts of dyslexia that exist beneath the surface, we can begin to uncover tools and strategies to help us navigate challenges, lean into our unique strengths, and find self-acceptance.

Take a look at the iceberg and think about which strengths and challenges resonate most with you.

You've got this!

Just as an iceberg is always in a state of flux—growing, shifting, rolling—the impact of dyslexia changes throughout our lifetimes. The more we understand how dyslexia affects us, the easier life becomes. Never stop being curious and exploring!





Read detailed description

What people think dyslexia is

Struggling to pronounce words and recognize sounds

Difficulty understanding reading material

Slow and effortful reading

Spelling mistakes

What dyslexia also is

Burnout

Empathy

Sleep problems

Low self-esteem

Misreading information

Trouble remembering words

Out-of-the-box thinking

Struggling with time management

Difficulty planning, organizing, or managing tasks

Resilience

Curiosity

Mood disorders

Visual-spatial reasoning skills

Big-picture thinking

Struggling to perform tasks on autopilot

Missing mistakes in writing

Trouble knowing left from right or remembering routes

Difficulty following instructions

Struggling to remember information

The dyslexic journey

Contrary to the myth that dyslexia is something you just "grow out of," it continues to shape experiences well into adulthood, with certain life stages making its traits and challenges more visible.

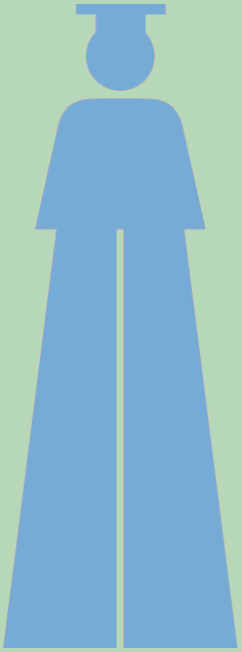
Early life

Before reaching school age, children may experience delays in speech or letter learning, struggle with rhyming, and display reasoning skills that seem advanced for their age. Once children begin school, signs of dyslexia often become more apparent because of the focus on reading and writing abilities.



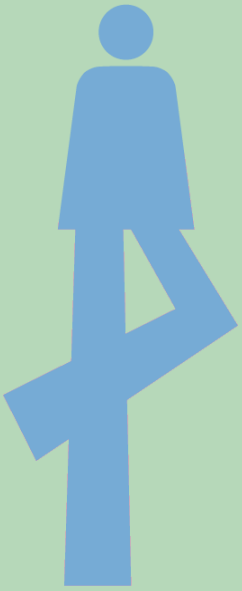
Education

Children and teenagers may struggle to keep up with their peers, which can lead to heightened anxiety and even bullying. In the early years of school, the primary challenge is often learning to read. Throughout higher education, the challenge often shifts to keeping up academically, with students spending extra hours studying, writing, and preparing for tests.



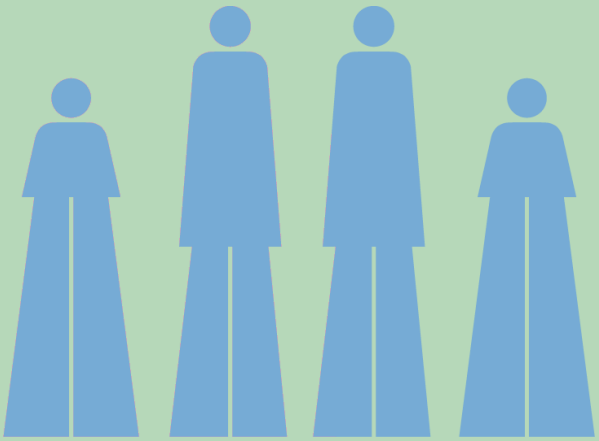
Transitioning to adulthood

Adulthood brings a brand-new and ever-growing list of responsibilities, such as meeting deadlines at work, paying bills on time, and keeping up with a social calendar. Understanding how dyslexia can impact these and finding the right support is often a learning curve.



Family life

Parenting brings many new demands, from mental fatigue and juggling schedules to providing emotional support and helping with homework, all of which can be harder to manage when you have dyslexia.



Retirement

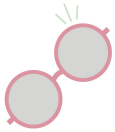
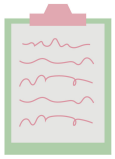
During retirement, some aspects of dyslexia may become more noticeable. The familiar rhythms, routines, and coping strategies that have helped us manage dyslexia for years are often replaced by new routines and unexpected challenges.



School and beyond

There is a common misconception that the challenges of dyslexia begin and end with school. In reality, these struggles often evolve and continue to show up in adulthood.

Because of that misconception, many of us don't realize the extent to which our dyslexia impacts our daily life. So let's take a look at some of the challenges people with dyslexia face in school and how they can continue to impact adult life.

Challenge	School	Adult life
Reading fluency 	Falling behind because it's harder to learn information presented in written form.	Struggling to understand information presented in written form, such as emails and training materials, which can be extremely time-consuming.
Reading aloud	Experiencing high levels of shame and anxiety when having to read to the class.	Avoiding activities that involve reading aloud, from giving presentations in the workplace to reading to your children.
Tasks take more time to complete 	Losing focus in the classroom, feeling mentally exhausted, and missing out on social activities that peers have time for.	Falling behind on work or needing to catch up outside of work, which can lead to mental exhaustion and impact home life.
Spelling 	Achieving lower grades and avoiding volunteering for written tasks, which can mean missing out on key developmental opportunities.	Avoiding written tasks, such as writing on the board at work or jotting something down while playing a game with friends, and missing out on opportunities that could have a positive personal or professional impact.
Memorizing information and processes 	Struggling to remember new information, such as times tables, formulas, and grammar rules.	Finding it hard to learn new work systems, forgetting your partner's preferences, and keeping track of school routines as a parent, all of which can result in frustration toward yourself and from others.
Spiky profiles	Being top of the class in some subjects and bottom in others, usually	Excelling in some areas of life while struggling in others, which can create

Challenge	School	Adult life
	those involving language, spelling, and grammar, which often leads to criticism from peers.	uncertainty for coworkers or family members who may be unsure of what they can reliably expect from you.

Read detailed description

Social impact

When your life experiences are different from the people around you, it's easy to feel disconnected. This feeling can start in school and carry on into adult life.

Social challenges

- Replying to text messages can be hard work. You might feel anxious about making typos or feel like you don't have the mental energy to respond. And if you've put off replying for a while, it can feel too awkward to respond.
- Group activities are great—until they involve reading or writing. If a friend suggests playing a game that involves writing things down or reading aloud, you might suddenly remember you have somewhere else to be…
- When you still can't remember someone's name or birthday after asking several times, interactions can feel awkward, making you avoid them altogether.
- It's common to misinterpret text messages or infer a tone that wasn't intended, which can lead to unnecessary conflict.
- The way that people respond when you answer a question and your answer is different from everyone else's can make you want to disappear into the floor.

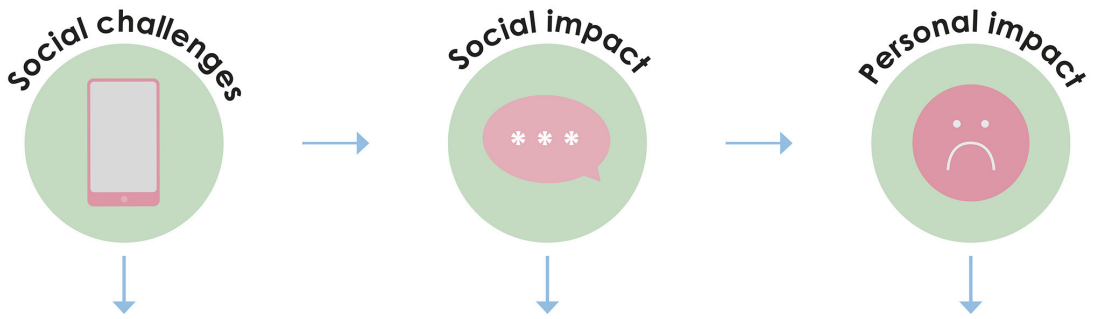


Social impact

- Being ridiculed for spelling incorrectly, mispronouncing a word, or struggling to articulate yourself.
- Getting bullied in school because you were in the "special" class or called out of class every day for reading intervention.
- Not having time for social events because it takes you longer to complete tasks.
- Missing out on social opportunities due to difficulty keeping up with text messages.

Personal impact

- Feeling othered—it can be isolating when your lived experience differs from everyone else's.
- Struggling to open up and tell people that you have dyslexia.
- Experiencing shame and low self-esteem.



Solutions

- Effective reading intervention is important, because so many of the challenges of dyslexia—and the ways they can hold you back—stem from language difficulties. The earlier it starts, the better, but reading support can still make a huge difference in adulthood.
- Research shows that supportive relationships with family, friends, teachers, or colleagues can make a real difference in the emotional well-being of people with dyslexia.
- Talking to a mental health professional can make a lasting difference.

Menopause

The impact of dyslexia can become more noticeable during menopause because fluctuating hormones can amplify many of the challenges we already face.

I often hear from clients who feel menopause has made their dyslexic challenges much harder to manage. Some even describe it as feeling like they're "losing their minds" and worry they are experiencing early- onset dementia because of the dramatic shift in their cognitive performance. Let's take a look at what could be causing this.

Dyslexia and hormones

Hormones play a major role in how our brain functions, and during menopause, hormones change a lot. Estrogen production sharply declines, and whether you're dyslexic or not, this is often associated with difficulty processing information, holding on to words, and maintaining attention. If you have dyslexia, and already experience these struggles, it's not surprising that they can feel harder to manage.

Hormonal changes can also affect coping strategies developed over years of living with dyslexia. For example, you might have managed to keep up at work by putting in extra hours in the evenings, but now your brain completely shuts off by the end of the day and refuses to turn back on. One moment your dyslexia is under control—and the next, it's running the show.

These changes don't always last forever, but there's no guarantee that you'll return to feeling the way you did before menopause began. There are several things you can do to help manage this difficult transition. There is also emerging research on potential evidence-based medication strategies,

such as hormone replacement therapy (HRT), that could ease some of the negative impact on cognitive functioning. Before starting any medication, always talk through the potential risks with your medical provider.

Navigating menopause

- **Move your body:** Aim for two resistance-based workouts and four aerobic workouts each week. Consult with your doctor first before making any significant changes to your physical activity.
- **Follow a Mediterranean diet:** Eat plenty of fruit, vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts, and olive oil. The nutrients supplied by a Mediterranean diet can help support and protect parts of cognitive function that are affected by the hormonal transition.
- **Practice self-compassion:** Remind yourself that your symptoms are the result of your body going through a huge transition—they don't reflect personal failure or weakness.


A B C D

Retirement

I've heard so many stories about the challenges of dyslexia becoming harder to manage during retirement. While specific research is lacking, based on what we know about retirement, aging, and dyslexia, we can piece together an understanding of why this might happen.

As we get older, our brains change in ways that can impact areas of cognitive functioning, such as working memory, processing speed, and word recall. And studies have noted that retirement often seems to accelerate that cognitive decline. Since these areas of cognitive function are already affected by dyslexia, changes in mental performance during retirement may feel more pronounced.

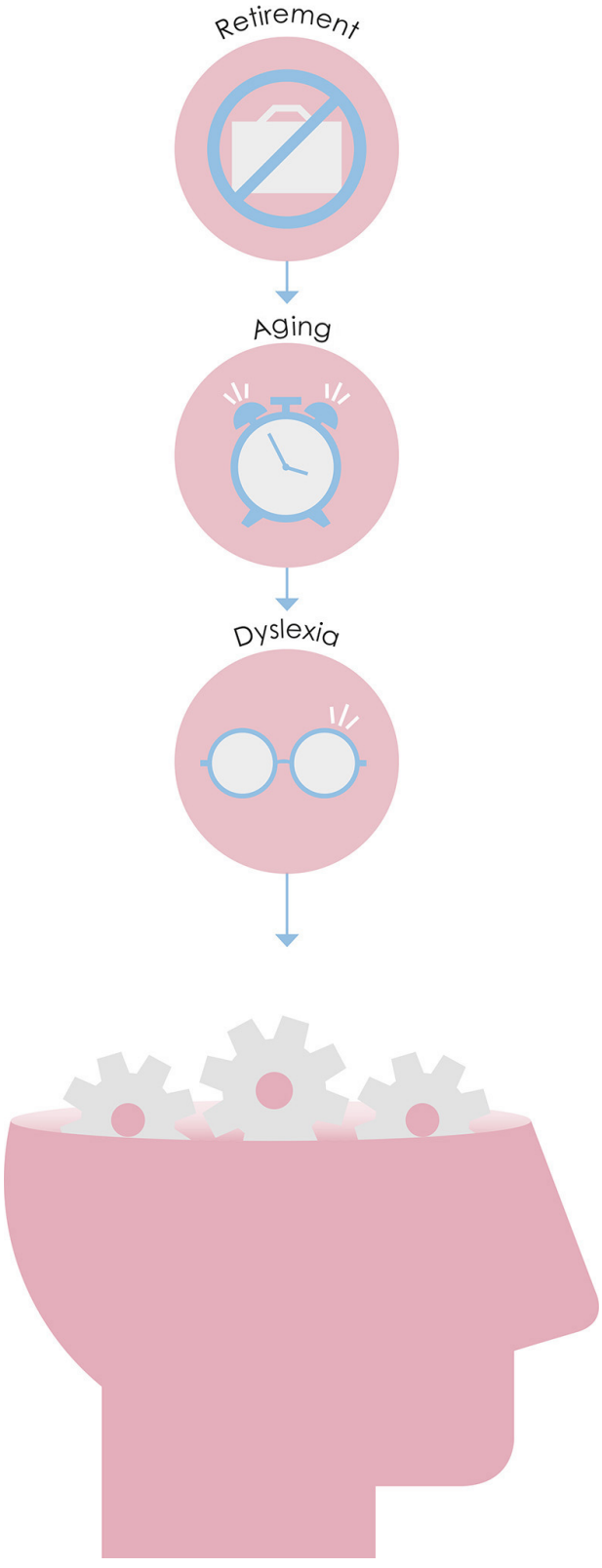
On top of this, dyslexic adults often develop strategies to compensate for their challenges, many of which are rooted in their daily workplace routines. When we retire, and our daily routines completely change, we often let go of these strategies, which can lead to cognitive decline. This means we often have to build new strategies to support our daily functioning, which can be mentally exhausting, placing further strain on our cognitive functioning.

Quick win

Letting go of familiar routines can be hard, but it's also an opportunity to reinvent your life and prioritize your passions. Take some time to make a list of all the things you've always wanted to try but never had the time for, and challenge yourself to check off one each month—maybe even one a week!

Living well in retirement

- **Keep your brain as active as possible:** You could learn a new skill, teach someone else new skills, or do puzzles.
- **Be strategic about building a new routine:** Challenge yourself to create a new schedule. Don't forget to set aside time to pursue your passions!
- **Reflect on what you need:** Take some time to think about the challenges you are facing and set up new strategies to compensate for those.
- **Take care of your body:** Exercise regularly and be conscious about what you eat.
- **Maintain social connection:** Try to get involved in a group. It could be anything from volunteering to joining a club of people who regularly meet to do an activity like pickleball.
- **Practice self-compassion, always:** Remind yourself that when everything about daily life changes, there is often a significant adjustment period—especially if you're dyslexic.


Retirement
Aging
Dyslexia

Accommodations

The world isn't designed for brains that work differently, so it's important to seek out the accommodations you need to perform on equal footing.

Accommodations are tools, strategies, and changes in your environment that help reduce barriers and enable you to perform at a level comparable to those around you. For example, things like text-to-speech, speech-to-text, AI proofreaders, low-distraction spaces, extra time, and flexible deadlines. Accommodations don't give you an unfair advantage, but the ability to interact with the world in a similar way to others.

Think of it like wearing glasses. If you have perfect vision, you will be able to see an object clearly, even if it's not within arm's reach. But if you don't have perfect vision, you'll likely need to wear glasses (or contacts, in my case) to see as clearly as—but not better than—someone with perfect eyesight.

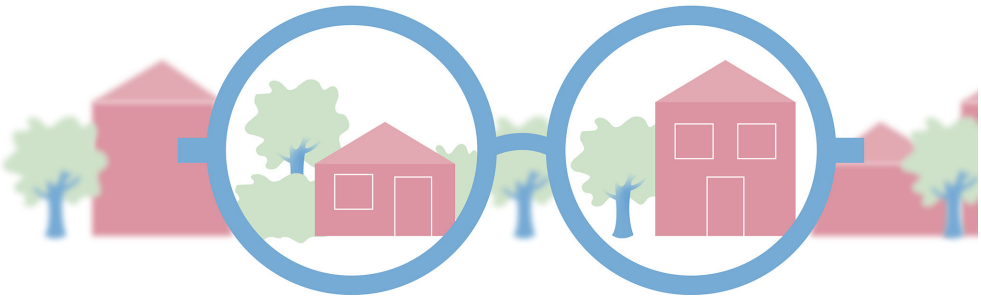
Seeking accommodations is an excellent way to relieve some of the mental strain of dyslexia and improve your ability to function well, whether in school, the workplace, or day-to-day life. But they often carry a lot of social stigma. We can be criticized or judged for using accommodations because of the common misconception that they give us an unfair advantage. They can also make us feel singled out and different from everyone else, which can mean we avoid seeking valuable support.

But what if things were different? Imagine if the world was actually designed in such a way that everyone had access to the tools they needed. This is known as universal design.

Universal design

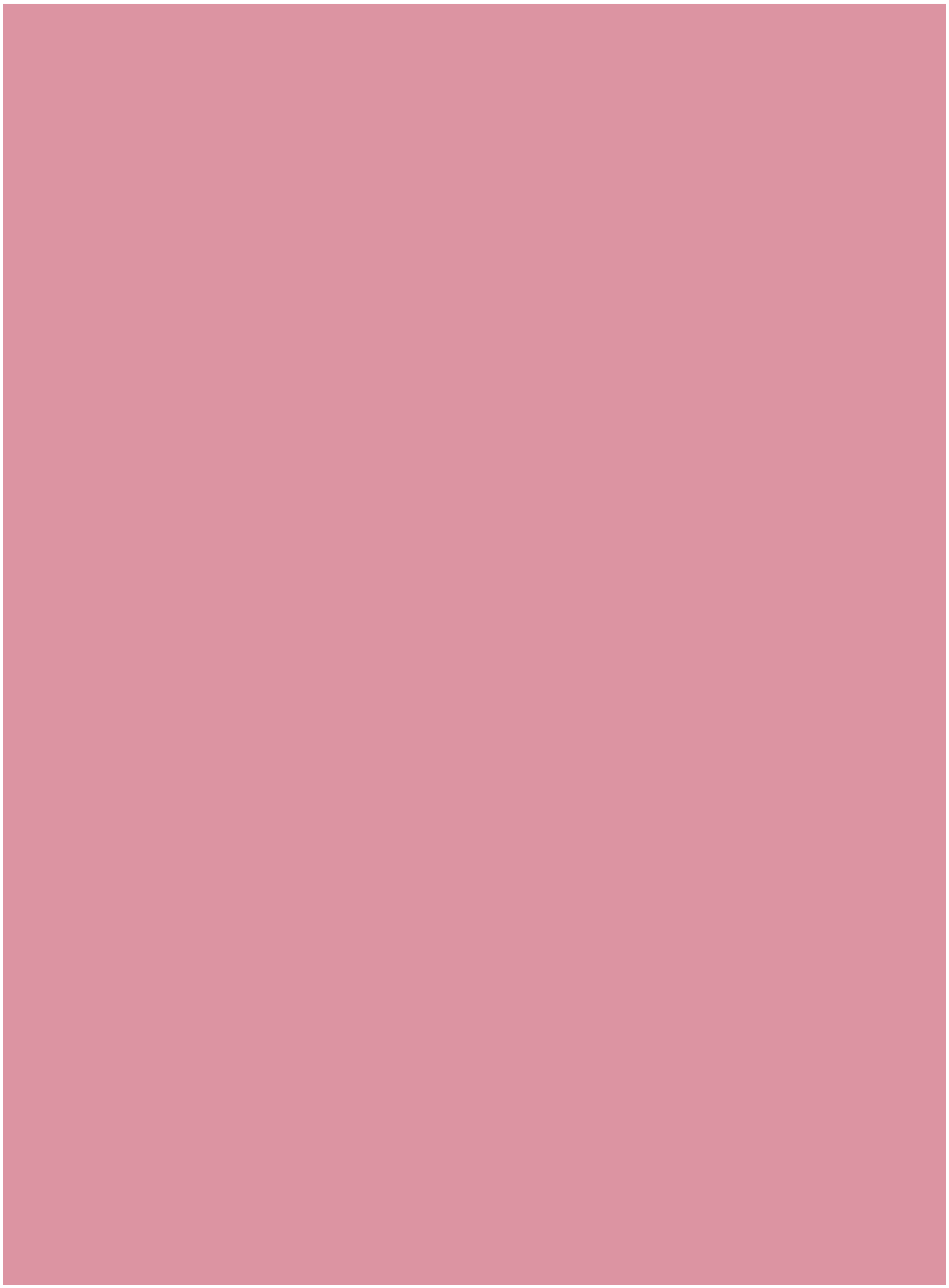
The creation of this utopia may be slightly idealistic, but I believe that it's always worth trying to move in the direction you want to go—even if you're only taking small steps at a time. For me, this means building systems that give everyone access to the tools they need. This would make access to accommodations the norm and reduce the stigma associated with receiving them.

Many of the accommodations that are invaluable for people with dyslexia could also benefit others. Imagine showing up for a new job and being told, "Here is the training information—you have access to a written manual, as well as a PDF, audio, and video version. If you need any text-to-speech or speech-to-text software, maybe an AI proofreader, or even a quiet space to work, here's where you can access those tools."



It doesn't just level the playing field for dyslexic individuals. It levels it for everyone.

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Chapter 4

Career

Dyslexia in the workplace can be tough, from taking longer to complete tasks to feeling pressure to keep up with nondyslexic coworkers. But, when we focus on what we do best, dyslexia can actually offer unique advantages. In this chapter, I'll share practical tools and strategies to guide you through common challenges at work while harnessing your strengths, so you can perform at your best every day.

Writing difficulties

Making work *work* for you

Misreading details

Executive functioning

Slower learning processes

Time tax

Thriving under pressure

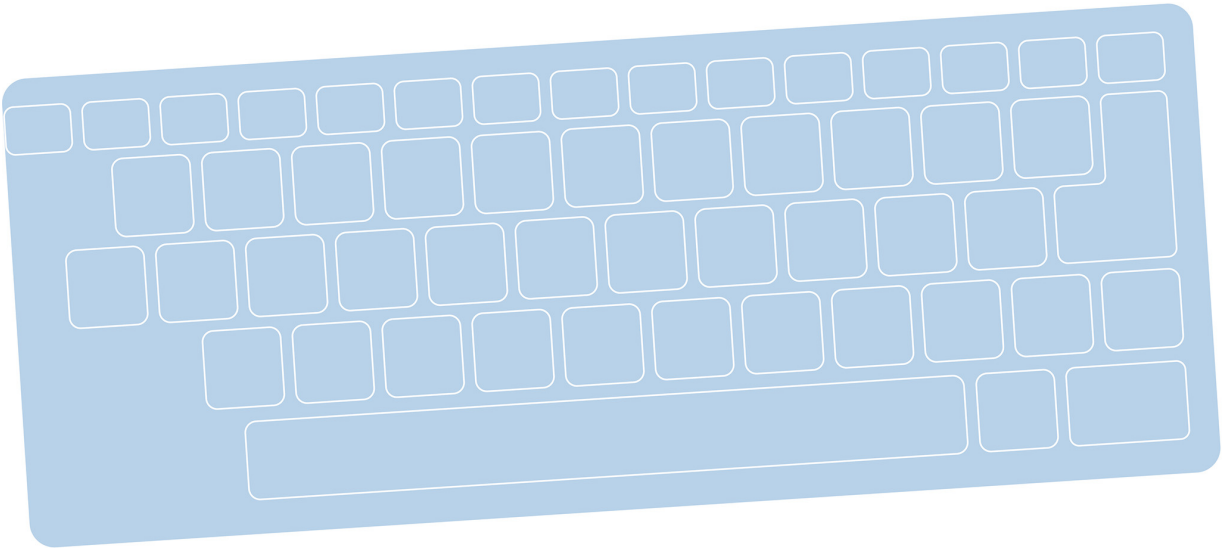
Social dynamics

Self-advocacy

Writing difficulties

Whether it's emails, meeting notes, or reports, writing is an unavoidable part of most of our jobs. But for dyslexic employees, even the thought of these tasks can be daunting.

Have you ever written an email, proofread it multiple times, sent it, and still noticed a mistake afterward? This is common for people with dyslexia and it can be particularly anxiety-provoking at work, where clear, error-free writing is often considered the standard. You might worry that the next typo will cost you a client or maybe even your job!



Why does this happen?

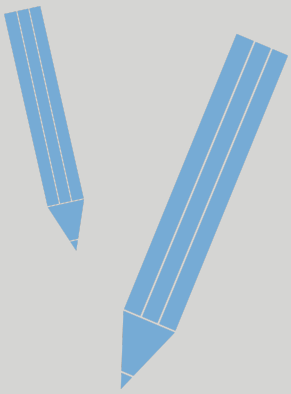
The dyslexic brain often relies on a top-down reading process. This means we rely on the overall context to understand what we're reading, rather than following it word for word. For example, when handed a project brief, we might quickly skim it to pick up the overall gist and let our brains automatically fill in any gaps, instead of carefully reading every word. This

approach helps identify the guiding principles of a project, but it can mean missing important details. We often read what we *believe* rather than what is *actually* on it. This is why, even after proofreading an email several times, we may still find mistakes afterward.



Quick win

When in doubt, ask your coworkers for support, but don't just hand over a rough draft. Always use the resources available to you first, such as online proofreading tools, to make their job easier.



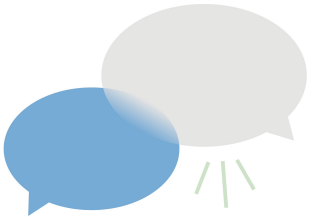
Making work *work* for you

AI assistants



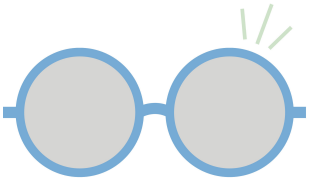
Dyslexic employees often dread hearing the words, "I need you to take notes in the meeting." AI assistants can be a huge help here by providing transcripts and summaries of your meeting. If this isn't an option, clarify your manager's expectations and figure out a strategy that works for you. You might say, "In order for me to take the best meeting notes, it would be very helpful to have an outline of the meeting to follow, so I can fill in major details and decisions as we go."

Speech-to-text tools



I've said it before and I'll say it again: Speech-to-text tools are incredibly helpful for people with dyslexia—especially in information-heavy workplaces. Try using these tools to create your first draft when you need to complete a written task. They can help you express your ideas with less mental effort. That's actually how I "wrote" this book!

Proofreaders



There are a number of programs out there that can proofread your work for you. These tools make it possible to spend more time on developing your incredible ideas and less on grammar and spelling. They're available in most applications, so whether you're writing an email or a project proposal, they're easy to access. As with all technology, they're not perfect, so it's important to double-check any corrections, but they often catch errors you are likely to miss when proofreading on your own.

When it comes to confidential information, remember that not all systems and software are appropriate.

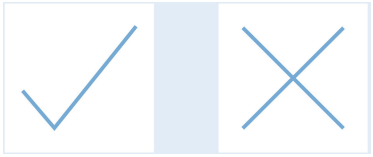
If you're working in fields that require confidentiality, such as medicine or law, you should always ensure the tools you use comply with the information and security standards of your workplace.

Misreading details

Have you ever thought you understood something, only to later realize that you misread the instructions or missed an important detail?

This can happen a lot if you have dyslexia because of the shortcuts our brains often take when reading (see The dyslexic brain).

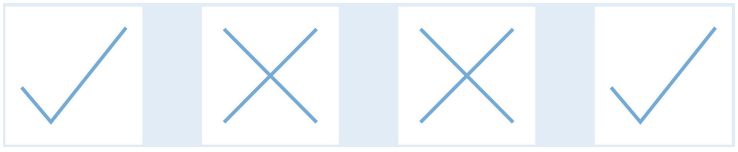
I want to acknowledge that there's no such thing as perfection. You can use every strategy available and put every fail-safe in place, and still make mistakes you won't catch until it's too late, such as reading the deadline as the 21st when it was actually the 12th. In some contexts, mistakes aren't a big deal. But in others, the stakes can be much higher.



Quick win

If you're stuck on a project, return to the instructions to make sure you haven't misread a critical detail that could change everything. I've done that more times than I can count!





Avoiding mistakes

- **Complete this checklist** when you are working with important details.

1. **Big picture:** Skim the text to pick up the overall gist.
2. **Slower pass:** This time, read it out loud.

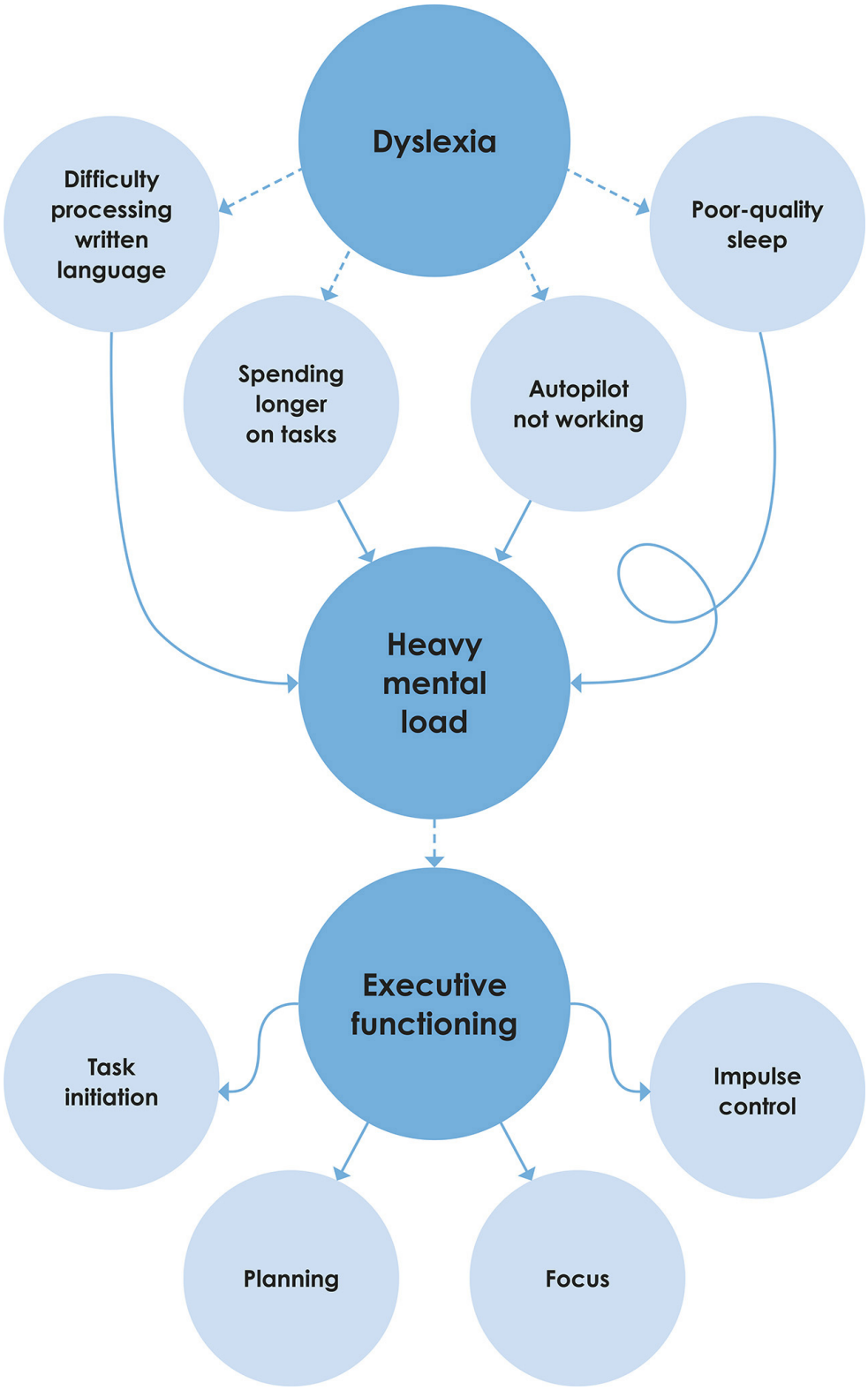
3. **Highlight the details:** These could be points to action or deadlines.
4. **Reread with fresh eyes:** Return to the document a few hours later.

- **Make the most of text-to-speech readers**. For many people with dyslexia, listening is less mentally taxing than reading, so you'll have more energy left to actively engage with the content.
- **Slow down** when details are important, rather than relying on the overall gist. Using a pencil, ruler, or even finger to track what you're reading can be helpful.
- **Practice self-compassion**. You can't always avoid mistakes, so learning to accept that they happen is the next best thing (see The power of self-compassion).
- **Talk to your boss** about how your dyslexia can lead to mistakes and how best to handle them. Being open about mistakes when they happen and resolving them right away can make things a lot easier.
- **Read your work aloud**—ideally the next day, or at least a few hours later. You could try starting at the end and reading sentences in reverse order to stop your brain from assuming what should be there instead of what is there.
- **After reading an important document**, talk it through with a coworker and compare your understanding.

Executive functioning

When your boss hands you a large stack of responsibilities and you struggle with knowing where to start or find it hard to stay on task, you can thank your executive functioning!

Executive functioning is the name for the system in your brain responsible for planning, focus, impulse control, and task initiation. While dyslexia seems to directly impact executive functioning, executive skills can also be indirectly affected by the heavy cognitive load and mental exhaustion that often accompany dyslexia.



[Read detailed description]

Dyslexia's impact on executive functioning is often exacerbated by a heavy cognitive load.

Planning and prioritization

We often struggle with planning and prioritization, especially when we're carrying a heavy mental load. This can look like finding it hard to figure out how long a task is going to take, forgetting steps of a process, over- or under-planning, or struggling to form a structured plan.

TOP TIP: One of my favorite planning methods is reverse engineering. This works by first focusing on where you want a project to end (the desired result) and then working backward to determine the tasks you need to accomplish to achieve it.

Task initiation

Language-heavy tasks, such as drafting emails and reading reports are often exhausting for the dyslexic brain. The extra effort and energy required to complete these tasks can make starting a new task, or even finishing an existing one, so much harder.

TOP TIP: Focus on microtasks instead of trying to tackle a whole task at once. When you have a mountain of emails, instead of telling yourself, "I'm going to respond to all of these in the next hour," try, "I'm going to respond to one of these in the next five minutes." This can make language-heavy tasks feel much more manageable!

Maintaining attention

We often find it difficult to stay focused on tasks involving lots of reading or writing. Our concentration can easily slip away before we realize it's leaving, causing us to fall behind on work deadlines.

TOP TIP: Ensure the task at hand is the center of your focus by moving unnecessary things off your desk, putting your phone in your bag, and closing any distracting tabs or applications on

your screen. Visual reminders can also help keep you on task when your brain drifts. You could try putting a sticky note on your screen that says, "You are working on [the project]."

Impulse control

Acting on impulse isn't necessarily bad; it can lead you down a path you never intended and inspire some surprisingly creative ideas. But when it pulls you away from a project, you can end up losing hours, if not days, working on things that aren't related to what you actually need to do.

TOP TIP: Check in with yourself roughly every 15 minutes to make sure that what you're working on is relevant to the project. Ask yourself, "Am I working on the task I started?" and "Is what I'm currently focused on the next logical step?" Even just a quick check-in can help keep you on task and improve productivity.

Task switching

The human brain doesn't have the ability to focus on more than one task at a time. When we "multitask", the brain is really just switching between tasks really quickly rather than focusing on multiple things at once. Task switching is usually not helpful for productivity, especially if you have dyslexia. This is because our brains often need time to settle into a task, so when our focus is disrupted, it can take additional time and energy to regain it.

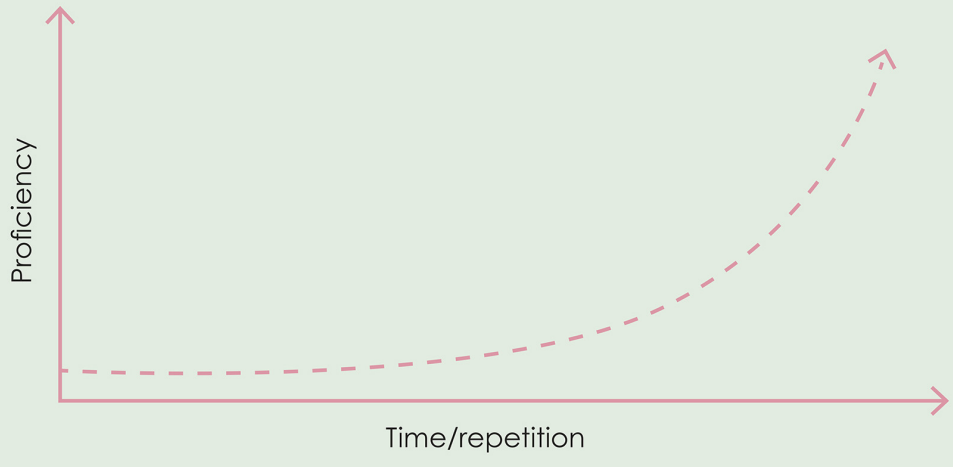
TOP TIP: Some task switching can be necessary in the workplace, so it's important to try and set yourself up for success. When you have to abandon a task to quickly switch to another, spend a minute making a note of where you stopped and what you were going to work on next. This should make it easier to pick up where you left off, enabling a smoother transition.

Slower learning processes

You may be familiar with the feeling of dread when your boss says, "We're implementing a new process or software."

The "dyslexic learning curve" often involves a painfully long start. This is mostly due to automaticity challenges, which make it difficult to perform "simple" tasks without conscious thought (see Automaticity challenges). This learning curve can be hard in the workplace, where there is often pressure to quickly adapt to new systems and procedures. You may worry that taking longer than others will have negative consequences, or that you are costing your clients more than you should. However, the good news is that once a dyslexic person grasps something, they often have a deep understanding of it, leading to a J-curve. After enough practice and repetition, progress often takes off.

The dyslexic learning curve

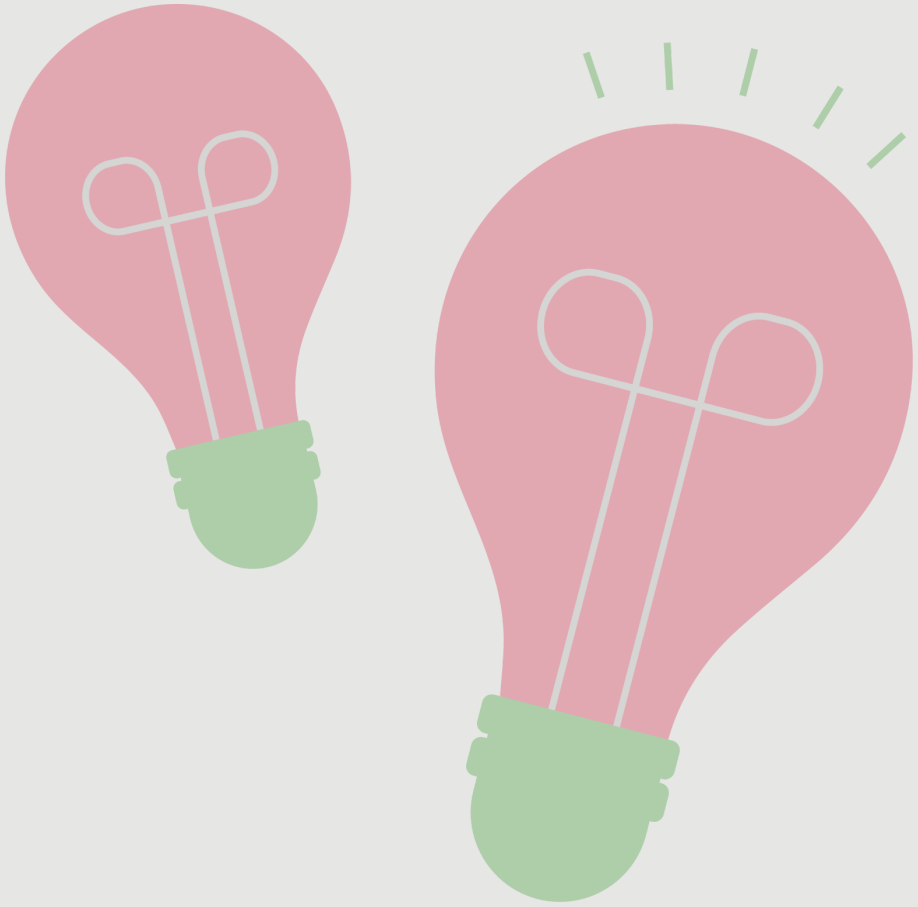


Supporting workplace learning

- **Identify the main goal** of the process and summarize it in a few words. Only move on to the specific steps once you've figured it out.
- **Divide the process** into digestible chunks and then visually map it out to help it stick.
- **Look for (or even create) a step-by-step video** of the process to refer back to.
- **Remember the value of practice.** Learning by doing is a powerful tool because it engages us in a multisensory way.
- **Talk yourself through the process** by saying each step out loud. This can help reinforce your learning.
- **Frame the learning curve as a potential asset.** When you repeatedly engage in a process, you are much more likely to spot things others have missed.
- **Treat yourself with patience.** Remind yourself that this kind of learning can take a bit longer because of how your brain works.
- **Try being up-front** about your struggles. I know it takes vulnerability, but it can help manage expectations and reduce some of the pressure to get things done quickly. You could say to your manager, "It may take me a few more repetitions, but I will get there."

You've got this!

Try reframing your anxiety about learning a new process as excitement. Instead of thinking, "Oh no, this is going to be so hard…" try, "I'm still learning the process right now, but once it clicks, I'm going to be unstoppable!"



Time tax

Workplace tasks often take longer for people with dyslexia. This can feel like paying a time tax—a cost that no one else has to pay and one that no one realizes you're paying.

There are only 24 hours in a day and when tasks consistently take longer that extra time has to come from somewhere (usually our personal lives). We often bring home work we couldn't finish on the job. While this isn't the end of the world on the odd project—though I still wouldn't recommend it—regularly giving up your personal time comes at a high cost. This is why we need strategies in place to help us at work.



75% of managers stated that providing assistive technology to their staff noticeably increased their productivity.

Finding the time

- **Make the most of assistive technology:** Explore text-to-speech, dictation, AI, and proofreading tools.
- **Optimize your productivity:** Time of day impacts productivity, so notice when you work best on certain tasks (e.g., project management in the morning or creative work in the evening) and plan your weekly schedule with this in mind.
- **Pace yourself:** Try not to attempt too many mentally demanding tasks in one day—you'll likely run out of energy, and those tasks will take even longer. Instead, spread them over the week.
- **Create templates for tasks that you complete on a regular basis:** This means you won't have to start afresh each time. For example, you could create templates for emails you frequently send and visual checklists for multistep processes.
- **Keep an eye on the time:** Try setting a timer to go off every 15 or 30 minutes to keep you aware of the passing of time and consciously on task. Once you're in the flow (or maybe distracted from the flow), it's very easy for time to slip away.
- **Practice self-advocacy:** If your environment feels safe, being open about dyslexia can be really helpful. You might say, "My process is very thorough, so it may take a little longer, but it also has benefits, such as spotting inefficiencies, recognizing patterns others might have missed, and discovering ways to improve."
- **Ask about accommodations:** If your boss knows about your dyslexia, ask if they can accommodate flexible deadlines or if you can delegate proofreading tasks to someone who can complete them quicker.

Thriving under pressure

In the workplace, dyslexia can mean navigating endless hurdles and always feeling the need to give 150% to prove you belong.

If you have dyslexia, meeting tight deadlines or responding to unexpected demands can be extremely stressful, especially in workplaces that prioritize speed over quality. This is because we often take extra time to learn new processes and complete reading- and writing-intensive tasks without compromising the quality of our work.

Pressure takes a toll

Here are some of the ways it can show up:

- Imposter syndrome and fear of being "found out"
- Checking work multiple times on tough days
- Heightened sensitivity to rejection
- Cognitive fatigue (hitting a wall early before the day is done)
- Difficulty focusing on anything by the end of the day
- Headaches and muscle tension
- Heightened stress levels, irritability, and decreased patience

You've got this!

Remember that you were hired because you're *you* and not because you're like everybody else. You may even have been hired because you offer a unique perspective and bring something new to the table. Lean into that and embrace the value you offer your team.

Coping with workplace pressure

Pay attention to when you function best

Remember to utilize tools and strategies (you'll find plenty in this book) that work *with* your brain and not *against* it. Once you find a tool that works well for you, consider how you might adapt it to other areas of your work.

Self-advocate

Share what works for you with your coworkers or manager, providing concrete examples where possible. You could say, "I'm happy to give you my initial thoughts on the brief now, but if you want a more thorough analysis, it'll have to wait until the end of the day when I've had more time to review it."

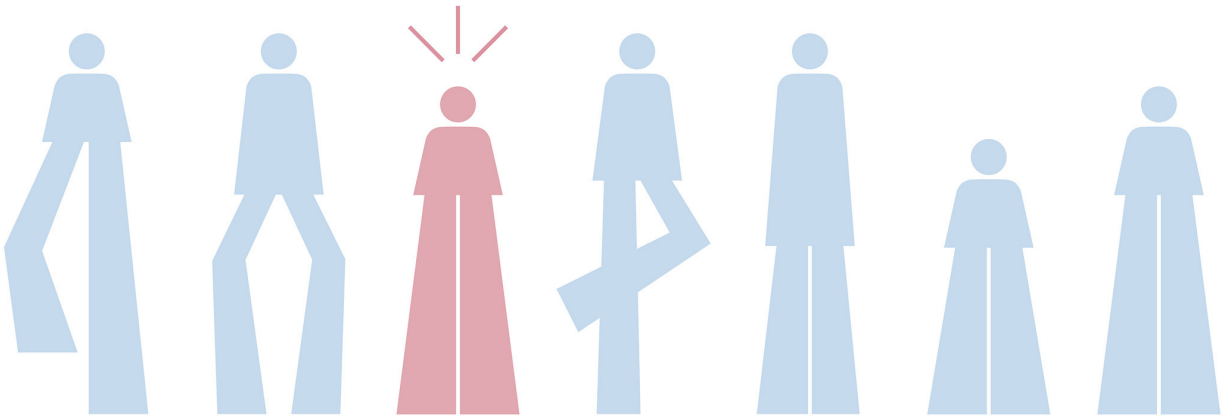
Avoid critical comparison

You might compare yourself to coworkers who seem to manage tasks more quickly or efficiently. While comparison isn't always the enemy, comparing our weaknesses to our coworkers' strengths often leads to self-criticism. Instead, try comparing your strengths with your coworkers' and thinking about ways they complement each other.

Social dynamics

People with dyslexia make great coworkers! We're often empathetic, full of innovative ideas, and able to spot things others might miss.

Despite our greatness, certain workplace factors can be highly disruptive to our thinking process. Figuring out how to navigate these can make a huge difference in our performance.



You've got this!

The world is gradually moving toward appreciating the incredible value that dyslexic thinking brings to the workplace. The more we talk about our strengths and what we need to thrive, the closer we will get to all workplaces recognizing this. So don't be afraid to openly celebrate your dyslexic strengths!

Challenge		You could say...
Asking coworkers to repeat themselves multiple times	→	"Could you please send me important information by email, so I don't forget it?"
Struggling to hold on to a thought when interrupted	→	"I can lose my train of thought when I'm interrupted. When that happens, do you mind if I talk over you so I can finish letting it out?"
Relying on others without feeling like a burden	→	"I would be happy to look over your project for ways to identify big-picture changes, if you could quickly scan this for spelling mistakes?"
Managing expectations	→	"My brain doesn't always catch typos" or "Writing takes me longer, so I may need a little more time than others."
Explaining that you're dyslexic	→	"I'm dyslexic, which means that my brain processes information differently. It can make tasks involving spelling and reading more difficult, but it also makes me very good at tasks involving problem-solving or understanding how things fit together. If you have any questions, you can always ask!"
Mistakes can seem careless	→	"My brain tends to focus more on content than grammar, so it doesn't always catch things like typos, even after I have carefully proofread my work."
Delayed response time	→	"I may need some extra time to respond to questions or emails because of how my brain processes information."

Read detailed description

Self-advocacy

It can be frustrating to know that you're capable, intelligent, and skilled at your job, and still feel judged for dyslexic mistakes you can't avoid. This is why advocating for yourself at work is so important.

There are so many awesome benefits to hiring employees who have dyslexia that people and organizations often overlook. So, let's explore ways to help you confidently be yourself, advocate for what you need, showcase your strengths, and even put yourself forward for that promotion!

The global charity Made By Dyslexia found that three out of every four dyslexic individuals hide their dyslexia at work.

Showing up as *you*

You have probably come across the word "masking" on social media. It's when someone hides parts of themselves or the way they naturally act to fit in. People with dyslexia often get caught in a cycle of masking in at work because we overidentify with our struggles and undervalue our strengths—and trust me, we bring extraordinary strengths.

Showing up as yourself and gradually unmasking the parts of your dyslexia that you feel the need to hide can help you perform at your best at work. Telling people you have unique "strengths" or "skills" to offer isn't enough to self-advocate effectively. It's important to be specific about what you bring to the table and the tools you need to thrive. Let's walk through my four-step plan to help you prepare for this.

1. Define your strengths

Grab a pen and paper and brainstorm answers to these questions to help you discover what you do best.

- What kind of projects or problems energize me?
- What areas do others most often seek my insight or support in?
- What types of patterns or solutions have I noticed that others have missed?
- Which processes or systems have I adapted to work better for me, and how did I do so?

2. Identify helpful tools

Now, answer these questions to help you recognize what you need to succeed in areas you find more difficult.

- What types of tasks do I avoid consistently?
- During tasks or projects, where do things often go wrong for me, and what resources exist that could support me during those moments?
- Which tasks do I find most mentally exhausting, and what tools might help?

- What tools have I already created for myself?
- Which parts of my role produce the most anxiety, and what tools could reduce it?

3. Showcase your strengths

Now that you recognize the ways you're an asset in the workplace, it's time to think about how to present your strengths.

Requesting to be on a project → "I can do my best work when I'm working on [fill in the blank] type of project."

Highlighting your value on a project → "I naturally see the big picture and patterns within it, which can help with this project by [what you observed]."

Highlighting the value of your process → "I often work through information in a way that doesn't seem linear to others, and that helps me see things that might have previously been missed, such as [what you observed]."

Highlighting the value of a strength → "I am great at simplifying and improving complex systems and processes, such as [something you've improved in your role]."

4. Request tools to help

Always frame tools as a means to unlock your greatest potential, rather than a way to hide a weakness. Keep your requests simple and reasonable and try not to overexplain.

Requesting a specific tool → "I am able to do my best work when I have access to [tool]."

Requesting information in a specific format → "My understanding of material is most accurate when I have access to it via [specific format]."

Requesting a specific process or timeline → "Because of how I process information, having [this type of timeline or deadline]

helps to ensure my best performance."

The global economy loses $3.2 trillion due to untapped dyslexic potential in the workplace.

Pursuing a promotion

According to a 2022 study, nearly half of dyslexic individuals report feeling that they have missed out on a promotion due to their dyslexia. So if you're waiting for permission to pursue that promotion you deserve, let me be the one to give it to you.

Dyslexia does not disqualify you from being promoted for a position you've been working toward. You can use what we've just discussed about defining and presenting your strengths to help put yourself forward for a promotion. Here's an example:

"I saw that this position was open, and I think that I would be an excellent candidate to consider because of [your relevant

strengths]."

There is no guarantee that you'll get the promotion, but you're more likely to get it if you actively pursue it than if you sit quietly on the sidelines.

Legal protection

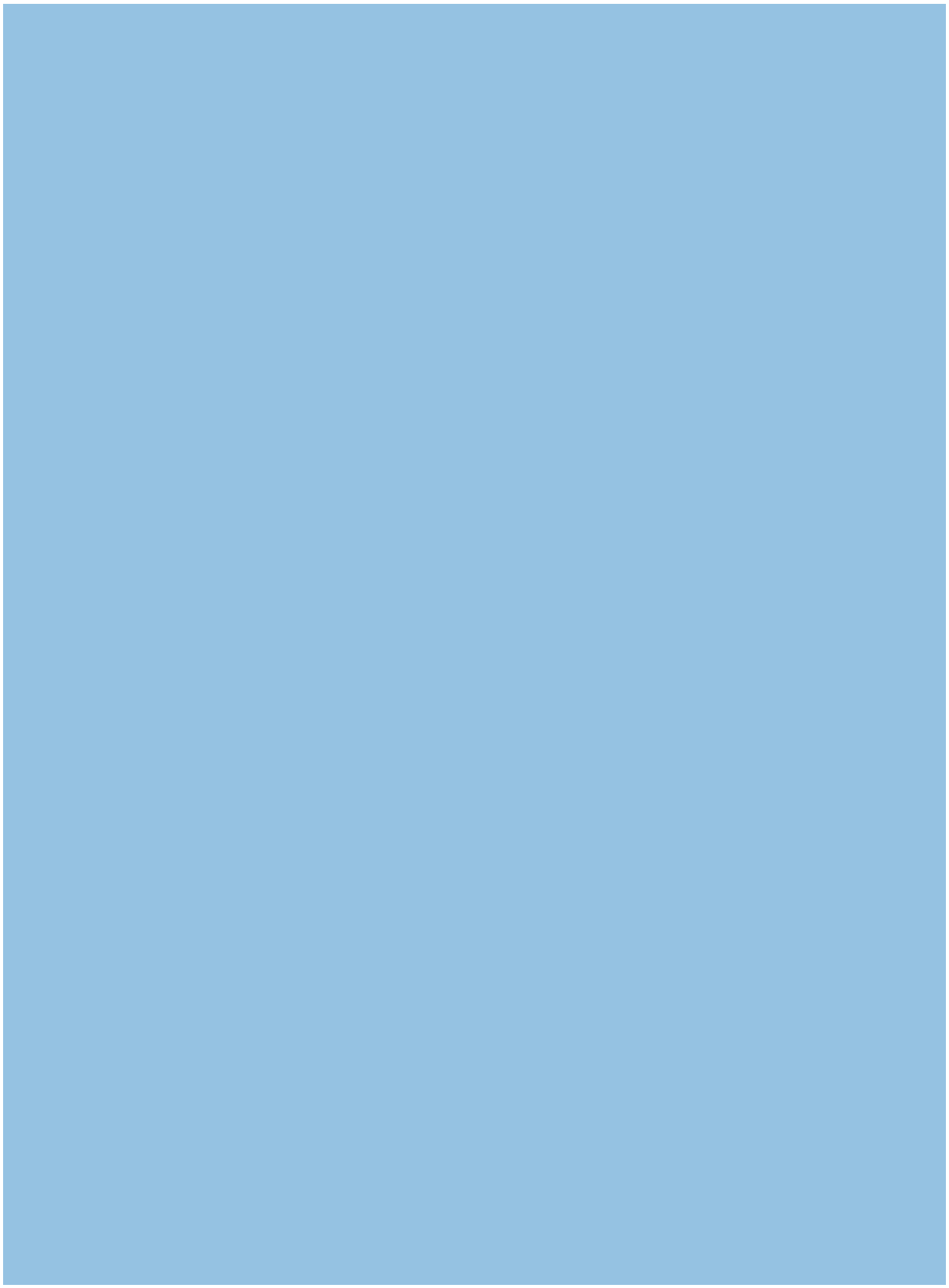
When starting a conversation with your employer about access to accommodations, aim for a collaborative approach focused on what you need to perform at your best. Most of the time, this will go well. But if it doesn't, it's important to remember that your right to access accommodations is often legally protected.

Dyslexia is legally protected in several countries: in the US under the Americans with Disabilities Act, in the UK under the Equality Act, and in Australia under the Disability Discrimination Act. Specific laws will vary depending on the country you live in, but the underlying principles remain fairly consistent.

The goal is to provide protections that allow employees to request reasonable accommodations or adjustments to effectively fulfill their job functions. It is therefore within your right to consult HR, and even seek legal advice, if your employer is unwilling to work with you and reasonable changes are not made.

NB: I'm not a lawyer, and this isn't legal advice. If you need guidance on legal matters, you should consult a qualified legal professional.

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Chapter 5

Relationships

Dyslexia can enrich our relationships in surprising ways, but it can also create moments of conflict. By understanding how, we can build healthier, more fulfilling connections. While this chapter focuses on romantic relationships, much of the advice applies to all kinds, including family and friends.

Communication

Remembering important details

Relying on others

Dealing with frustration

Vulnerability

Communication

Good communication is the foundation of any healthy relationship, and it's also the area most clearly affected by dyslexia.

Let's take a closer look at some of the ways dyslexia can impact communication in relationships and what you can do to help navigate this.

Talking about the trees

You might see the forest while your partner sees the trees. People with dyslexia often excel at seeing the big picture but find it difficult to focus on the small details.

Maybe you're dreaming about a home renovation, imagining the overall vision, while your partner is focused on the practical details. Struggling to make space for each other's different approaches can lead to disagreements where neither partner feels heard.

When this happens…

Remember that both styles of thinking matter, so make time and space to each share what you're focused on.

Try to appreciate and compliment your partner's approach. You might say, "I'm really grateful that you're good at staying on top of these details. It really helps make sure nothing falls through the cracks."

Being interrupted

Interruptions can make communication especially difficult. When this happens, particularly in disagreements or moments of vulnerability, it can feel like your brain shuts down—you

can’t find the word you’re looking for or even remember what you were saying.

When this happens…

Ask for the time and space to share. You could say “I know that you have things you want to say, and I would love to hear them, but it would be really helpful if I could finish my thought.”

If you do find your brain shutting down, remind yourself that communication doesn’t need to be rushed. It’s okay to take a few extra seconds to gather your thoughts.

Quick win

One of the best ways to resolve conflict can be to prevent it before it even happens. Notice which issues cause the most tension in your relationship, and make time to talk to your partner about how to best handle them next time they come up.



Feeling things more deeply

Lots of dyslexic people experience a heightened sensitivity to criticism because of how often we faced it as children. On top of that, research suggests that people with dyslexia may experience emotions more intensely than others.

When this happens...

Remember that the goal is to be on the same team. If you notice yourself becoming defensive because of past experiences, try to be open with your partner. You could say, "My brain feels paralyzed right now because this brings back the feeling of being criticized as a child for making dyslexic mistakes." It's important not to use this as a way to avoid finishing the conversation, but it's okay to give yourself some time to clear your mind.

Texting

Does it take you 5–10 business days to reply to a text because you overthink your response and end up avoiding it until it's been uncomfortably long? Or have you ever misinterpreted the tone of a text and jumped to the conclusion that something was wrong? Texting can be tricky when you have dyslexia, and unfortunately, it is a key form of communication in many modern relationships.

When this happens…

Make assuming good intentions your default. If a text feels passive-aggressive, pause, take a deep breath, and consider whether you might be misreading it. It can help to imagine the person who wrote it saying it to you.

Let people know that you're not the most consistent responder and that it's not personal. If you really want to respond, but you know that you don't have the mental capacity to text, quickly calling the person or sending a voice note is a great alternative.

Too many words

When you have dyslexia, words can feel "slippery," which makes it hard to retain what you hear when someone is speaking to you. This may be due to challenges with working memory or the strain of carrying a heavy cognitive load. However, if your partner thinks it's because you're not listening or don't care, it can lead to misunderstandings.

When this happens…

If your partner is sharing a lot at once, when they're finished, try asking, "I want to make sure I've heard you correctly. Is this what you mean […]?" Not only will this help them feel heard, but it will also help you remember the conversation.

Be open with your partner if your mental load is feeling heavy. You might say, "I really want to be able to take in what you're telling me, but first I need to take a few minutes to clear my head and make space for what you want to share."



Remembering important details

If you have dyslexia, you probably know all too well how difficult it can be to hold on to details. This can be hard in relationships because remembering details is often seen as a sign of caring.

Being in a relationship usually involves remembering a lot of details, from your partner's favorite food and the names of their friends to significant dates and work schedules. These details may seem small, but they can make a big difference in the way your partner experiences your relationship. When someone remembers the little things, it can make you feel like they genuinely care, and according to research, this can support long-term stability in a relationship.

How our brains differ

Dyslexic individuals don't have "bad" memories; our brains just function differently.

Working memory overload

We often experience working memory overload (see Running out of mental space), so what we hear today might not make it into our long-term memories. For example, if I'm working on a project, such as writing a book about dyslexia, and in the midst of that I ask my partner a question, I'll probably struggle to remember what the answer was even five minutes later.

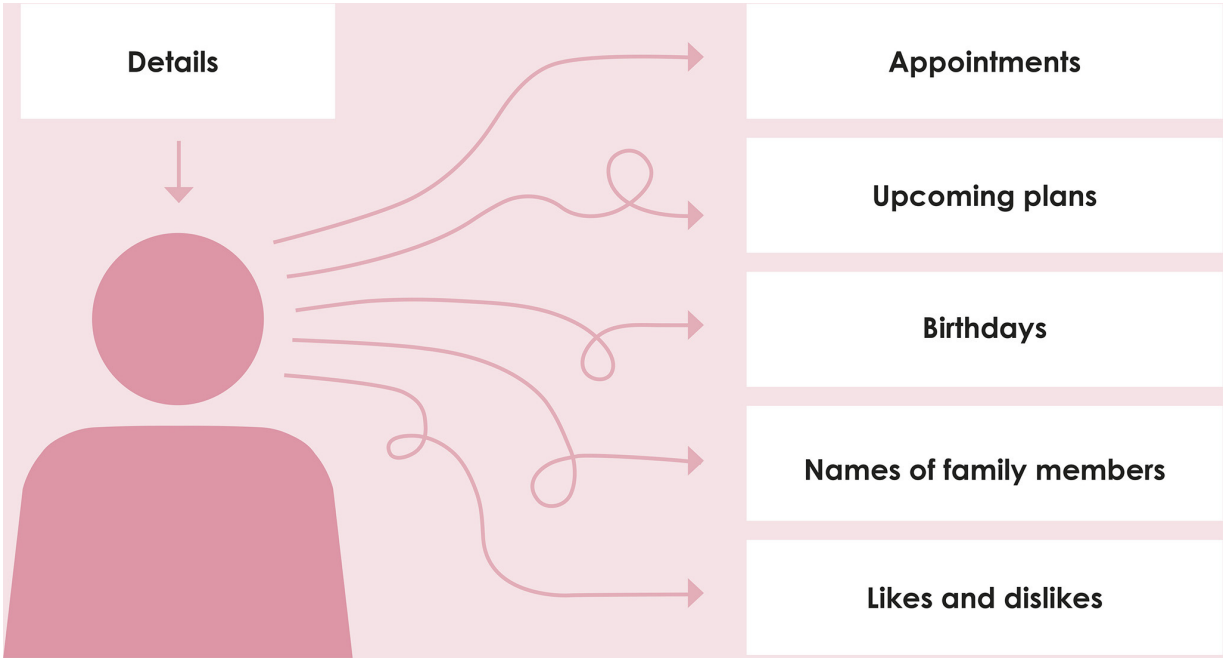
Difficulty remembering sequences

Recalling sequences, such as dates, steps in a process, or items on a to-do list, can also be difficult because of our struggles with procedural learning. Often, it's not that we can't

remember the information at all, it's that we can't recall it in the right order. For example, I know one of my children was born on the 9th of a month and another on the 12th, but it can take me a moment to remember who was born when.

Showing you care

- **Be open with your partner:** If they understand how your brain works, they are much less likely to take it personally. You might say, "Forgetting details doesn't mean I don't care, my brain just doesn't always hold on to them."
- **Add important dates to a shared calendar:** I also recommend keeping notes on your phone of all the little things your partner likes.
- **Ask for information in a way that works for you:** If your partner shares something important at a time you're unlikely to remember, ask them to write it down, send you a voice note, or remind you at a better time.



Relying on others

Being dyslexic means your brain excels in some areas and struggles in others. This is why one of the most invaluable things a person with dyslexia can have in their life is the support of someone who complements the way their brain works.

Leaning into healthy interdependence with partners, family, friends, and even coworkers is an important skill for people with dyslexia. I call it a "skill" because relying on others and acknowledging that they are better at some things takes practice.

Communication is key

If the people around you don't know you're struggling, they won't be able to help. Being open about your experience and helping loved ones understand life from your point of view is so important, particularly in romantic relationships where your life is often closely intertwined with another person's. It's okay to lean on others for support.

It's also important to balance each other's strengths and weaknesses in a relationship. A task that takes you an hour may take them 20 minutes, and vice versa, so why not make a trade? It's a win-win. When we don't talk about the ways we are struggling, we often forget how much better working together and supporting one another can make our lives.

A gentle reminder

When you're relying on someone else, they might feel frustrated or bitter if you're not contributing a fair share to the mental load. This doesn't mean you should stop relying on

others; just make sure you support them in return. Being a team means showing up for one another.

Task trades

Filling out forms, applications, or paperwork	⟷	Making phone calls and talking to customer service
Breaking down dense instructions	⟷	Carrying out instructions
Managing the calendar	⟷	Handling the logistics of following the calendar (e.g., getting everyone ready to leave on time)
Proofreading important written communications	⟷	Completing hands-on tasks from dishes to repairs
Explaining an email that left you confused	⟷	Taking on any related tasks

Read detailed description



You've got this!

People with dyslexia often make emotionally supportive partners. We've experienced a lot of adversity, which has helped us build empathy and compassion and strengthened our ability to relate to and validate those who are struggling around us.

Dealing with frustration

If you're dyslexic and your partner isn't, misunderstandings can feel particularly frustrating. You might not fully understand each other's brains, and you may approach things differently.

Frustration in relationships between dyslexic and neurotypical individuals often stems from mistakes and differences in how you both function.

Making mistakes

Mistakes happen, but when you repeatedly make them, it can lead to frustration. When you're in a close relationship with someone, your mistakes will likely affect them too. For example, accidentally double-booking because you misread the date, then having to cancel plans at the last minute.

When this happens...

- **Talk about how dyslexia impacts you.** If you don't, your partner may judge you harshly, assuming you are lazy or incapable if you repeatedly make mistakes.
- **Share your frustrations.** Making mistakes can be just as frustrating for you as they are for your partner. It's important to share how you feel instead of bottling it up.
- **Apologize—even if you make an honest mistake.** Dyslexic or not, mistakes happen, and when they do, they can also impact your partner. Once you apologize, you can discuss ways to avoid it happening again.
- **Establish a strengths-based division of responsibilities:** See Task trades for strengths-based trades.

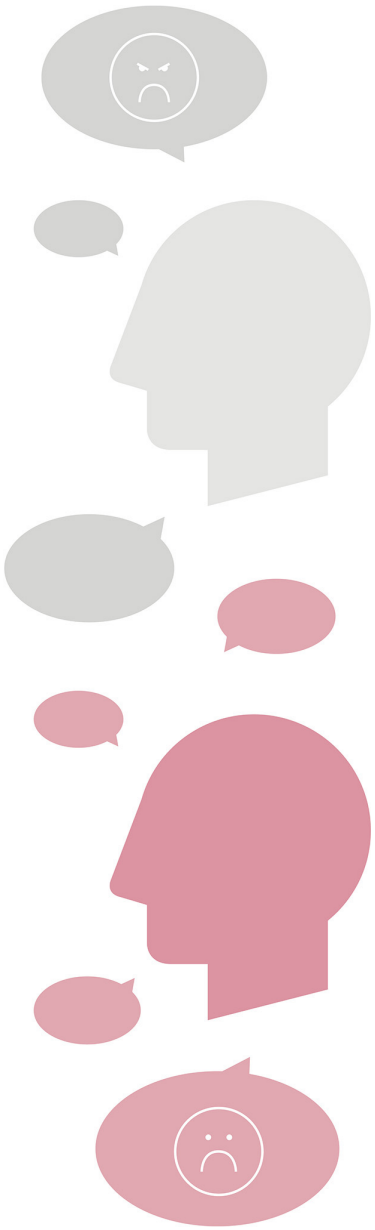
- **Ask for help.** If you're filling out a form, you could say to your partner, "Can you look this over to check whether I've made any mistakes?"

Functioning differently

It's easy to feel frustrated when someone functions differently from you—you might see their actions as unnecessary, time-wasting, or even detrimental. This can lead to resentment, particularly when children are involved. For example, repeatedly taking more time to complete certain tasks can lead to an imbalance in parenting responsibility and lost family time.

When this happens...

- **Validate your partner's frustration.** You might say, "It makes sense that you are frustrated, because the way I do things is costing a lot of time." This will make it much easier to move forward together.
- **Explain how your mind works.** You could say, "My brain has to consciously work through a lot of processes that other people can do without thinking. This involves much more time and mental energy."
- **Practice acceptance.** If certain tasks have to be done by you, it's important that your partner accepts that they may take you longer or that you might do things differently than they would. This is a two-way street—you will also need to offer the same grace to your partner.



Vulnerability

We all bring baggage into our relationships. And for dyslexic individuals, sometimes our biggest suitcases are filled with shame and low self-esteem.

Being vulnerable in relationships as a dyslexic person can feel scary. This is especially true when it comes to sharing the deeply ingrained shame and low self-esteem that many of us have held on to for so long.

Even in close relationships, it's easy to hide the parts of ourselves we feel ashamed of in hope we'll be accepted, but this can stand in the way of emotional intimacy.

There's a secret I want you to know…

Vulnerability is being honest about our imperfections. Being vulnerable with someone you love is the beginning of emotional intimacy and not the end of your relationship. Even if you still need to do the work to heal your shame and low self-esteem, the act of allowing yourself to be seen and accepted feels like rain falling gently on a parched field.

Stories we're made to believe

There are many narratives we end up believing that get in the way of vulnerability. These narratives make us feel like we'll be rejected if we allow ourselves to be open. This is one of the major ways shame and low self-esteem can seep into our relationships.

> **You're going to get tired of me being this way and leave.**

If I don't constantly try harder, then you'll see me as "stupid" or "lazy."

You think I don't care, even though I care deeply.

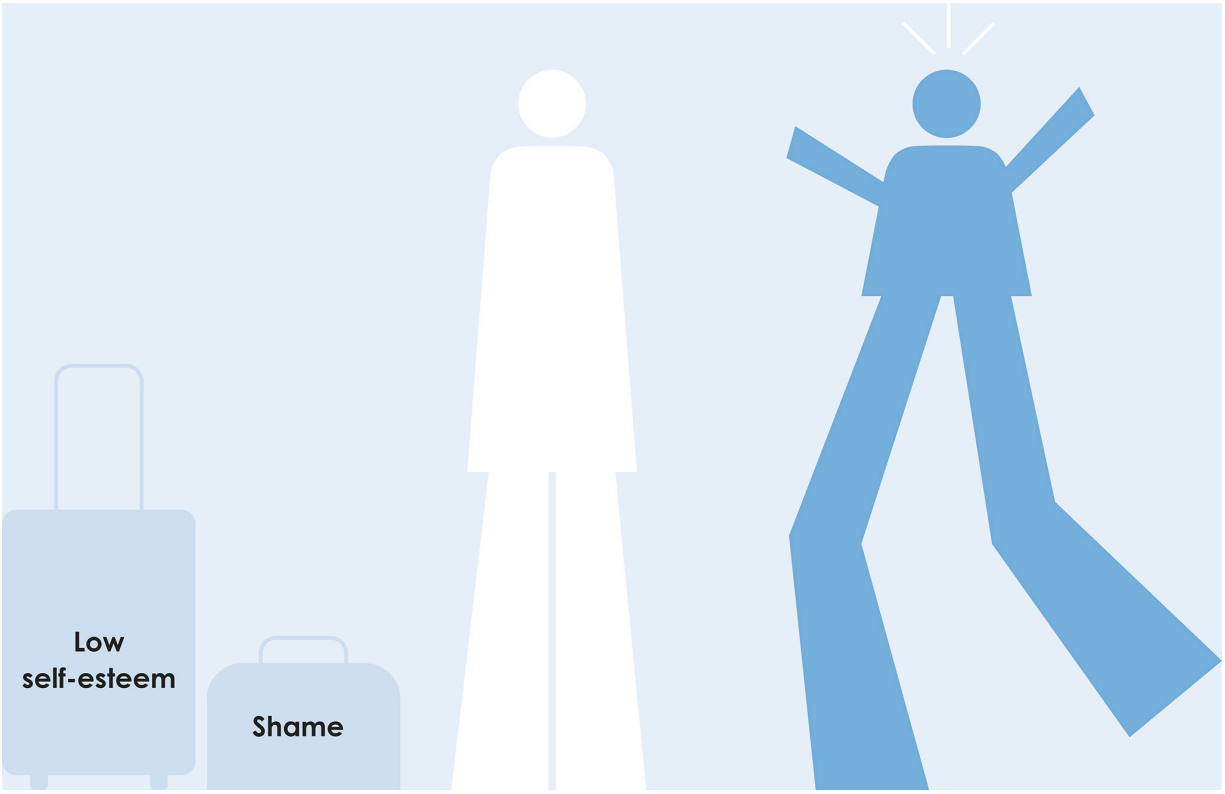
To be accepted, I have to keep parts of myself hidden.

How to be vulnerable

The fear of being vulnerable can make knowing where to start feel daunting. Here are a few ways you can test the waters in your relationship as you move toward showing up as your authentic self.

- **Be open about getting mentally lost sometimes.** "I'm really not understanding what you're trying to explain to me. Can we step back for a minute?"
- **Share your fears.** "Sometimes I feel afraid that you might leave me because you feel like I don't care or I'm not enough. Do you ever feel that way?"
- **Be honest about the tools you use.** "Did you know that when you share something you like with me, I write it down on my phone? I know that my brain won't always hold on to those things, and because I care about you, I keep track this way."
- **Own it when your emotional raw spots are touched** and you find yourself lashing out. You might say, "I had a strong reaction because it brought up a lot of feelings tied to shame and my past experiences, and I'm sorry."

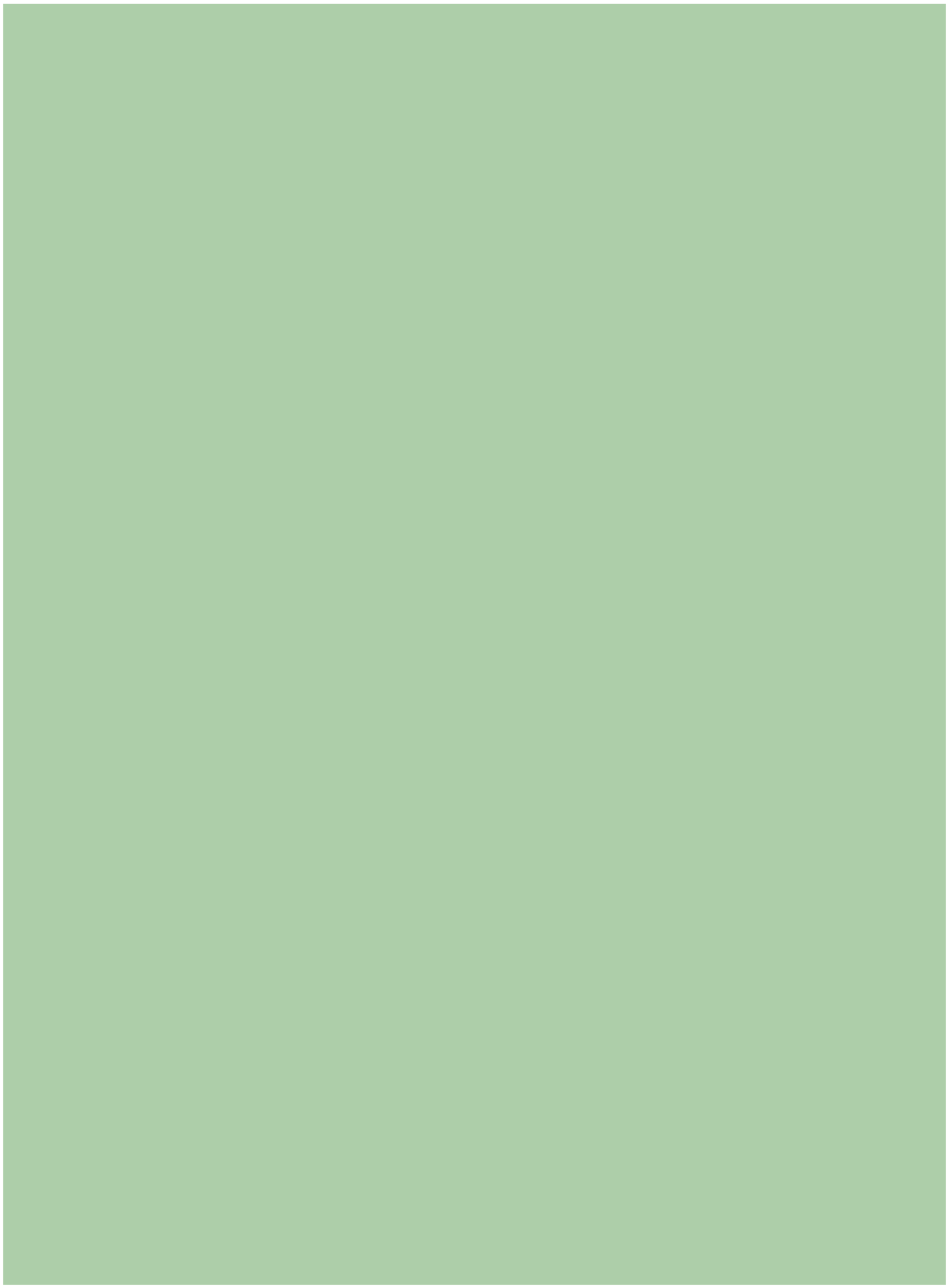
- **Do your best to work through experiences that bring up shame** (see Working through shame). When something connected to dyslexia triggers an instinct to hide, take time to pause and reflect on what happened.
- **Make space for shame** in your relationship rather than hiding it through withdrawal or lashing out. It's an ongoing process—even though my wife and I talk about dyslexia often, things still arise that bring up deep feelings for me.



You've got this!

The sad truth is that there won't always be space in a relationship to be vulnerable and feel accepted. But if you do feel emotionally safe, and you're willing to give it a chance, so much freedom and healing can come from being vulnerable with your partner or a loved one.

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Chapter 6

Parenting

Being a dyslexic parent can be complicated and overwhelming. It's an experience that can leave you laughing until your stomach hurts one moment and crying tears of frustration the next. This chapter will guide you through some of the challenges of being a dyslexic parent, with the hope of making the journey just a little bit easier.

Does dyslexia run in families?

How to talk about dyslexia

Parenting dyslexic kids (as a dyslexic parent)

Help! I'm overstimulated

Anxiety around homework

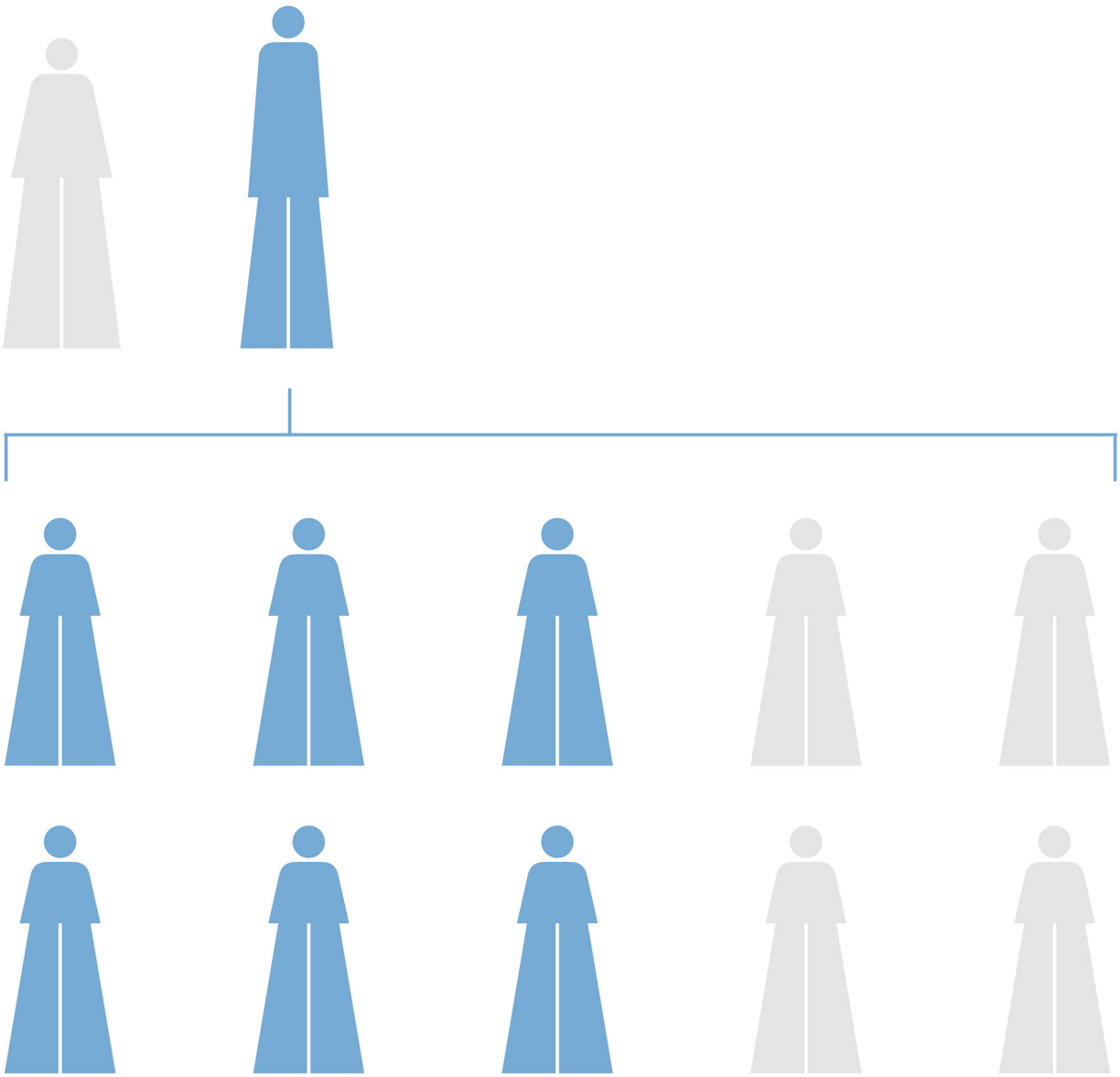
Story time

Does dyslexia run in families?

You'll almost always be asked if dyslexia runs in your family during a screening or assessment. This is because family history can increase the likelihood of dyslexia.

If you're dyslexic, there is a 40–60% chance that your children will be too, and the likelihood is even greater if both parents are dyslexic. It's normal to have complex feelings about this. If your experience with dyslexia has been positive, this may not feel like a big concern; you'll simply make sure your children have access to the same support you had. But if your experience has been negative, you may feel a lot of shame and guilt about passing dyslexia on to your children.

Everyone experiences dyslexia in their own way, and different factors influence whether that experience feels positive or negative. Having parents or caregivers who provide loving, supportive, and proactive care and intervention can make a remarkable difference. When dyslexia is identified early and the right support is in place, it's less likely to have a negative impact on a person's life.



If you're dyslexic, there is a 40–60% chance that your children will be too.

You've got this!

If you're reading this book, you're already on the journey toward figuring out how to give a child with dyslexia a positive experience. If the story you lived growing up was rough, remember that the future isn't written yet and you have the opportunity to show up for your child as they write theirs.

How to talk about dyslexia

It's natural to worry about saying the "wrong" thing when talking to your children about dyslexia, but avoiding the conversation can be just as harmful. Let's explore how to talk openly and confidently about dyslexia with your kids.

Dyslexia should be a household word. It should come up regularly in conversation, and all family members should be allowed to openly talk and ask questions about dyslexia at any time.

Is there a right age?

Talk to your children about your dyslexia as early as possible; there will be plenty of opportunities to bring it up in passing or conversation. It's important to normalize the topic, so if one of your children is also dyslexic, they already have an idea of what it is by the time they find out. This can go a long way toward reducing shame and the risk of mood disorders, such as depression and anxiety. For example, you might say to younger children, "I make a lot of mistakes like this because I'm dyslexic" or "My brain sees patterns like this fairly easily because of my dyslexia." In general, the depth of the conversation should match their level of questioning.

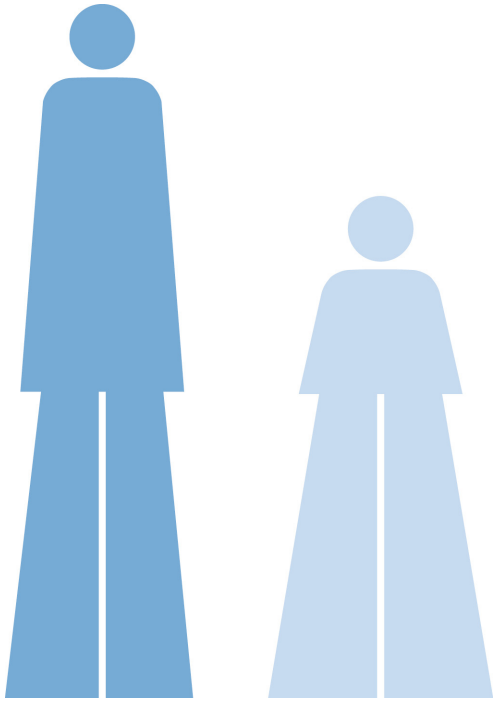


How to talk to your dyslexic child about dyslexia

As you now know, dyslexia often runs in families. So, as well as sharing your own experiences, you may also need to explain what dyslexia means for your children, if they are dyslexic too.

- **Acknowledge both the positives and negatives** when you introduce dyslexia to your child. "Being dyslexic means that your brain does certain things very differently from others. Those differences can bring some really cool strengths and also some tricky challenges."
- **Describe and nurture specific strengths** that you see in your child, such as creativity, empathy, problem-solving, storytelling, and top-down reasoning. "I loved seeing how hard you worked to figure out so many different ways to use those same Lego bricks!"
- **Acknowledge their challenges and support them** in working through them. "Because of the differences in how your brain works, things like [insert struggle] can take a little bit more work to figure out. Do you have any ideas about how we could tackle this together?"
- **Introduce them to others who openly talk about their dyslexia,** so they know they're not alone. Books and videos about dyslexia can also help with this.
- **Treat it as an ongoing conversation,** not a one- and-done. Always be open to answering questions about dyslexia,

even if the answer is "I don't know; we can look that up together."



What *not* to do

- **Don't** talk about dyslexia like it's a big secret or something to be ashamed of. Whispering in dark corners does not help!
- **Don't** sugarcoat the challenges. Living with dyslexia can be difficult, and if we gloss over the hard parts, our children are less likely to share them with us.
- **Don't** contradict their feelings. If your child says, "I feel stupid," don't respond with, "But you're not stupid." Instead, stay curious and ask them what it's like to feel that way.

What children *need* to know about dyslexia

As I've mentioned, it's important to keep the conversation about dyslexia going, and not to overwhelm your child with everything you know in a single talk. Here are some of the most important things to tell your child about dyslexia.

“Dyslexia means your brain functions differently.”

“Dyslexia can affect how your brain deals with language and information.”

“Dyslexia can bring some very annoying challenges and also some very cool strengths.”

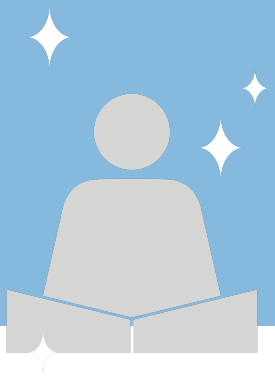
“Being dyslexic and having to work hard at something does not mean you can’t do it.”

“Dyslexic brains like to take a different route. They might take a little longer to get there, but they still do, and they often see things others miss along the way.”

“Using tools to help with dyslexic challenges is important. It’s not cheating.”

You've got this!

The more you normalize talking about dyslexia at home, the more likely your children will grow up feeling comfortable with it and accept it as part of who they are, rather than something to be ashamed of.



Parenting dyslexic kids (as a dyslexic parent)

Being a neurodivergent parent to neurodivergent children can be one of the hardest challenges you've experienced, but it can also come with some of the greatest joys.

The joys

It's amazing to see the strengths of neurodivergence in your children. You may notice the same qualities in yourself, but it's especially rewarding when you recognize them in your kids and have the chance to nurture and encourage them. Watching your children flourish and come into their own is an incredible experience.

As a dyslexic parent of a dyslexic child, you can model how to handle the challenges you've faced and how to make the most of the unique strengths you've nurtured over a lifetime. Kids learn a lot from what they hear, but they learn even more from what they observe. So, it can be hugely beneficial when your child sees you talking openly about your own experiences.

The challenges

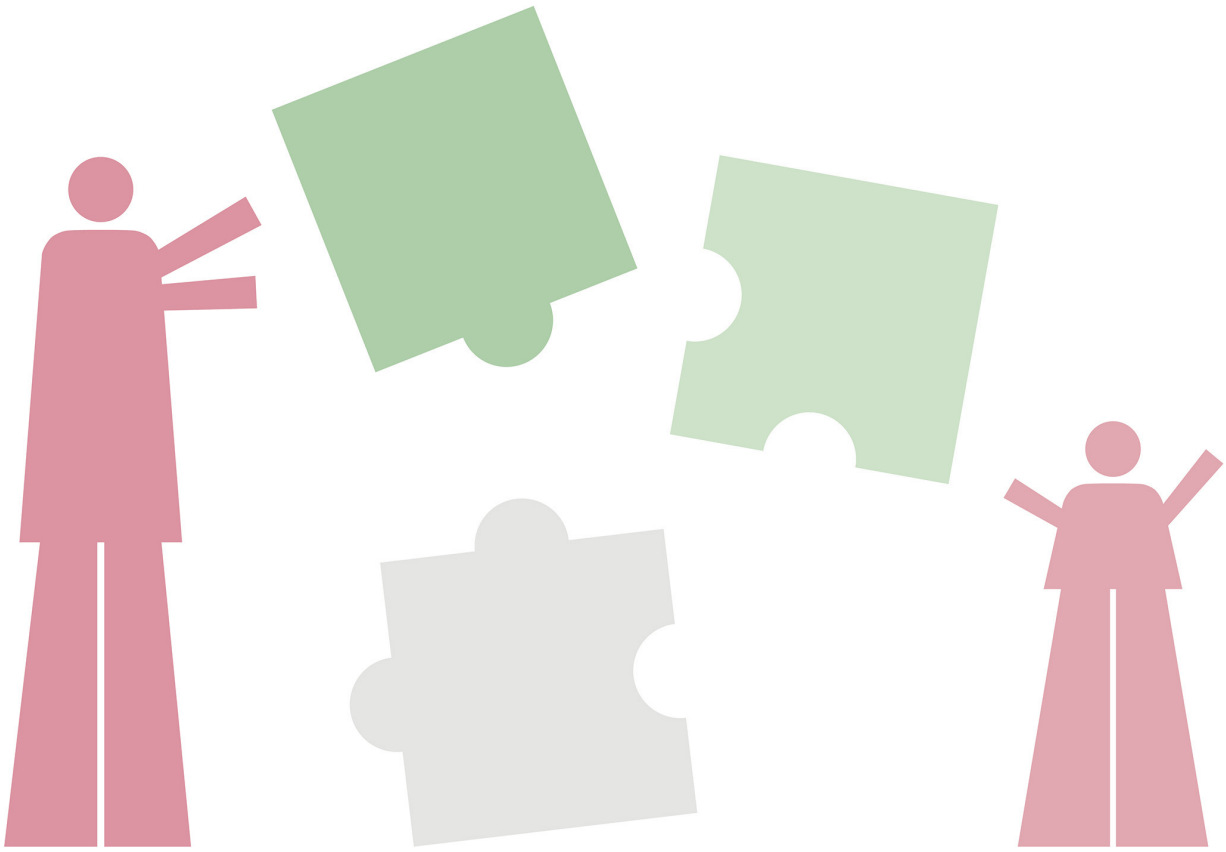
If your own experience with dyslexia has been difficult, it's natural to parent from a place of fear, trying to protect your child from the struggles you faced, rather than recognizing them as the unique individual they are. But raising resilient, capable dyslexic adults isn't about shielding children from challenges, it's about joining them in navigating those challenges. It's about saying, "Yes, this is hard. Let's figure it out together!"

Our children also learn from watching us cope with our own challenges. If you're struggling, you may feel the need to hide it from your children, but you don't have to. In fact, sharing what you're going through in an age-appropriate way and modelling positive support strategies can help you both.

For example, if you're overwhelmed, you could say, "You might have noticed that I've been a little bit tired and frustrated recently. I've been feeling a bit overwhelmed. I'm going to take some deep breaths to help myself feel calmer so I can be more patient."

When you're a dyslexic parent raising dyslexic children, your emotions and experiences often overlap. If you're feeling overwhelmed, it can become harder to show up for your children, and household order can descend into chaos, leaving them feeling the same.

When this happens, remember that our most meaningful interactions with our children can come in the simplest forms. As adults, we often overcomplicate things. Practice slowing things down: Lie back, look up at the ceiling (or the clouds if you're outside), and talk about what you see. Help them understand that life can be overwhelming, and when it is, it's important to slow down, take a breath, and connect.



Help! I'm overstimulated

Living with dyslexia means your brain is constantly working overtime, which can lead to overstimulation, making parenting so much more difficult.

You've likely come across the term "overstimulated" on social media, but what does it actually mean?

We feel overstimulated when our brain is struggling to hold too much information at once, whether it's sensory overload—such as bright lights and loud noises—emotional demands, or juggling too many tasks. And children, particularly neurodivergent children, delight in creating lights, sounds, needs, and chaos.

People with dyslexia are more easily overstimulated because their brains are often working extremely hard. Research shows that dyslexic brains filter out less unnecessary information from their environments, so there is more information to process and manage.

What does it look like?

When you're overstimulated, this might manifest as:

- **Shutting down:** Your mind goes blank and your eyes lose focus as you stare into space. Perhaps you feel a sudden urge to find a quiet spot and just sit. Your body may feel heavy, and you may have a headache.
- **Becoming irritable:** Ordinary things start to feel extremely irritating, and you may snap at others for even the smallest things.
- **Pushing people away:** You may find yourself avoiding conversations, telling others to leave you alone, or not responding when people reach out.

Survival hacks for overstimulated parents

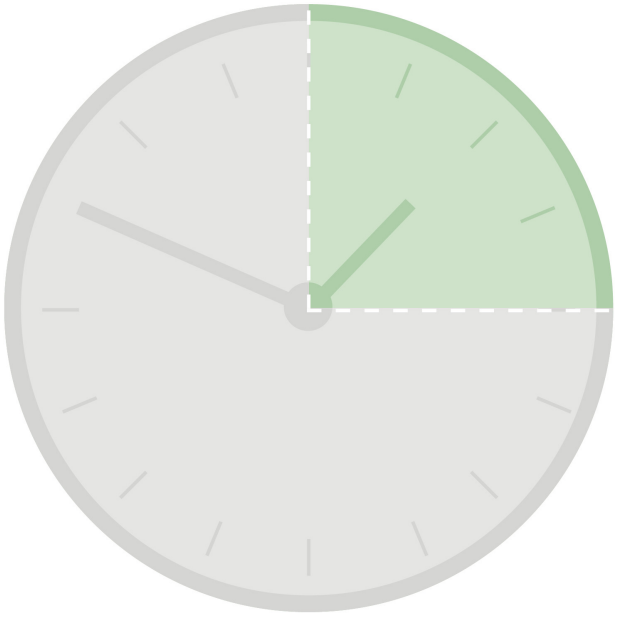
- **Learn how to recognize when you're becoming overstimulated:** Don't just go into survival mode and push your way through. Take a deep breath, acknowledge that your brain is overwhelmed, and sit with the feeling.
- **Create a plan for the next time you feel overstimulated:** If you have a partner, consider using a code word that signals "I need 10 minutes alone in the bedroom to reset."
- **Communicate with your kids:** It's powerful for kids to see you struggle and still handle it. You might say, "I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed right now. I need a second to take a deep breath, so I can self-regulate and be a good parent."
- **Help your children recognize when they feel overstimulated:** Talk to them about what it means to be overstimulated, ask what they need most in those moments, and explore strategies to help them self-regulate.
- **Model self-compassion when overstimulation leads to mistakes:** Own it, apologize, and forgive yourself. Remember: there's no such thing as a perfect parent.

Anxiety around homework

If you have dyslexia, you probably remember the relief of leaving homework behind. So when your child brings homework home one day and needs your help, it can trigger intense anxiety.

Suddenly, all the feelings you've buried and never intended to revisit come rushing back. I still remember looking at my oldest child's first piece of homework and feeling immediately worried about doing it wrong. It's very common to feel anxious about your ability to help your child and concerned that they might judge you for it. To make things even harder, we often can't sit down with children to complete homework until the end of the day, when we're more likely to feel mentally depleted and less capable. I'd love to suggest banning homework as a solution, but since that's probably unlikely, let's figure out some strategies to help us effectively support our kids instead.

On average, dyslexic students spend an additional 45 minutes a day on homework compared with their peers.



A kinder approach to homework

- **Be there to support your child** with homework, but don't do it for them! Remember that their homework is supposed to be at an appropriate age level and grade. Work hard to understand it and encourage them, but let them take the lead.
- **Remind yourself that it's okay to make mistakes.** Homework is supposed to be about the learning process and not about having perfect answers.
- **See doing homework with your child as an opportunity** to model how to handle frustration when you have to do hard things. This is particularly important if your child is dyslexic, because they will likely struggle with homework throughout their academic journey.
- **Don't avoid helping your child.** It's great if you have a partner who is happy to be the go-to parent for dealing with homework, but it's still important to help sometimes. It

can be a bonding experience and help build your self-confidence.

- **Ask for accommodations,** such as a reduced homework load or time limit on homework, if your child is dyslexic and homework is taking them a very long time to complete. After a long day at school, spending the entire evening on homework isn't an effective way to learn.

Story time

Reading to your kids at night can create precious memories and a warm bonding experience. But for so many dyslexic parents, it can also bring a sense of dread.

If you have dyslexia, you may feel insecure about reading out loud to your children, or worried that you'll be exposed, especially as your children get older and their reading ability improves. After all, there's nothing quite like being corrected by your seven-year-old…

People with dyslexia often have a long history of receiving constant critical feedback, so it can trigger a lot of emotional pain. Even little corrections can have a big impact. And so, when your child stops you mid-story and says, "That was the wrong word," it can take you right back to sitting in the classroom and being criticized by your teacher.

On top of that, one of the most common times to read stories to children is bedtime. This also happens to be the time of day when our brain might be the most fatigued, so we're more likely to make mistakes while reading. A rather unfortunate combination.

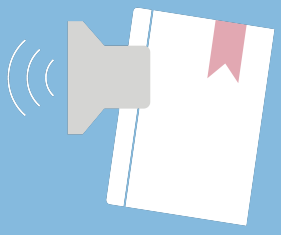
Finding joy in story time

- **Remember that reading isn't about perfection,** but about instilling a love of stories in your children.
- **If you feel hurt by being corrected,** remind yourself that it's natural for kids, particularly those learning to read, to follow along and point out mistakes. They are probably not trying to be critical.

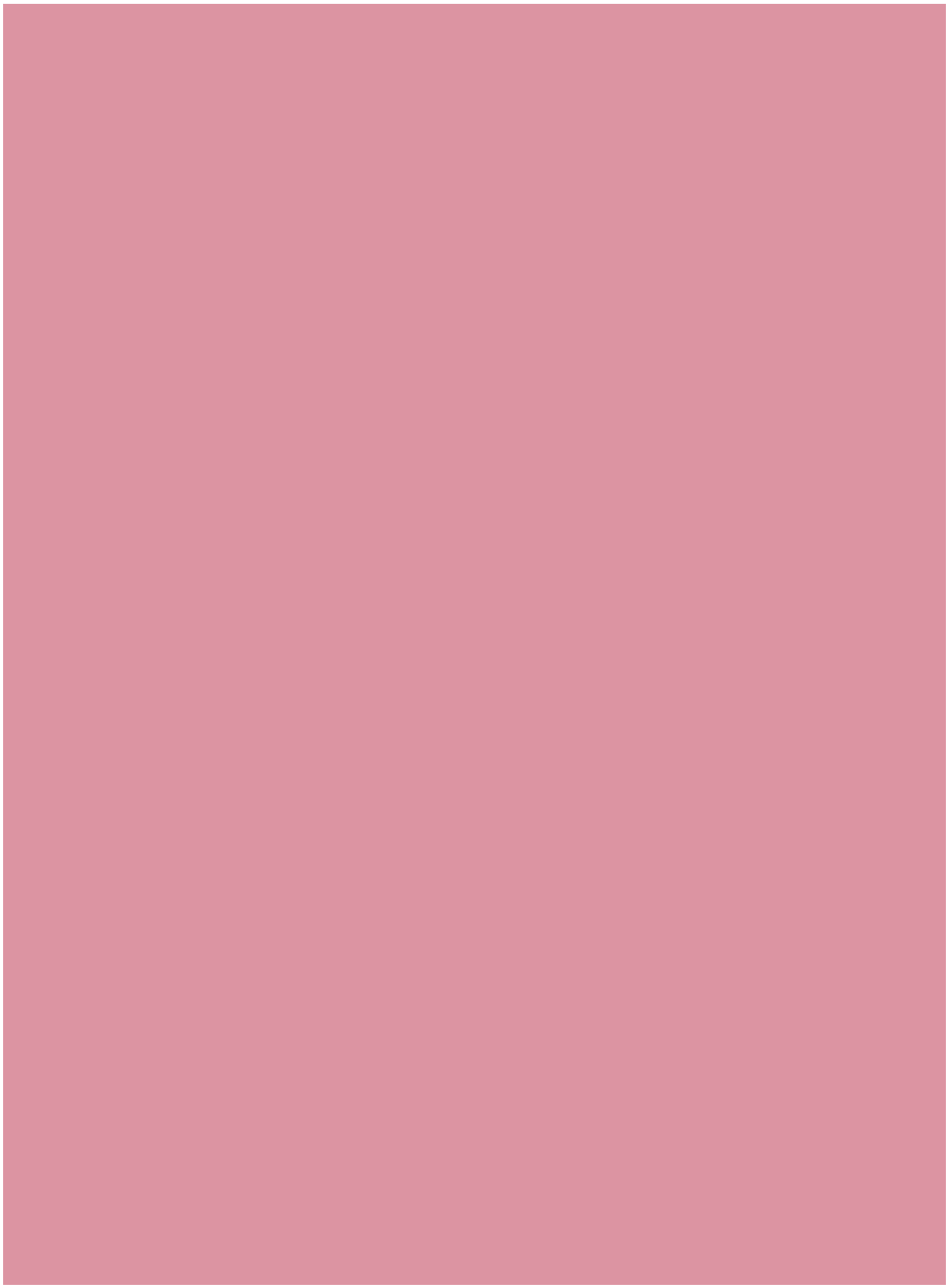
- **See it as an opportunity to talk about dyslexia.** When I make mistakes, I always explain to my children that it's because I'm dyslexic.
- **It's okay to choose easier books to read** on days when you're particularly mentally fatigued. Try to be honest with your children about what you're experiencing.
- **Model how to be vulnerable** and handle making mistakes. Practice acknowledging any mistakes without judgment. You might say, "Oops, I skipped those words. Let me try that again."

Quick win

Audiobooks can be an incredible way to engage in a story with your kids without having to read the book yourself. Cozy up on the couch and get lost in a story together.



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Chapter 7

Daily life

I have a vivid memory of the moment I realized that dyslexia's impact on my life extended well beyond the page. I was in my mid-twenties, walking home from work and listening to an audiobook about how dyslexia can affect someone's ability to learn how to tie their shoelaces. It was a light-bulb moment, which led me to explore how dyslexia shapes almost every aspect of my day-to-day life.

Running out of mental space

Automaticity challenges

Why do I always lose track of time?

Driving and navigation

Little dyslexic mishaps (whoops!)

Life admin

Reading under pressure

Running out of mental space

People with dyslexia can come across as forgetful. But, usually, it's not that we forget. We just don't have the mental space to store the information in the first place.

Working memory is the part of your brain responsible for holding the information you are actively using. If I ask someone with a strong working memory to go to the store and pick up pears, lemons, garlic, and a baguette, they'll likely remember all the items. But someone who struggles with working memory may forget at least one item on the list because they don't have the bandwith to retain all the information.

Working memory

Working memory is made up of several parts, each used for holding different types of information. Many people with dyslexia struggle with a part known as the "phonological loop," which temporarily stores and rehearses verbal information. Think of it as the bit of your brain that repeats information in your head so you don't forget it.

Dyslexia can overload and tire the working memory because of challenges such as processing written language, completing tasks on autopilot, and conscious compensation (see Automaticity challenges). This often leads to stress, mental exhaustion, and disruption of executive functioning.

How working memory struggles show up in everyday life

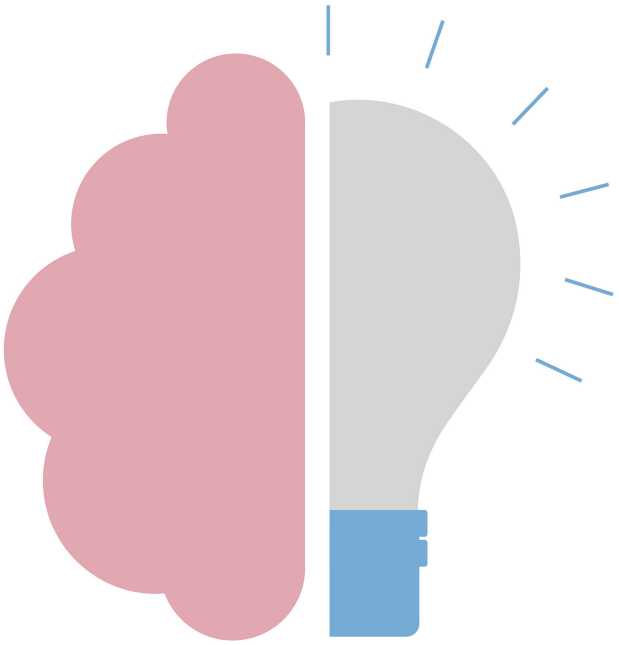
- Being asked to "quickly go to the kitchen and grab the yellow spatula from the third drawer to the right of the oven," and by the time you get to the kitchen, all you can recall is that you were supposed to find something yellow.

- Forgetting what you've just read, even if you're actively paying attention.
- Trying to figure out how much to tip in a restaurant and constantly having to check the total because it slips your mind while calculating.
- Having to repeatedly check the recipe when you're baking because, even though you've looked a hundred times, you can't remember how much sugar to add.
- Struggling to explain a complex idea because you can't keep all the parts in your head long enough to organize them clearly.

Working *with* your working memory

- **Don't keep it all in your head:** Keep a running list of things you need to remember. This could be in a journal or on your phone, wherever works best for you.
- **Use what you already know:** We can use our long-term memory to support our working memory by connecting new information to similar things we already know. As you are learning new things, ask yourself "What else does this remind me of?"
- **Take breaks:** Your working memory is not an infinite resource. When you're completing a task that demands a lot of your working memory, such as responding to important emails, doing paperwork, or figuring out a complex process, plan to take breaks between tasks; stand up, move around, or make a cup of tea. I still shudder when I think about how mentally exhausting it was to learn how to submit my insurance claims when I started my practice. NB: It's helpful to note where you are before taking a break.
- **Talk to yourself:** Because of the way the dyslexic brain interacts with language, repeating information out loud can help you remember it. If you're a visual thinker and

want to go the extra mile, picture yourself doing the thing you need to remember.



During busy periods, let go of what you can to prevent your working memory from becoming overloaded.

Automaticity challenges

Have you ever struggled to perform a "simple" task without thinking about it, such as tying your shoelaces, reading a clock, or differentiating left from right?

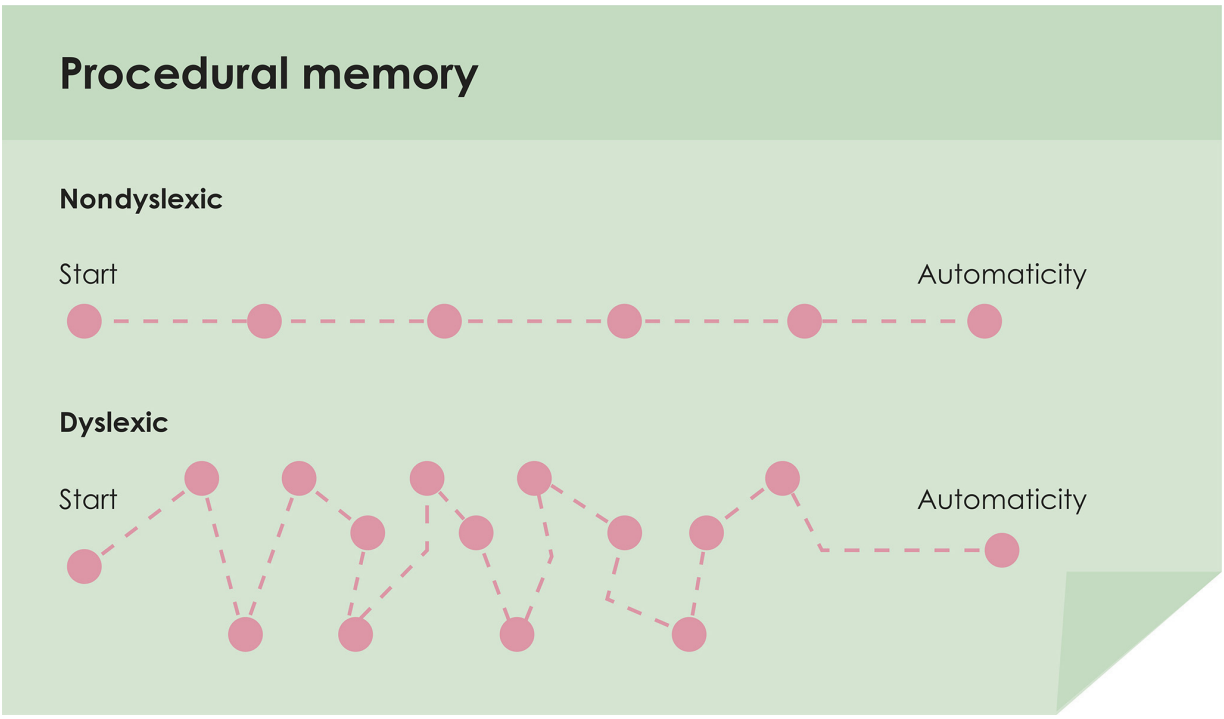
Many people with dyslexia struggle with automaticity—the ability to perform a task without conscious thought. Automaticity shows up in everyday tasks, such as not having to think about pedaling once you learn to ride a bike, or making your morning coffee without thinking through the steps. This is the procedural memory at work.

Evidence suggests that there is a difference in procedural memory consolidation among children with dyslexia that makes the process less efficient. In other words, dyslexia can make it difficult to carry out multistep tasks on "autopilot." So you might need to perform a task repeatedly, over a long period of time, until you feel confident in your ability to smoothly do so.

Automaticity challenges can make living with dyslexia even more exhausting. When performing a task, we often have to think through each step of the process for much longer than our neurotypical peers—this is called conscious compensation.

As I've mentioned, conscious compensation makes performing a task more demanding on the working memory. Because of the increased cognitive load, working memory systems can become overloaded. This can alter executive functioning and negatively impact related tasks, such as focus and prioritization.

Struggling with automaticity is one of the most telling examples of how the impact of dyslexia extends far beyond language difficulties.



You've got this!

Conscious compensation could explain why people with dyslexia often excel at innovation! When you repeatedly and consciously engage with a process, you are more likely to expose ways of improving it, which are often missed by those who engage with that process on "autopilot."

Strategies to help with automaticity struggles

- **Use external reminders,** such as notes on your phone or visible sticky notes, to offload tasks you need to remember. I typically recommend that any sort of reminder should be used with some restraint—too many and we ignore them all. Ask yourself, "Is a reminder the most effective way to offload this?"
- **Make simple checklists** you can easily follow for processes that involve actively thinking through multiple steps.

- **Try not to compare** your performance to others. Instead, allow yourself to learn at your own speed and in your own way. If you frequently make mistakes because you try to complete tasks at the same pace as others, insert a few checkpoints to pause, reflect on your progress, and plan what's next.
- **Be intentional** about your use of conscious compensation. When you perform a task, think about what you can do to group steps together. For example, if you need to write a long email, instead of perfecting it sentence by sentence, split the task into two stages: first, dump all the details onto the page; then craft them into clear sentences.
- **Develop strategies** to reduce your cognitive load. When attempting a task that you find mentally exhausting, look for ways to offload it or make it less taxing. For example, if you need to complete a writing task, try using dictation software (speaking is often easier for dyslexic individuals than writing or typing). Or, if you have a long list of things to do, try prioritizing the three most important tasks.



Taking a different path can still get you to the same destination—even if you took a longer route and observed different scenery along the way.

Why do I always lose track of time?

Time might be just a construct, but managing it well is key to handling daily responsibilities, something many with dyslexia find difficult.

People with dyslexia often experience time blindness, which can make it difficult to sense how much time has passed and how long a task will take. I have a habit of starting a project that will take three hours to complete, when I only have an hour before my next obligation…

The impact of time blindness

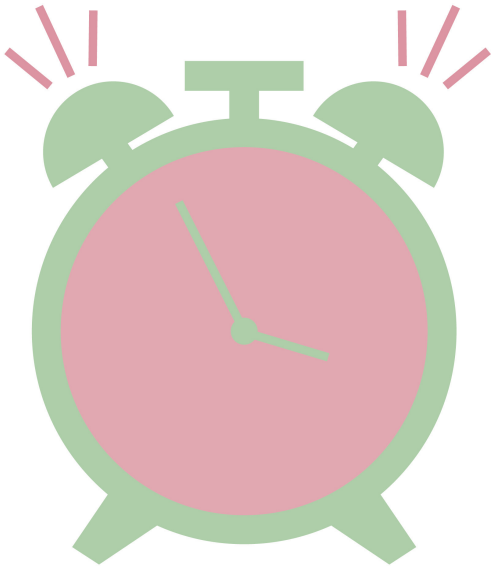
While time blindness isn't the end of the world, it can create unnecessary problems in our day-to-day lives.

- We frustrate others when we're late or when someone else has to pick up a task we were unable to finish on time.
- We often feel stressed out and constantly behind when our to-do list is long.
- We're thought of as less reliable. Even if it isn't intentional, others may start to trust our word less if we repeatedly fail to follow through on when we promise things will be done.

Navigating time blindness

- **Be honest with your loved ones** about your relationship with time. You could say, "Because of dyslexia and the way that my brain perceives time, things might take me a bit longer and my estimate of how long a task will take isn't always accurate."

- **Be honest with yourself** when estimating how long something will take, and try adding an additional time buffer. I often recommend coming up with one "If everything goes perfectly" estimate and another "If nothing goes to plan" estimate that's 50–100 percent longer.
- **Ask others to help you** estimate how long a task will take to finish. If you ask someone who knows you well, their estimate might even be more accurate than yours.
- **Schedule regular reminders** to keep you aware of the passing of time when you are working on a project. For example, you could keep an alarm nearby that goes off every 30 minutes.
- **Pause** next time you suddenly want to start a project that you've been considering for a while. Ask yourself, "Do I have any other commitments in the next hour that starting this project now will disrupt?"



Driving and navigation

From making wrong turns and forgetting directions to misreading street signs, I've spoken to so many dyslexic clients who struggle with driving and navigation.

If you have dyslexia, you may find it hard to automatically distinguish between left and right. It's easy to see how this could cause problems behind the wheel. Remembering directions can also be difficult, and asking people to repeat them can be embarrassing. So, when someone says, "take the third right," you might find yourself taking the fifth left instead... You may also experience a slight delay in reading street signs, or even avoid them altogether when under a heavy mental load, which can make you miss turns.

Building confidence behind the wheel

- **Ask for directions based on landmarks:** These are often easier to remember than street names or turns. For example, "turn toward the purple house ahead," instead of "turn left on Fifth Avenue."
- **Reduce the urgency:** If you're driving to somewhere new, give yourself an extra five or ten minutes to get there.
- **Use reminders for left and right:** For example, wear a watch on your right arm, or maybe go all out and put little L and R arrow stickers on the dashboard.
- **Talk to yourself:** Repeating your next turn out loud can be very helpful; for example, "Now I'm turning toward the blue building ahead."
- **Increase awareness:** Don't be afraid to explain that mistakes happen because of your dyslexia if another passenger ridicules you.

- **Take a breather:** Sometimes, even when we're using all the tools, things can still go wrong. We miss a turn, we're late, and we're highly stressed behind the wheel. When this happens, the best thing you can do is pull over somewhere safe and give yourself five minutes to pause and breathe.

Little dyslexic mishaps (whoops!)

Dyslexia and mistakes often go hand in hand.

Mistakes don't just show up in writing; they can sneak into lots of different parts of our lives. They can be big or small, but what really matters is how we feel about them and how other people react to them.

Mixing up words

Maybe you used an incorrect word that sounded like the one you meant, for example, saying "moon" instead of "spoon." Or perhaps you said, "put it in the dishwasher" when you meant "put it in the oven" because they're both similar-sized appliances and your brain decided to swap them… While these mistakes are sometimes funny, being frequently ridiculed for saying something wrong can make you feel ashamed.



There are two sides to every mistake: the error and its impact.

Forgetting steps

It's normal for people with dyslexia to slip up on multistep tasks, perhaps forgetting to add sugar while baking cookies or putting the coffee back in the wrong place. These mistakes might seem silly, but they can be embarrassing. Serving a dish to a large group of guests only to find out it tasted terrible because you forgot a key ingredient is never fun…

Written errors

From typing 98 instead of 89 to signing off an email with "regrads," written mistakes are an all-too-familiar part of life

with dyslexia. Often these mistakes are very low-cost, but they can be problematic—for example, if you're filling out an important form or taking stock of your finances.

Don't sweat the small stuff!

- **Try not to take yourself too seriously:** If a mistake has left you feeling ashamed, seek support and do your best to work through it. But if it hasn't, laughing it off can be the best medicine.
- **Check with fresh eyes:** If you're completing an important task where mistakes matter, do it in advance so you have time to double-check it the next day.
- **Don't be too hard on yourself:** Everyone makes mistakes and they do not define us.

Quick win!

Talk about how your dyslexia impacts you with the people in your life. When others understand why you make mistakes, they are more likely to respond with compassion and help you figure out how to avoid making the same mistake again.

Life admin

Being an adult involves a huge amount of admin. While this isn't fun for anyone, dyslexia has a way of making it even more taxing…

Dyslexia often interferes with even the most ordinary tasks, from filling out tax forms and completing job applications to reading contracts and keeping track of bills. We often don't realize just how taxing these tasks can be, which can leave us questioning why we're so tired when we only have "everyday" things going on. Let's take a look at the areas of life admin that can be tricky for people with dyslexia and what can be done to help.

Banking processes

Money management isn't always a problem for people with dyslexia, though it can be if dyscalculia is involved (see Friends of dyslexia). But dealing with complex finances spread across multiple accounts or making new transfers can be mentally demanding because they require holding various numbers in your mind, placing strain on the working memory. This often leads to avoidance, which can be expensive when it comes to managing finances.

- **Automate regular payments** to reduce your mental load.
- **Keep the number of financial institutions you're affiliated with small** enough to be manageable. Having everything in one place makes it much easier to keep tabs on what's going on.
- **Schedule a weekly or monthly check-in** to review your financial status and look over any outgoing and incoming

payments. The more you stay on top of it, the less overwhelming it's likely to become.

Millions of apps

We live in an era marked by millions of apps. Nearly everything you do now requires downloading an app, setting up another account, and getting flooded with notifications—all this adds to our already heavy mental load.

- **Keep things as simple as possible** and avoid downloading any unnecessary apps. It might be tempting to have an app to manage every aspect of your life, but too many will become unnecessary noise.
- **Consolidate whenever you can.** You're much more likely to remember to check one platform that handles 10 things reasonably well than to check 10 different specialized platforms.

Paperwork

I'm pretty sure I'll never stop feeling like every form I fill out is actually a test—and probably a test that I'm not going to pass with flying colors… Which is unfortunate considering how much paperwork adult life routinely requires! From applying for a driver's license and registering for insurance to keeping the electricity on and the water running, it can seem like there's a form for everything.

- **Do your best not to let paperwork pile up.** It's very easy to put it off, but that will only make it more challenging.
- **If you have a lot of paperwork** to complete, schedule something to look forward to afterward for added motivation.
- **Share the responsibility** with a partner or someone else in your life if you can.

Reading under pressure

Even if you're a very competent reader, if you have dyslexia, reading under pressure can be stressful.

Menus Menus are often not designed with readability in mind, and they're full of words you probably won't encounter on a daily basis. Add to that the pressure of quickly choosing what to eat in a busy, noisy restaurant, and it's no wonder that ordering a meal can feel daunting for people with dyslexia.	**Handling it:** Remind yourself that it's okay to take your time. Try asking the waiter for a recommendation or ordering the same dishes as someone else at your table. You could also look at the menu online and decide what you want to order in advance.

The group chat Being part of a group chat can give you a sense of belonging, but constant messages can also be very stressful. Trying to keep up with them and come up with instant replies can be a lot of pressure. The fear of misinterpreting others or making a typo can also create anxiety.	**Handling it:** Use voice-to-text software or send voice notes to communicate in a way that doesn't rely on written language. Using emojis can also help show that you are engaged in the conversation without having to write anything.

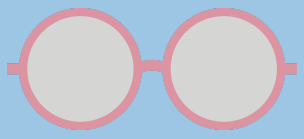
Board games Being handed long instructions to a board game and told, "Hey, we're going to start playing in a minute, just look over these real quick" can be stressful and make you want to opt out of playing altogether.	**Handling it:** People with dyslexia often excel at grasping the big picture, so figure out the point of the game and your aim first. You can pick up the finer details as you play.

Traveling Navigating airports, trains, and even roads can be difficult with dyslexia. The pressure of reading signs accurately and showing up in the right place can create anxiety when traveling.	**Handling it:** Give yourself plenty of time to get there. Plan your route in advance and make sure you have all the necessary details on you, such as gates, street names, and platforms.

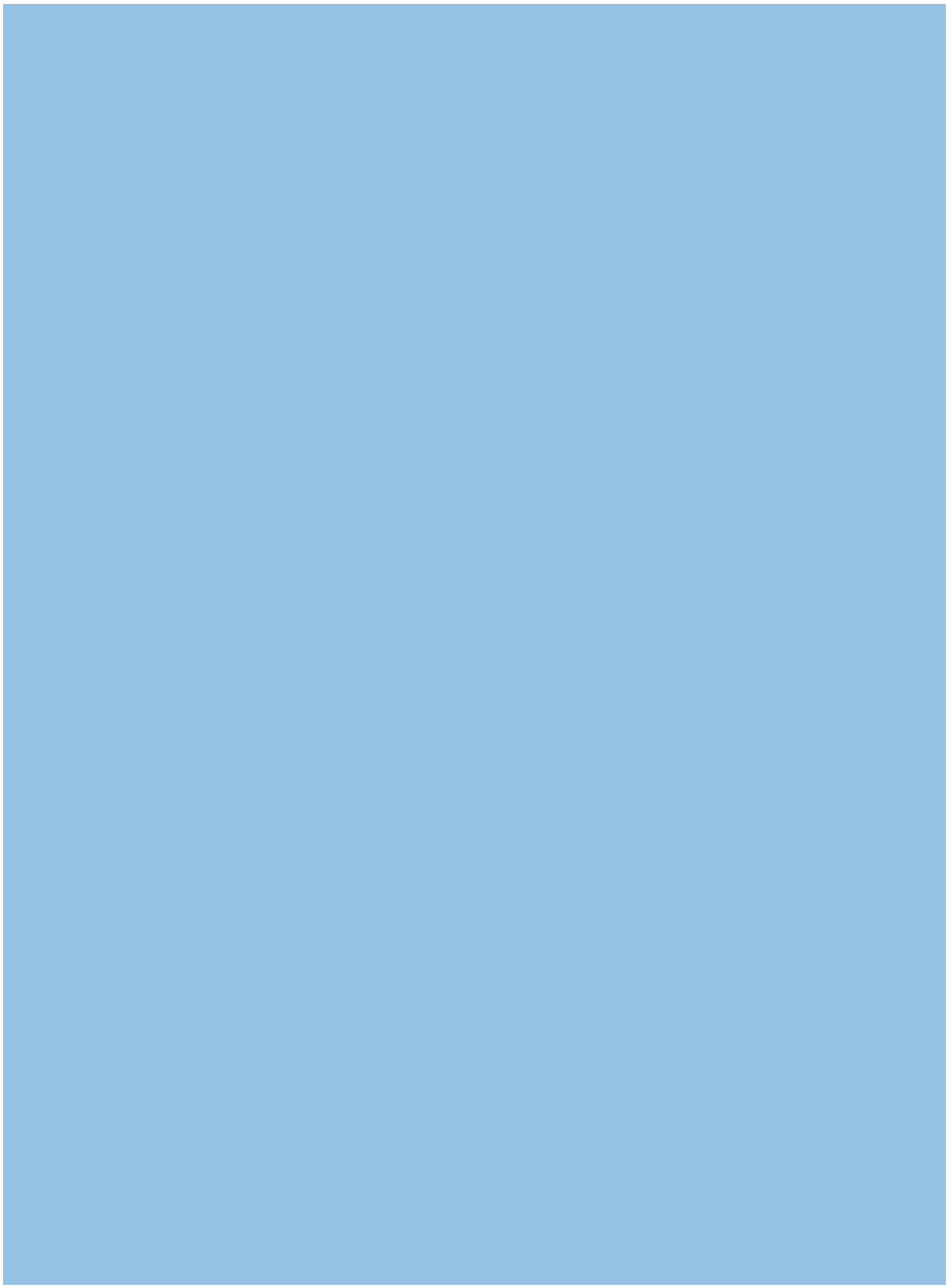
Read this with me

Another stressful scenario is when someone says, “read this with me” while looking at a computer screen. Suddenly you feel pressured to read as fast as they do so they’re not left waiting. You might try to guess when they’ve finished, then say, “that was hilarious” to show you read it, even if you didn’t.

Handling it: Remind yourself that it’s okay if it takes you a bit longer to read something. If the other person knows you’re dyslexic, you could also ask them to read it to you instead.



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Chapter 8

Emotional well-being

Living with dyslexia can feel like being stuck on a roller-coaster. One moment, I feel confident in my abilities; the next, I'm overcome with self-doubt. And I'm not alone in this. I've spoken to so many dyslexic clients who struggle with low self-esteem, self-criticism, and even anxiety and depression. But I want to remind you that there's hope. There are so many things we can do to improve our emotional well-being.

Why do I feel so stressed?

Shame

Self-esteem

Believing that you *can*

Depression and anxiety

Talking to a therapist

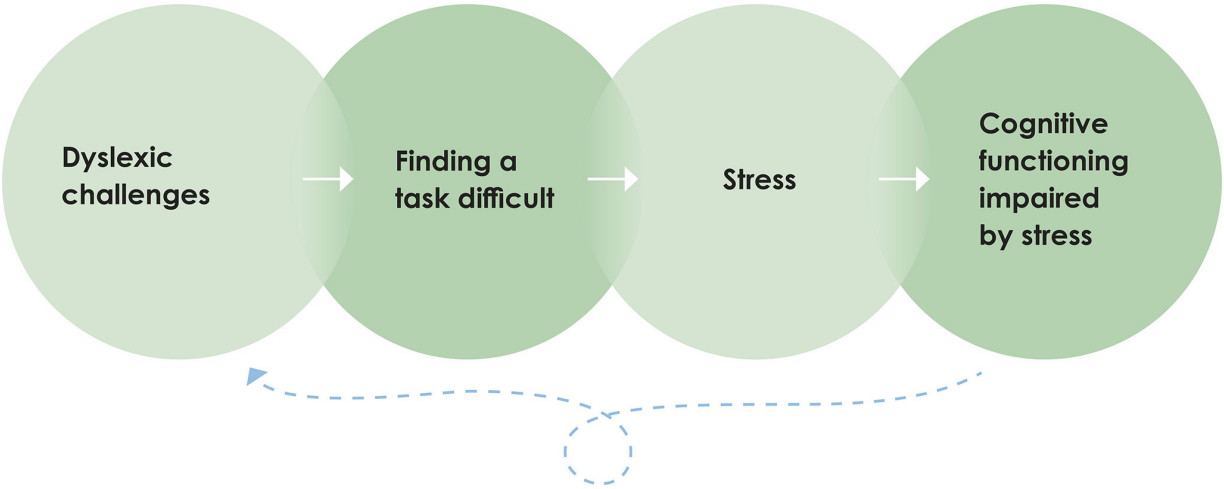
Why do I feel so stressed?

People with dyslexia often spend a lot of time navigating a world that isn't designed for how their brain works, which can result in high stress levels.

Stress is a natural reaction to pressures in our environment. When our stress levels are high, our bodies produce a lot of cortisol (also known as "the stress hormone"). Our bodies need cortisol to maintain balance and mobilize energy when we need it. But when we consistently produce it in excess, it can impair our ability to function well in daily life. Studies show that moderate cortisol levels can enhance focus and cognitive functioning, whereas elevated levels disrupt working memory, an area of cognitive functioning already affected by dyslexia.

Stress and dyslexia can create a vicious cycle, which prevents us from getting things done. Challenges such as brain fog, poor focus, the pressure to overachieve, working memory struggles, and reading and writing difficulties can make completing a task more difficult and cause anxiety about doing it incorrectly. This can increase our stress levels, which further impairs cognitive functioning.

The stress loop



Breaking the cycle

Next time you're trying to complete a task but feel stress getting in the way, take a moment to break the cycle. Remember, stress leads to more stress, so taking five minutes to reset is often the most productive choice in the long run. Here are my favorite five-minute resets.

- **Remember that stress is there to help:** Tell yourself, "My body is mobilizing energy to help me focus on performing this task," instead of "I'm getting stressed and that's going to make me fail."
- **Try a cold water reset:** Dipping your face in a bowl of cold water for 20–30 seconds (or splashing it in the sink) triggers a mammalian dive reflex, which slows your heart rate and directs blood back to your brain, improving mental alertness. NB: Doing this for longer than 30 seconds can trigger a stress response!
- **Pause for a sensory reset:** Sensory overstimulation can exacerbate stress. Turn off any screens, noise, or bright lights. Find a comfortable position and sit still for five minutes, focusing on your breath and any physical sensations that arise.

- **Do some low-intensity exercise:** Going on a short walk or doing some stretches can help reduce stress and improve your cognitive functioning.
- **Take stock:** You know those things you've been trying so hard to remember for next week? Take five minutes to write down and schedule any tasks lingering in your mind to reduce your cognitive load, so that you can fully focus on the task at hand.

Shame

Shame underpins so many mental health challenges experienced by people with dyslexia.

If, throughout your life, you've been repeatedly told there's something wrong with you or criticized for the way you do things, you're not alone. This is a common experience for people with dyslexia, and it can lead to internalizing a deep sense of shame—a feeling that something is inherently wrong with you that you need to hide from others. Shame has been linked to an increased likelihood of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.

For dyslexic individuals, shame begins in the classroom. We're often ridiculed by our peers and criticized by our teachers. We're taught to associate intelligence with reading and writing ability, which can lead us to believe, and be treated as if, we lack it.

A survey conducted by the British Dyslexia Association found that 82 percent of children with dyslexia had felt a desire to hide it. This is a sobering statistic given that childhood is supposed to be a time for care-free exploration and creativity —not for hiding part of yourself you believe is broken or insufficient.

Working through shame

1. **Identify shame:** When you want to hide and hear a voice that says "I am bad" or "no one can see the real me," take a breath and remind yourself that it's shame talking.
2. **Understand the source of your shame:** Ask yourself "Why am I feeling this way?" The answer is often rooted in your past.

3. **Practice kindness and self-compassion:** Tell yourself, "I'm human and dyslexic. I'm allowed to be imperfect. I'm allowed to make mistakes."
4. **Allow yourself to be vulnerable:** Open up to your loved ones about what you're feeling, if you feel emotionally safe to do so.



[Read detailed description]

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is a word used to describe how we see ourselves. The irony of this is that our self-image is often shaped by how we believe others see us and how they treat us.

Dyslexic or not, most of us have a habit of evaluating ourselves to determine our worth. "Am I smart enough? Can I trust myself? Do I belong in this room?" And for people with dyslexia, our answers to these questions are often negative. How could they be anything else when we've spent years making mistakes, facing criticism from our peers, and comparing ourselves to others?



Read detailed description

An alternative approach to self

Comparing ourselves to others and wondering what others think of us is a natural part of being human, so I'm not going to tell you to stop doing this. But I do want you to practice a different approach. Next time you compare yourself to others, try to do so without criticism, and when you look at yourself in the mirror, focus on self-acceptance.

Self-acceptance is the intentional act of seeing yourself without judgment. It's looking in the mirror and saying, "that's me." It involves acknowledging your strengths, weaknesses, and areas of growth, and holding space for them all without criticism. Our self-worth is bound to shift over time. By choosing

self-acceptance consistently, and treating every version of ourself with kindness, we ensure that we are always taking steps toward growth from a gentle and loving place.

Moving toward self-acceptance

- **Keep track of your wins.** Write them down in a "wins notebook," along with any encouraging feedback you receive from others, so that when your brain says, "you can't," you have tangible reminders that "you can."
- **Nurture your strengths.** Invest in what you're good at, whether it's designing buildings, working with people, creating art, coding, or cooking.
- **Use comparison to applaud** and not to criticize. When you notice that someone else's process is different from yours, instead of thinking "Mine must be worse," try "It's really cool that you do that the way you do!"
- **Accept your dyslexic struggles** as differences, or even weaknesses, and not character flaws. We all carry a unique mix of strengths and weaknesses. Give yourself permission to acknowledge both without trying to hide them.

Believing that you *can*

The voice of self-doubt may have told you "you *can't*" more times than you can count. But I want you to know that you *can*.

If you have dyslexia, you may be familiar with the voice of self-doubt. The one that says, "you'll fail," "you don't have what it takes," or "you shouldn't even try." The one that makes you question yourself and what you're capable of. It can feel like an unwelcome (and very vocal) roommate that never leaves.

Avoidance

Self-doubt wants nothing more than to make you avoid what matters. "You could fail and that would be uncomfortable. Just stay here with me." So we avoid trying, telling ourselves we're better off not taking the risk. But here's a little secret that self-doubt doesn't know… People with dyslexia are tremendously capable; for every challenge we face, we bring a unique strength. Self-doubt defines us by our weaknesses, and when we let it, we miss out on the opportunity to discover what we are great at—and even what we can improve on.

You've got this!

The antidote to thinking that you *can't* is believing that you *can*. Focus on the question "How will I?" instead of "Can I?" You are already capable of doing nearly anything you set your mind to—you just need to give yourself permission to go for it.



Finding self-confidence

Let's explore what you can do to move away from self-doubt and toward self-confidence.

- **There isn't a link between dyslexia and intelligence:** Remind yourself that being smart and capable is about nurturing your strengths and making space for your weaknesses. It's not about being good at everything.
- **Focus on the remarkable uniqueness of your ideas:** Don't dwell on the dyslexic mistakes that can accompany them in written format.
- **Remember that you don't have to be like everyone else to belong:** The spaces you fill wouldn't be the same without you.
- **Failing is part of the learning process:** When this happens, learn how to pivot and adapt your strategy. Ask yourself, "What could I do differently next time?"
- **Self-doubt becomes a problem when we let it paralyze us:** Instead of seeing it as a sign to quit, treat it as a signal to get curious. When self-doubt shows up, ask yourself, "What can I learn here?" and "Is there a different way to approach this?"

Depression and anxiety

People with dyslexia are more likely to experience depression or anxiety at some point in their lives. This isn't meant to worry you, but to help you feel prepared and supported, so if it ever shows up, you know how best to handle it.

The prevalence of depression and anxiety in dyslexic individuals is 2–3 times higher than average. However, research shows that dyslexia alone does not increase the risk of anxiety or depression. Instead, the mental health of people with dyslexia is shaped by the challenges they face, others' responses, and the narratives they internalize.

Symptoms of depression

- Persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and worthlessness
- Emotional outbursts
- Loss of interest, energy, and motivation
- Social isolation
- Disrupted sleep patterns

Symptoms of anxiety

- Feeling nervous, restless, or tense
- Increased heart rate and rapid breathing
- Difficulty concentrating
- Significant worry about the future
- Disrupted sleep patterns

If these symptoms significantly affect your quality of life or you have thoughts of harming yourself or others, talk to a mental health professional or someone close to you (see Talking to a therapist).

Narratives that fuel depression

- I've failed so many times, trying again feels pointless.
- No matter how hard I try, I'll never be able to do it like everyone else.
- I feel exhausted all the time because of how much energy everything takes.
- I feel so different from everyone around me.



Narratives that fuel anxiety

- If anyone really sees me, people might think I'm a fraud.
- I always end up messing things up when I try.
- If I open my mouth and talk, I might embarrass myself.
- If I try to do this, I won't succeed.



Navigating depression and anxiety

- **Externalize dyslexic mistakes:** Name and separate them from yourself. For example, instead of thinking "I'm failing" when you forget a step, try "Dyslexia was active so that step didn't make it into my working memory."
- **Reset your nervous system:** When you feel anxious, try a physiological sigh. Inhale deeply through your nose, take an extra sip of air, then exhale slowly through your mouth. Repeat three times.
- **Double standard check:** When you make a mistake and criticize yourself, consider if you would respond differently if your best friend did the same thing. If so, how would you respond? Can you offer yourself the same kindness?
- **Build protective relationships:** Healing happens through connection. Build a bond with someone you can be your authentic dyslexic self with, perhaps someone who is also

dyslexic for mutual understanding and support. Make time to check in, and don't be afraid to ask for what you need (for example, "I just need someone to listen.")

Talking to a therapist

I wish I could tell you that every trained mental health professional is educated about dyslexia and will listen to and validate your concerns. Unfortunately, I can't—so let's talk about what you can do to make sure you find the right therapist.

As a licensed counselor, it's deeply saddening to hear from clients who have had therapists dismiss their dyslexia, or had to spend most of their sessions educating their therapist about dyslexia. While it's important for clients to share their unique experiences and perspectives, therapists are always responsible for educating themselves about any issues their clients are dealing with. Therapists who are well educated about dyslexia are especially important, given how commonly it's misunderstood.

Therapy is beneficial for everyone, but I'd particularly recommend it if the mental health symptoms you're experiencing are preventing you from living your life in the way that you want. When you're suffering from poor mental health, therapy can help you get unstuck and find a way forward.

You've got this!

Your therapy space is for YOU! You're allowed to take up space and talk about what matters most to you, even if your therapist moves the conversation on.

Finding the right therapist

When you are looking for a therapist, the single most important thing is to find someone you feel emotionally safe with and

comfortable opening up to. Here are some tips for finding the right therapist for you.

- **Look for a qualified therapist who specializes in dyslexia:** Ask dyslexic peers or tutors, search online, or ask your doctor for recommendations. There aren't many dyslexia specialists out there, but, hopefully, that will change over time.
- **Look for a neurodivergent-affirming therapist:** If you're unable to find a therapist who specializes in dyslexia, finding one who focuses on ADHD or ASD is the next best thing. They'll be more likely to listen to and validate your feelings and may even offer new insights.
- **Remember that you are the expert on *you*:** You shouldn't have to fight to be heard. If your therapist is dismissive, you could say "We need to talk about this because it matters to me and has a huge impact on how I function." If you're dismissed on multiple occasions, it's probably worth finding a new therapist.
- **Make sure you are getting what you need from sessions:** Don't be afraid to say, "I would like more support with this." When you're used to hiding part of yourself, it can stay hidden unless explicitly invited out. Therapists aren't mind readers, as much as we might want to pretend we are, and you may need to be direct about what you want to focus on.

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Chapter 9

Behind the exhaustion

Most dyslexic clients I speak to say they feel completely exhausted, and I couldn't agree more. Whether we're going the extra mile or taking a longer route, we often have to push a little harder than everyone else in day-to-day life. Add to that sleep challenges and cognitive overload, and it's easy to see how exhaustion becomes our default mode.

Sleep

Taking the long route

The pressure to overachieve

Burnout

Sleep

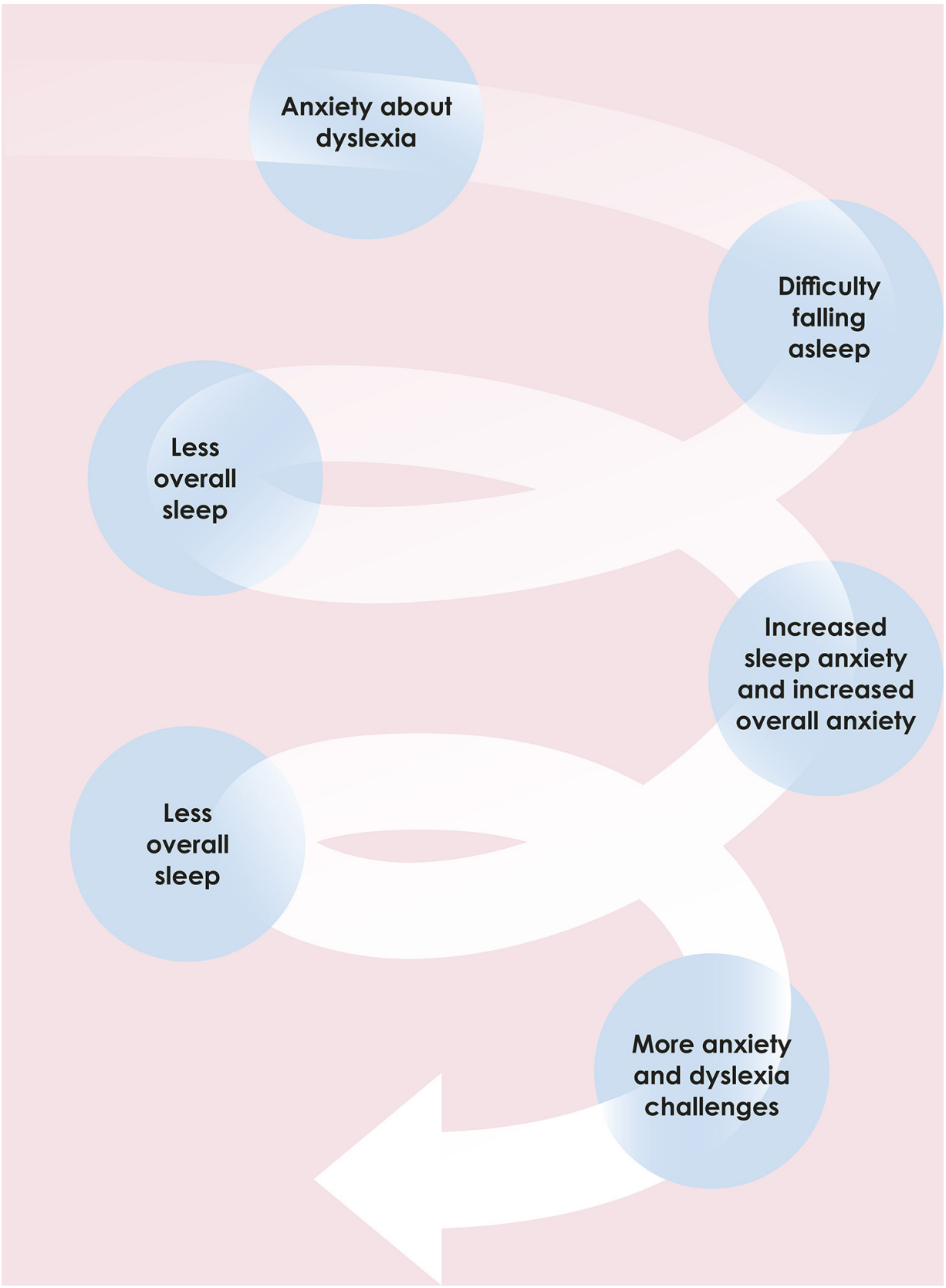
Many people with dyslexia struggle with sleep, which can make everyday challenges even harder. Fortunately, there are plenty of things you can do to improve your sleep quality.

If you are living with dyslexia, you might find it hard to get a good night's sleep. In a 2025 study, 66 percent of dyslexic children qualified as "poor sleepers" according to clinical standards. The study also found that, on average, children with dyslexia slept fewer hours than their peers.

Poor sleep can take a toll on anyone, but it's especially harmful if you have dyslexia. Many of the ways that dyslexia impacts daily functioning and learning are exacerbated by lack of sleep. Inadequate sleep disrupts our executive functioning and working memory, which are both already affected by dyslexia. It makes for a rough combination, and one that often goes unnoticed.

Lack of sleep can also take its toll on mental health by increasing the risk of mood disturbances such as anxiety. Anxiety has a unique relationship with sleep—we often experience heightened anxiety when we cannot fall asleep, which in turn makes falling asleep even more difficult. This can be even harder for people with dyslexia, who often already experience heightened levels of anxiety.

The dyslexia–sleep–anxiety spiral


Anxiety about dyslexia
Difficulty falling asleep
Less overall sleep
Increased sleep anxiety and increased overall anxiety
Less overall sleep
More anxiety and dyslexia challenges

How to get a good night's sleep

There are plenty of things you can do to improve your quality and quantity of sleep. Remember, what works for one person may not work for another, so it's important to pay attention to how strategies turn out for you. If something helps, use it; if not, don't force it.

Wind-down routine

1 hour before bed

Create a relaxing space: Set your room to an ideal temperature (64–68° F/18–20° C), and switch to warm, gentle lighting. Get cozy with a soft or weighted blanket.

1. **Process the day:** Reflect on how your day went and leave it behind. You might want to journal your thoughts.
2. **Prepare for tomorrow:** Lay out anything you'll need in the morning and write down any reminders.
3. **Relax your body:** Do a few stretches or yoga poses.
4. **Choose a calming activity:** Try drawing, completing a puzzle, listening to peaceful music, or reading a book (if you find reading relaxing).

Things to avoid

- Caffeine within eight hours of bedtime.
- Screentime within 30 minutes of bedtime. This can slow down melatonin production, which we need to fall asleep.
- Stressful activities (they can wait until tomorrow!).
- Mentally stimulating tasks—no problem-solving.
- Foods high in sugar and fat within three hours of bedtime.
- Lying awake for more than 15 minutes. If you're not falling asleep, get out of bed for a few minutes. You could get a

drink of water, read a book, or listen to peaceful music. Don't use any bright lights or screens.

- Thinking about tomorrow's agenda (this will wake your mind up).
- Engaging in anxious thought patterns or ruminating on mistakes. We can't always help this, but if it does happen, try to calm or distract your mind.

Ways to soothe your mind

- **Breathe the stress away:** Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 2 seconds, and then exhale for 6 seconds. Repeat this sequence 5–10 times.
- **Follow a guided meditation:** You'll find lots of sleep-focused meditations online.
- **Scan your body slowly from toes to head:** As you move up, gently wiggle or flex each body part, and observe any sensations.
- **Try this simple visualization exercise:** Take a deep breath, close your eyes, and picture yourself in a place that brings you warmth and peace. Notice what you can see, feel, hear, and smell. Let yourself fully rest in the experience.

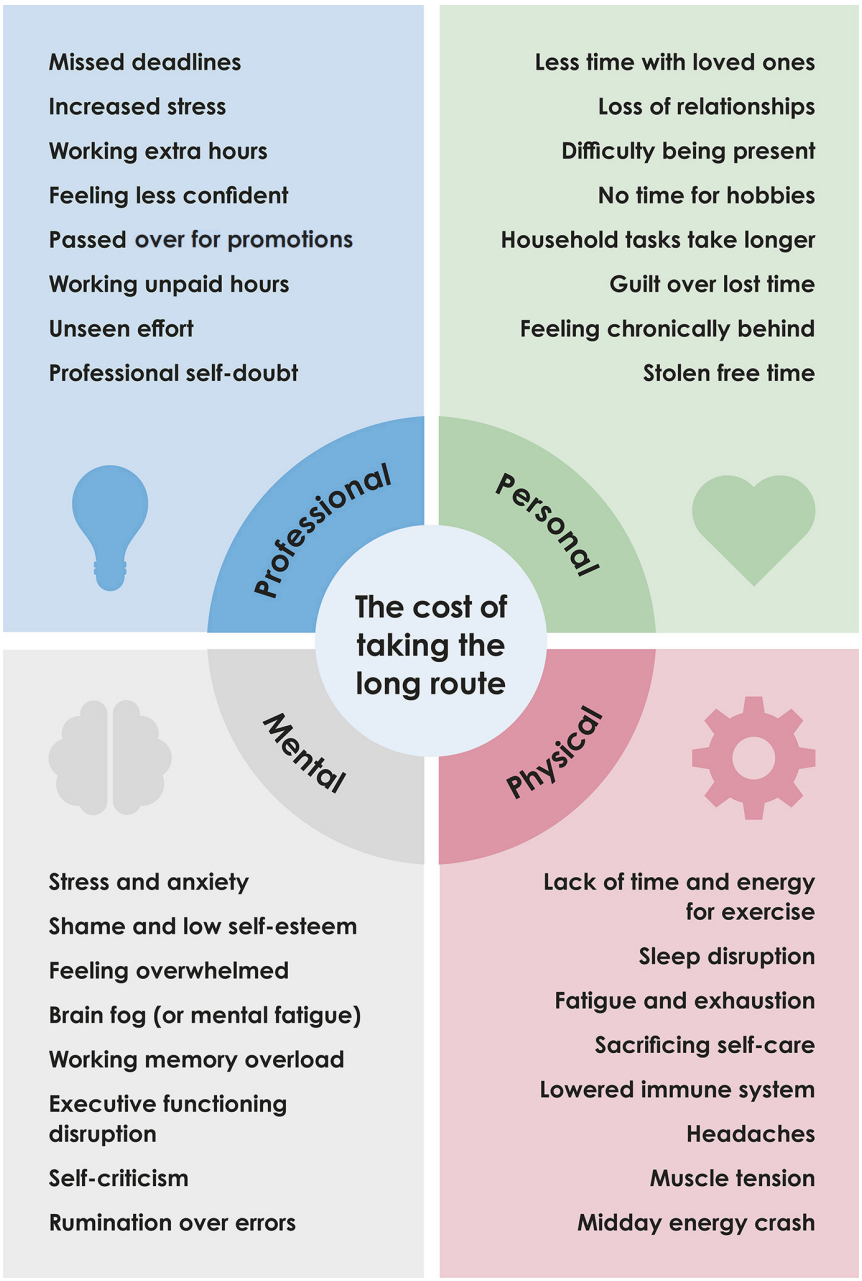
Taking the long route

Two people leave the same place at the same time to reach the other side of a mountain. One takes a tunnel; the other hikes over it. Both arrive in the same place, but the sights seen, time taken, and energy used are different.

Can you guess which person is dyslexic? If you've made it to this chapter, then you're probably already familiar with many of the ways that dyslexia costs us extra time and energy, from language and working memory challenges to automaticity struggles. Unfortunately, these are unavoidable parts of living with dyslexia, and they can impact almost every area of our lives.

Normalizing exhaustion

Like many others with dyslexia, I've come to normalize feeling constantly exhausted. When I say yes to a task that isn't dyslexia-friendly, I often accept that it's likely to take a large toll on my physical, mental, and social well-being. While we can't always avoid this, we should be careful about letting exhaustion become the norm.



Read detailed description

Making changes that last

If you're going to hike over the mountain instead of using the tunnel, you'll want to be strategic about it. Find equipment to make your hike faster and easier—maybe even a gondola that will take you part of the way. Everything we've covered so far in this book will help you with this, but it's not just about

knowing the right tools; it's about finding ways to make sure you use them.

Here's my five-step plan for making changes that last. Grab a notebook or record some voice memos to capture your thoughts as you go.

1. **Bring your awareness** to the things that cost you significant time and energy. Spend a few minutes at the end of each day asking yourself:

- "What things took me more time than I expected today?"
- "What left me feeling mentally exhausted today?"
- "Have I completed any tasks today that caused me to miss out on other things?"
- "What tasks do I dread or regularly complain about?"

2. **What tools and strategies have you already tried** to make life a little bit easier? Are there any tools you are currently using that no longer work? Are there any tools that may have improved since you last tried them?

NB: You might not realize that you've been using tools, but when you take a minute to reflect on how you've done challenging things, you'll likely discover you've tried a lot over the years.

3. **Explore the tools available** to you. It can be tempting to completely reinvent the wheel, but it's not always necessary.

- Look for technology that could help, such as dictation, speech-to-text, reminders, timers, or AI.
- Browse online forums to find tools that have helped others.
- Ask your friends and coworkers if they use any tools to manage their time more efficiently—bonus points if they're dyslexic!

4. **Use your brilliant dyslexic brain** to come up with new tools and strategies. It's important to give things a real chance before deciding they don't work and to stay open to trying them again.

- Let go of how things *should* be done. If you were the first person in history to encounter the task at hand, how would you approach it?
- The next time your brain says, "I wish a tool existed for this," pause and ask yourself, "Could I make that?"
- Look over your answers from Step One and identify which tasks trigger your mental brakes. Ask yourself, "What could I change to prevent those brakes from locking up?"

5. **Implement, observe, adjust, repeat.** Implement one tool at a time and practice for a week, or at least long enough to work through the initial learning curve.

- After a week, step back and reflect on what worked and what could have gone better.
- Write down how you can adjust the tool or strategy so that it works better for you.
- Repeat the process with the new changes, or if it already works (or completely fails) move on to the next tool.

Quick win

Start small when you're making changes. Instead of trying to change an entire process, start by changing one part of it. Small, incremental changes are much more likely to bring long-term benefits.

The pressure to overachieve

Have you ever felt an intense need to prove that you belong? The pressure to just work a little harder, do a little more, be a little more? For many people with dyslexia, this can be a daily reality.

When you live in constant fear of being exposed as an imposter, it's natural to do everything you can to prove that you belong. For those living with dyslexia, this often means going an extra 10 miles—saying yes to everything, no matter what.

There are some serious pitfalls to this approach. Going the extra mile can create a brief sense of belonging, but doing so repeatedly only adds to your cognitive load and takes you away from more important responsibilities. Eventually, this can lead to a cycle of exhaustion that can be difficult to break.

Quick win

When you find yourself saying "yes" to things that require going above and beyond, practice asking yourself, "Am I saying yes to this to prove I belong?" If the answer is yes, consider saying no. Every time we say "no" to those things, we get a little bit closer to accepting that we're enough.



Read detailed description

Accepting that we are enough, even when it feels difficult, is the first step toward breaking the cycle of exhaustion.

You don't have to do anything to prove you belong.

Burnout

Everything we've discussed in this chapter—poor sleep, extra effort, pressure to overachieve, and mental overload—can create a perfect storm for dyslexic burnout.

In both my personal and professional interactions with dyslexic individuals, one of the struggles that I consistently hear about is burnout. Many of us end up totally exhausted, unable to do anything for days or weeks while our minds and bodies recover. By addressing the challenges early that contribute to dyslexic burnout, we can prevent it from happening.

Early signs of burnout

- Energy depletion or exhaustion
- Falling significantly behind on daily responsibilities
- Finding the right words to say feels difficult
- Emotions become a lot harder to manage
- Stuck in bed, mindlessly scrolling

> **You've got this!**
>
> **If you have dyslexia, you'll probably experience burnout at some point in your life. When you do, it's important to show yourself compassion. Remember that burnout doesn't make you a failure. It's actually proof that you've been working hard! Slow down, get some extra sleep, and do what makes you happy.**

Preventing burnout

1. **Get comfortable with saying no** to others and also to yourself. Ask yourself, "Am I saying yes to avoid the discomfort of saying no?", "Am I saying yes to prove something?" or "Will I regret saying yes?", and "Do I have the ability to say yes and maintain my own health and well-being?"
2. **Identify early signs of burnout:** Check in weekly on your energy levels, motivation, and mood. If you notice any signs, address them early by following the strategies in the next step.
3. **Free up your energy** and use it to care for yourself. When you notice you're burned out (or heading there), you should take a look at some of these short- and long-term solutions.

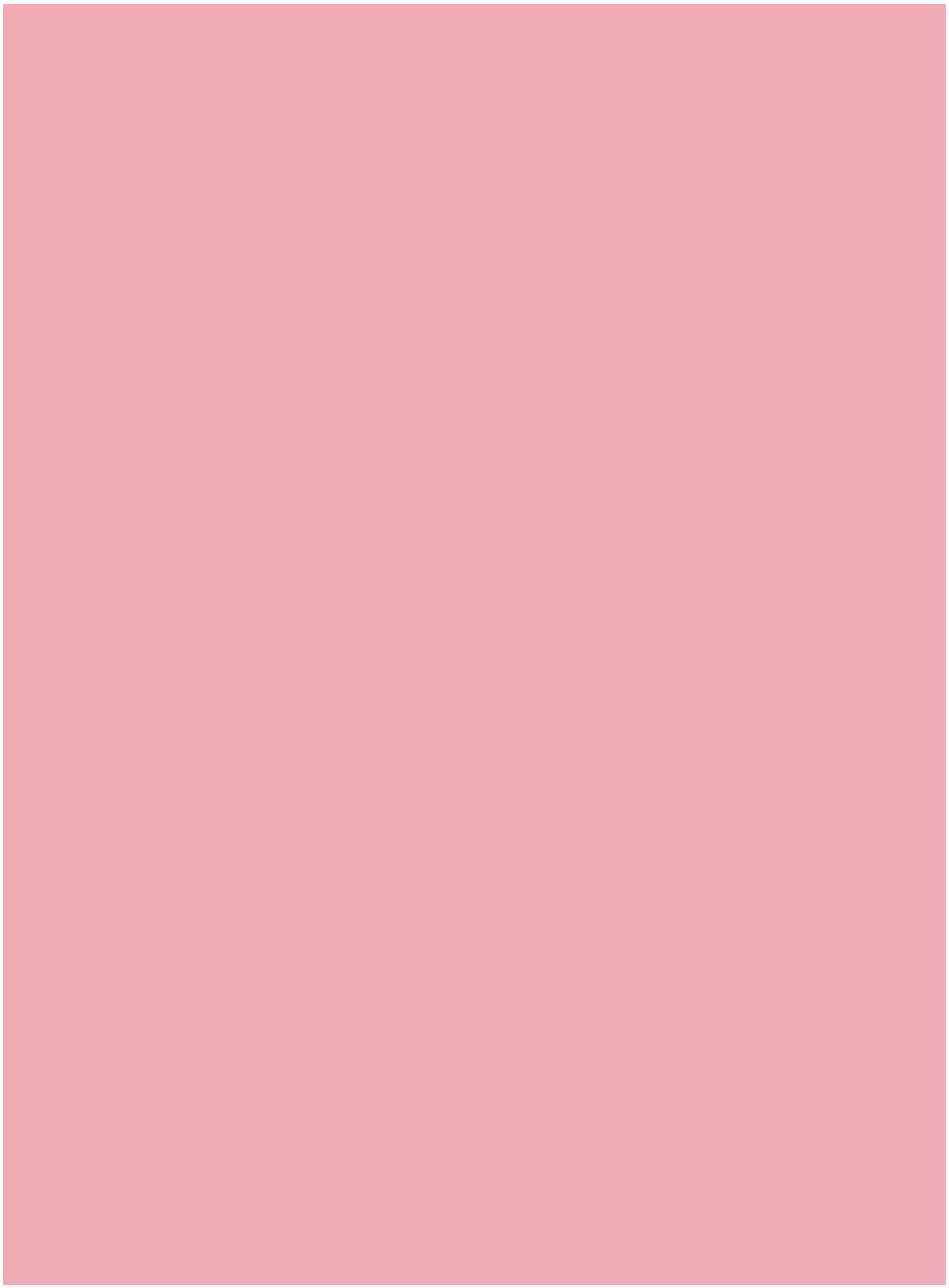
Short term

- Spend five minutes reviewing your to-do list every morning and decide whether you can drop anything.
- If possible, take some time off work and use it to do something peaceful.
- Confide in a loved one or mental health professional.

Long term

- Evaluate your responsibilities: are there any changes you could make to reduce your day-to-day mental load?
- Prioritize 20–30 minutes of daily physical activity. You could go for a walk, take a bike ride, do some yoga, or maybe even join a dance class.
- Do what restores you mentally or physically. If you're not sure what that is yet, experiment. It might be a new hobby, calling a friend, or taking a long bath.

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Chapter 10

Big-picture thinking

People with dyslexia are often natural big-picture thinkers. It's an ability that helps us notice what others might miss, understand how different parts of a system work together, and make unique connections between ideas.

What is big-picture thinking?

Big-picture thinkers

Leveling up

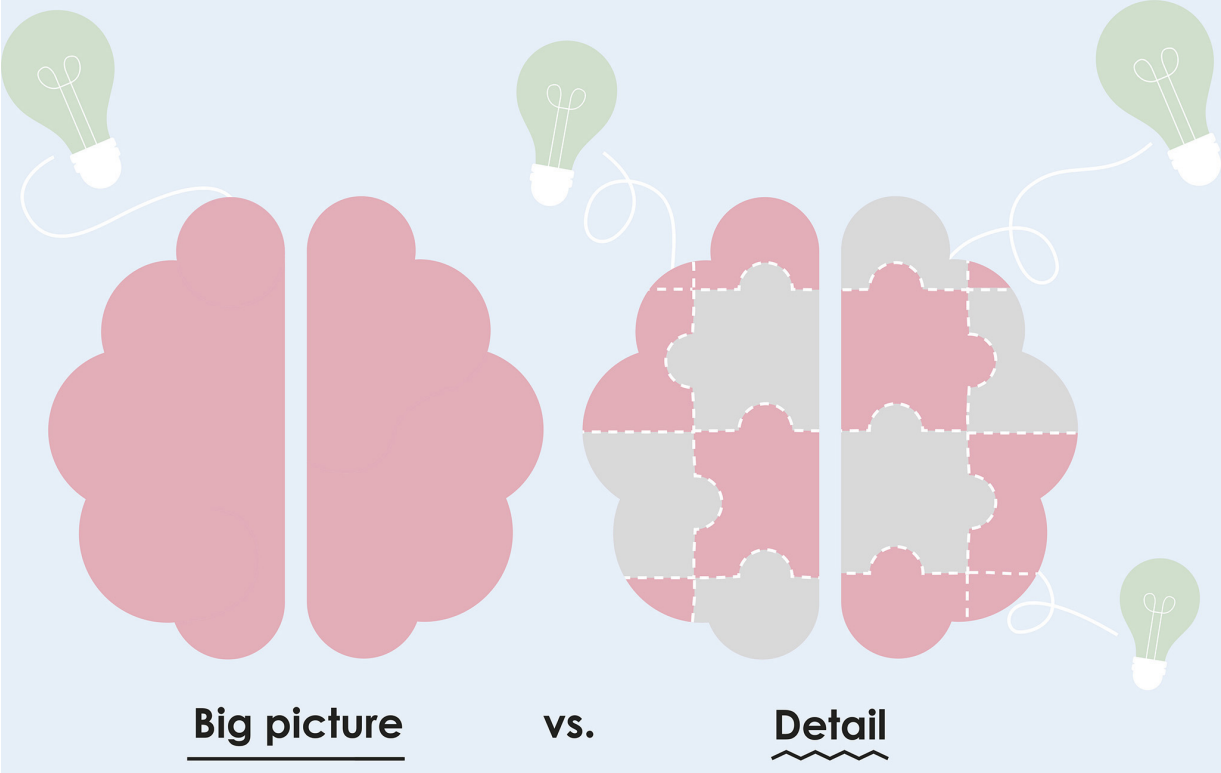
Overcoming challenges

What is big-picture thinking?

We all interact with information in different ways. Some of us see the world as a system of small parts that build a whole, while others see a whole made up of small parts.

Both ways of seeing the world offer useful perspectives. While detail-oriented thinkers notice small differences and errors more easily, big-picture thinkers quickly understand the system as a whole and how its parts work together. We all use both ways of thinking to some degree, but most people have a default approach through which they interact with information.

Throughout history, people with dyslexia have been observed to commonly (but not universally) default to big-picture thinking. This perspective makes it easier to notice patterns, find gaps, and innovate in ways others often overlook.



Signs you might be a big-picture thinker

1. **Top-down learning style:** When you are learning something new, grasping the overall concept first makes the details much easier to understand.
2. **Seeing connections others miss:** You often use phrases like "this reminds me of how…" to draw connections between ideas that may seem unrelated at first.
3. **Slow start → fast finish:** Learning feels slow at first as you make sense of the big picture, but once you grasp it, the details quickly fall into place.
4. **Spotting inefficiencies:** You are great at identifying parts of a process that aren't working and recognizing ways to improve it.
5. **You remember concepts, not details:** You can easily explain the big idea but the details are a little foggy.

6. **Sensing what might go wrong before it happens:** In family life, your ability to see relationships as an interconnected web helps you anticipate how a single decision can affect everyone.
7. **Impatient with details:** When you get into the nitty-gritty, the details seem almost irrelevant.
8. **"What" → "Why" → "How":** To understand a new process, you need to know *what* is happening (the goal) and *why* it matters—and then the *how* often follows naturally.

Quick win

When you're learning something new, find or create a clear map, flowchart, or diagram that gives you an overview to help you grasp the big picture first.



Big-picture thinkers

Big-picture thinkers with dyslexia have left their mark on history. Maybe the next name on this list will be yours!

Muhammad Ali (1942–2016)

Boxer and Olympic gold medalist who was known for using strategy and intelligence to win fights. In the ring, Ali used big-picture thinking to observe, understand, and counter his opponent. Outside the ring, he recognized systemic injustices and spoke out against them.

Sir Richard Branson (b. 1950)



Trailblazing entrepreneur who repeatedly demonstrates the ability to adapt his businesses based on the big picture. When Branson observed how "poorly" airlines treated customers, he set out to create a customer-centric brand that reimagined the air-travel experience.

Erin Brockovich (b. 1960)



Environmental activist and legal clerk who observed a pattern within a mass of seemingly unrelated real estate medical files and created a case against environmental poisoning that others had missed.

Octavia Spencer (b. 1970)

Oscar-winning actress and producer Octavia Spencer attributes parts of her success to her dyslexia, specifically her ability to bring together a puzzle of interconnected pieces to produce a cohesive big picture.

Jamie Oliver MBE (b. 1975)

Celebrity chef, entrepreneur, and best-selling author Jamie Oliver credits his dyslexia with helping him build a global multimillion-dollar brand. He believes his dyslexia helps him engage in "three-dimensional thinking" and "see problems differently."

Leveling up

For many people with dyslexia, big-picture thinking comes naturally, but learning how to use it effectively takes practice and confidence.

Here are my top tips for leveling up big-picture thinking, so you can excel as a communicator, strategist, innovator, and leader.

- **Make your thinking visible:** Even if you think the big picture is obvious, you still need to explain how you grasped it to others so they can follow your reasoning. Practice talking through your thought process—mapping it out visually on a whiteboard can be helpful, too.
- **Surround yourself with people who think differently:** Every big-picture thinker needs a detail-oriented thinker in their circle who they work well with. Even if you don't always think the details matter, they do!
- **Build a bridge from idea to action:** Always allow yourself to dream, and remember that turning your vision into reality takes careful planning and concrete steps. Outline the entire process from beginning to end.
- **Learn how to refine your process:** Ask yourself, "What can I influence here?", "How do I make this process more efficient?", "What steps could be eliminated?", and "What risks are worth taking?"
- **Be proactive:** As a visionary, it's easy to overpromise on what you can create and then underdeliver (or never deliver). Incredible visions get lost all the time when "I'm almost ready to start" turns into "I ran out of time," so don't delay getting started—make it happen.

Turning your vision into a reality takes careful planning and concrete steps.

You've got this!

Big-picture thinking can be helpful in so many ways, from being able to see how the pieces of a puzzle fit together to observing patterns and predicting the best next move.

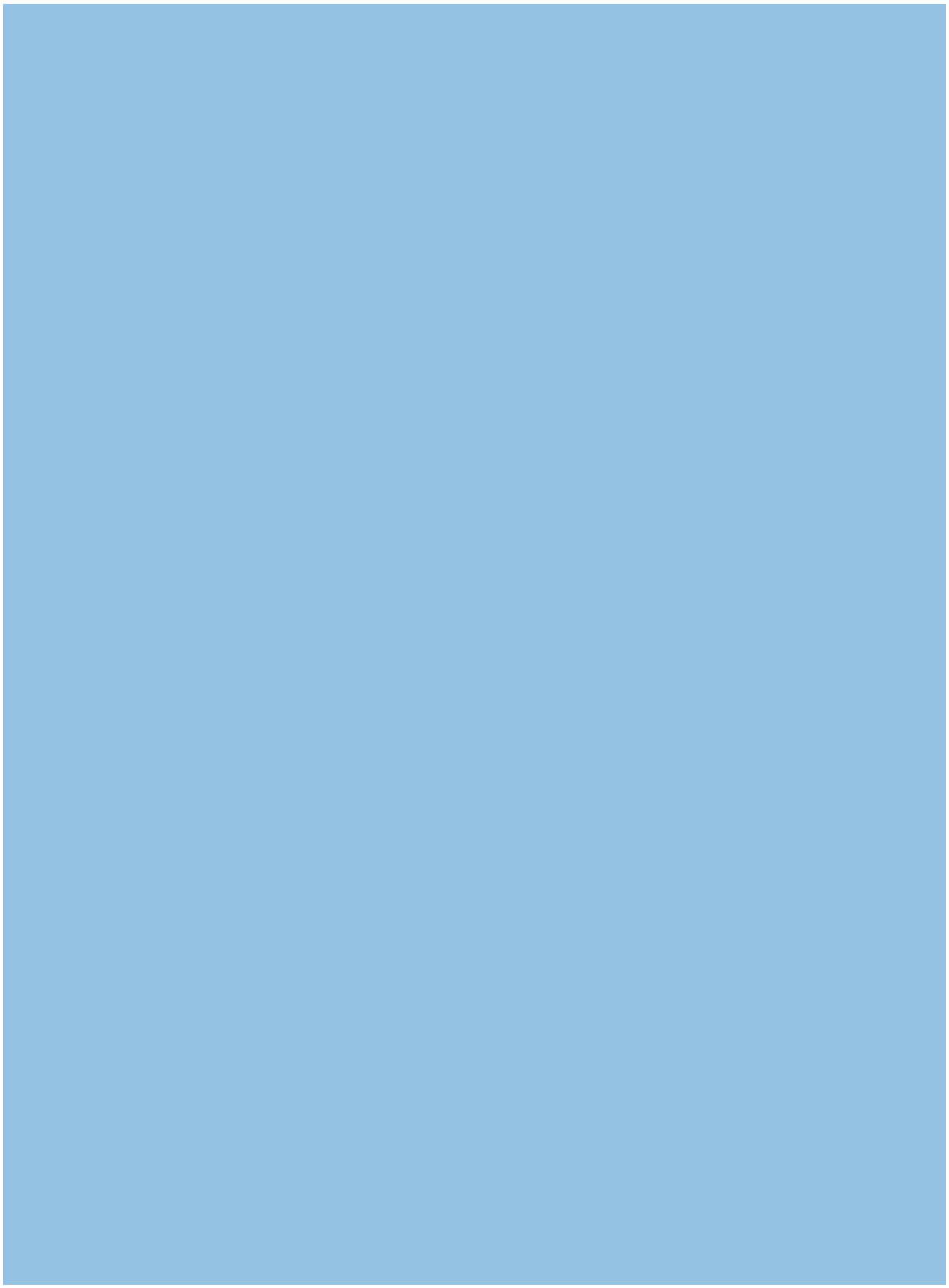
Overcoming challenges

Big-picture thinking is a great skill, but it does come with setbacks. Let's talk about how to overcome these with the right strategies and intentional effort.

When you're really good at seeing the forest, you can sometimes miss the trees. Details may seem almost irrelevant, but I can assure you that they are not (most of the time). Neglecting details can lead to mistakes. Mostly, they're harmless, but some can have serious consequences.	Taking a moment to plan and prepare, especially when performing detail-heavy tasks, can save you time in the long run. When reading important information, I recommend skimming it from beginning to end first and then reading through slowly to take note of key details.
If someone is struggling to see your vision, you might feel impatient or frustrated.	Be patient with people who don't share your vision—what they see is important too. Learn how to slow down and listen to other perspectives.
You may struggle to follow through on what you start. New projects can be exciting and energizing, but as you get into the finer details, you may feel deflated and lose the motivation to finish.	When you get stuck on the details, return to your initial vision and let yourself get excited. Then remind yourself that the details are necessary to bring that vision to life. Creating a tangible reminder, such as a written note or an illustration, can help you hold onto that energy.
When you can clearly see all the different directions you could go in, choosing just one can feel immobilizing.	Practice choosing a single direction. Sometimes that means saying "no" to good options. But remember: you can always pivot later.



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Chapter 11

Problem-solving

People with dyslexia are known to be natural problem-solvers. When you think of a "problem-solver," you might imagine someone changing the world through scientific discoveries. While that is definitely a form of problem-solving, problems can come in all shapes and sizes.

What is problem-solving?

Curiosity

A history of dyslexic inventors

Unlocking your potential

What is problem-solving?

Problem-solving involves taking something that isn't functioning as it should (the problem) and figuring out ways to make it work (the solution).

People with dyslexia often excel at problem-solving. This may be explained by differences in how our brains function (see The dyslexic brain), but it is more likely to be a byproduct of growing up in a world designed for a neurotypical brain, where we have to learn how to adapt from day one. An "I can solve this" mindset is our natural way of approaching the world.

A lifetime of problem-solving

Early life

Children with dyslexia often display advanced problem-solving skills. This can involve solving fun and creative problems, such as creating elaborate systems of strings and pulleys that allow you to turn on and off the lights from anywhere in the house, or taking apart every toy you own—speaking from experience here! But we also begin to face more difficult problems from an early age as we learn how to navigate an environment that works against us, such as overcoming language challenges and finding ways to hide dyslexia from classmates.

Adolescence

As the complexity of our problems increases, so does the need to develop more in-depth solutions. School and homework become more complicated and we have to find innovative ways to keep up. At this stage, we often begin creating "workarounds," using our problem-solving skills to find new ways of doing things that actually work for our brains.

Early adulthood

In the first decade of adulthood, the stakes continue to rise. We're presented with new challenges, such as performing at work, paying bills, and keeping up with a social calendar.

This can be an exciting time for those in careers that align with their dyslexic strengths. But many others face the stark realization that (like schools) most workplaces are not dyslexia friendly. We begin to realize that problem-solving skills are essential for building systems to navigate every aspect of adult life, and not just the education system.

Continued adulthood

Once we reach the later stages of adulthood and better understand ourselves, we can begin to reap the benefits of being skilled problem-solvers. Those who thrive at this stage have typically developed strategic systems to manage responsibilities, are able to delegate effectively, and make the most of their strengths.

By this point, you may have so many systems in place, running almost automatically, you barely notice them. Or you may have become the fix-anything person others turn to when things aren't working as they should. The combination of life experience and problem-solving skills can also make you good at predicting how situations are likely to unfold.

You've got this!

You might not even realize that you've spent most of your life developing problem-solving skills to keep up with systems that are not designed for you. The more aware you become of this strength, the more you can hone your ability to solve problems, creating opportunities for growth in every aspect of your life.

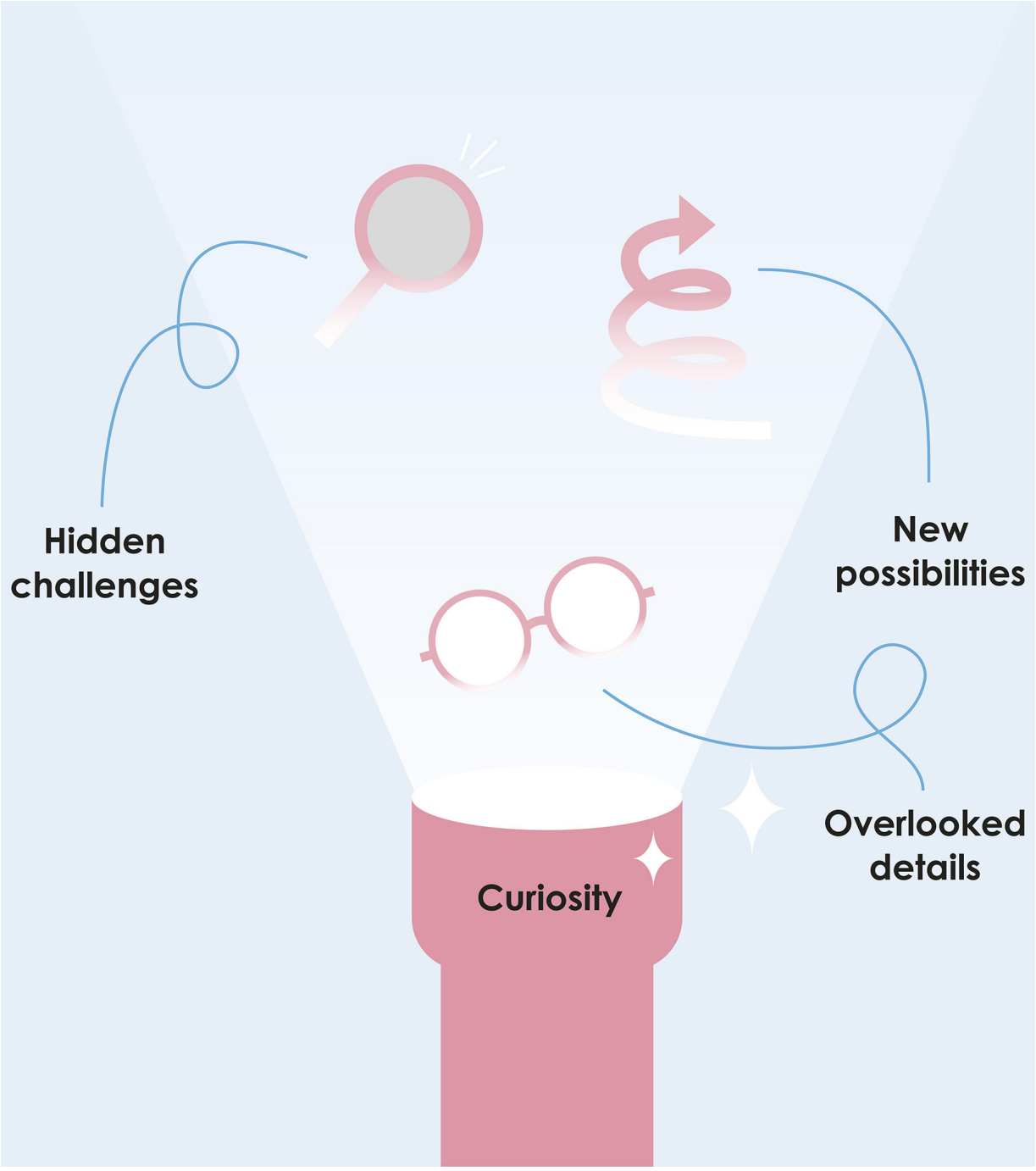
Curiosity

People with dyslexia often have an innate desire to know more—a curiosity that leaves us wanting to understand how everything works.

Curiosity encourages us to approach problems with an attitude that says "Let's explore every possibility!" It drives us to question "why?" and "what if?", helps us spot bottlenecks, and makes us more likely to notice details others have missed. This ability to step outside our habitual ways of thinking and explore alternative perspectives is key to problem-solving. Curiosity also helps us come up with creative solutions instead of settling for obvious answers.

There are a few factors that could explain why people with dyslexia tend to be naturally curious. Maybe it's because our brains seem to be wired for exploration and finding patterns (see A strengths-based approach to dyslexia). Or perhaps it's because dyslexia has made us acutely aware of our surroundings so we can try to fit in. Or it may come from having to navigate systems that feel "alien" to us.

Curiosity shines a light on new ways to approach a problem.



Quick win

Sometimes when we struggle to engage with learning, it's because we've lost touch with our natural curiosity. So, let's turn on that curiosity to help you feel energized and engaged. Ask yourself, "How would I teach this to an 8-year-old?", "What's the main goal of this?," "What would it look like if I mapped this out in my mind?". Being curious means keeping an open mind and exploring, even if it takes you a little off the beaten path.

A history of dyslexic inventors

Inventing is problem-solving at its highest level—it revolutionizes the way a problem is approached by creating something entirely new. And it's nearly impossible to talk about influential inventions without mentioning the work of a dyslexic creator.

Colin Murdoch (1929–2008)

A talented pharmacist and veterinarian, with an incredible 46 patents registered under his name. His most notable invention is the disposable syringe, which has saved millions of lives by preventing the spread of fatal diseases. In 1976, he was awarded medals at the World Inventors Fair in Brussels.

Jacques Dubochet (b. 1942)

Swiss biophysicist who helped develop cryogenic electron microscopy—a revolutionary technique that freezes water around delicate biological samples so fast that their structure stays intact for study. His work has contributed to the development of vital vaccines, including the COVID-19 vaccine, and helped us better understand diseases such as Alzheimer's and Zika.

Carol W. Greider (b. 1961) and **Elizabeth Blackburn** (b. 1948)

World renowned molecular biologists who co-discovered telomerase—an enzyme that rebuilds the protective ends of cells, helping keep DNA safe when cells divide. Their discovery has played a major role in life-changing medical research, including in cancer and aging. They were awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine.

Maggie Aderin (b. 1968)

British space scientist with a BSc in physics and a PhD in mechanical engineering. As an undiagnosed dyslexic child, Aderin attended a total of 13 different schools, but that did not dampen her curiosity. She was fascinated by space and saved up to buy her first telescope, only to discover it had significant flaws. Undeterred, she taught herself how to make and improve telescope parts, and in that moment, her future was born.

Unlocking your potential

For people with dyslexia, problem-solving is a way of life. And even though it comes naturally, it's also something we can sharpen to achieve what once seemed impossible.

Three types of problem-solving that people with dyslexia often excel at are insight-based problem-solving, reverse engineering, and domain integration. Let's explore how to level up our problem-solving skills by applying these approaches.

1 Insight-based problem-solving

This approach involves letting your brain do the work behind the scenes. Think of it as an "a-ha" moment, rather than logically working through a problem step by step. For example, you might struggle to figure out why your car won't start and, after hours of trying, go for a walk to clear your head, only to have a sudden epiphany about how to fix it.

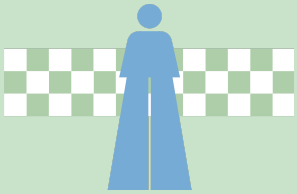


Leveling up

Insight-based problem-solving starts with giving your brain as much information about the problem as possible—consider it from every angle, explore available tools, and think about all relevant variables (for example, people, time, and regulations). Once you have all the information, let your brain do the work behind the scenes; close your eyes, go for a walk, or take a shower. Wait for your "a-ha" moment, and when it comes, assess whether the solution will actually work.

2 Reverse engineering

Seeing the end point is easy; the challenge often comes with figuring out how to get there. This approach is about leading with the big picture instead of the details.



Leveling up

Begin by finding a solution to your problem. Don't worry about the details yet, just focus on the end result. Once this is clear, work backward from there. Map out your process from end to beginning. Starting with the solution, keep asking yourself, "What needs to happen right before this?" until you reach the beginning and the path forward is clear.

3 Domain integration

Solving a problem effectively often involves integrating, or bringing together, ideas across different domains, even ones that might not seem related at first. For example, hospitals created safety checklists inspired by the aviation industry, and research shows that they significantly reduced surgical complications by preventing human error.

Leveling up

Start with curiosity. Explore a wide range of interests and hobbies to build a diverse internal library of domains to draw from. When you encounter a problem, ask yourself, "does this feel similar to any unrelated challenges I've faced or learned about?", then draw on those parallels to give you a fresh perspective on your original problem.



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Chapter 12

Visual-spatial reasoning

Visual-spatial reasoning is a common skill among people with dyslexia. In a survey by the Dyslexic Advantage Organization, 53 percent of participants strongly agreed with the statement, "I am very good at forming 3D spatial images in my mind." But about a quarter of participants didn't agree, so if this doesn't sound like you, it doesn't make you any less dyslexic. Everyone experiences their own internal world uniquely.

What is visual thinking?

What is spatial reasoning?

Visual-spatial dyslexic thinkers

Utilizing visual-spatial reasoning

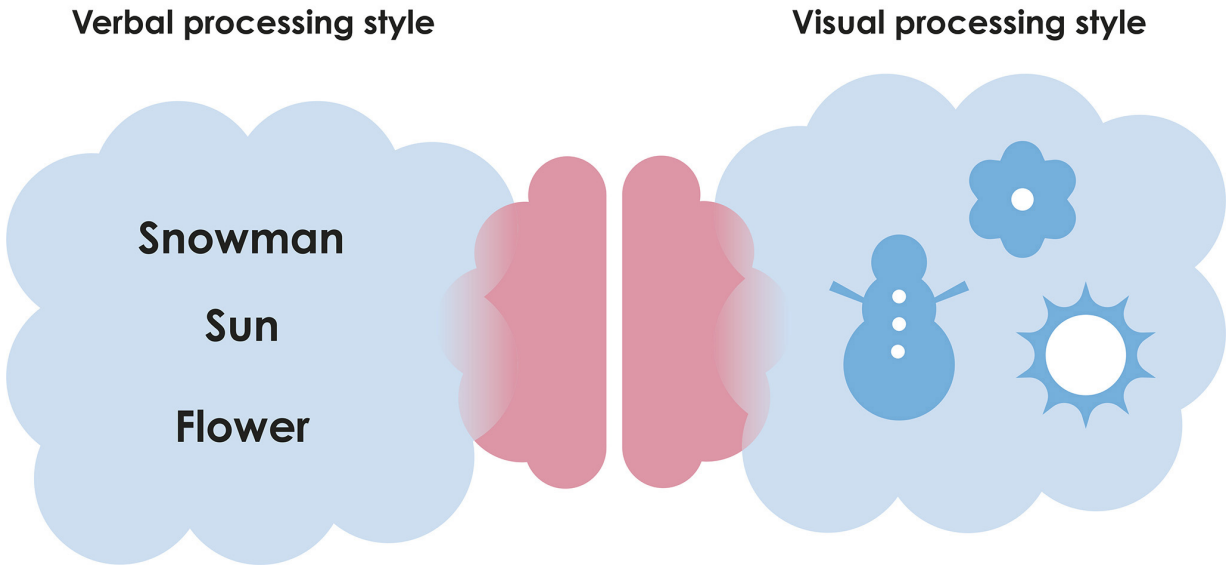
What is visual thinking?

Visual thinkers often process and understand information through images, patterns, and spatial relationships, rather than relying only on words.

If I asked you to explain what a snowman is, would you immediately picture a snowman and describe it based on what you see in your mind? If so, you're probably a visual thinker. If instead the words arrive first and the image follows later or not at all, your thinking style is probably more verbal.

Visual thinkers often process information holistically rather than sequentially. By this I mean we see the whole picture at once, instead of building a piece-by-piece understanding. We often experience reality through a zoomed-out lens, enabling us to see things as an interconnected network of information. Our thoughts involve vivid imagery, where we can see, and potentially interact with, scenes in our mind.

It's not uncommon for visual thinkers to arrive at insights almost intuitively, even if we don't have the words to articulate what we are seeing; for example, when someone asks for directions and you can picture the route but struggle to explain how to get there.



Visual vs. verbal

Visual thinking exists on a spectrum. On one end, people think mostly in images, with few to no words involved. On the other, their thoughts might include some inner narration alongside the visuals. The primary way to distinguish between visual and verbal processing is by noticing which comes first—the image or the words.

- With a visual processing style, understanding begins with seeing. The image or pattern comes first and the words to explain it follow.
- With a verbal processing style, understanding begins with words. A mental image can follow, but sometimes there are just words without any imagery.

What is spatial reasoning?

While visual thinking is the ability to think in pictures, spatial reasoning helps you interact with those pictures, as if they exist in a three-dimensional space.

Spatial reasoning is the ability to understand, manipulate, and interact with objects inside your mind. It often involves a natural awareness of the distances and sizes of objects relative to one another. Unfortunately, it doesn't mean you can literally move objects with your mind… But it does mean you might be able to envision what your living room would look like if you rearranged it and what size table you need for your dining room. I often compare it to the Iron Man computer, which allows him to visualize objects, manipulate them, and explore them from every angle.

Spatial reasoning falls under the umbrella of visual thinking. While visual thinking is about how you process information, spatial reasoning relates to how you interact with it. But not all visual thinking is spatial. It's possible to be a very visual thinker without having good spatial-reasoning skills. The reverse is also true: you can have strong spatial-reasoning skills without being a visual thinker. For example, you might understand how objects relate to one another and be able to mentally manipulate them in an abstract way, instead of clearly visualizing and rearranging them in your mind.

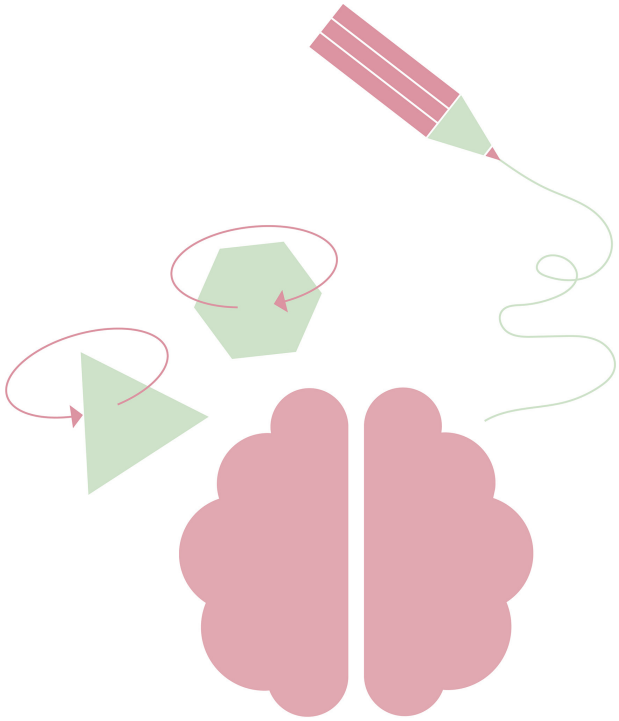
The benefits of visual-spatial reasoning

- Applicable across a wide range of exciting careers, including architecture, urban planning, filmmaking, engineering, surgery, radiology, molecular biology, fashion design, video game design, graphic design, landscape design, and more.

- Allows for a quick understanding of how various parts of a system work together.
- Enables an intuitive understanding of how physical relationships between objects work. For example, when playing racquetball, you might instinctively predict where the ball will land.

The drawbacks of visual-spatial reasoning

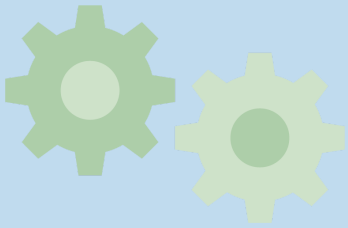
- Places a heavy demand on the working memory.
- Easily becomes distracting.
- Showing your work can be challenging.
- Struggling to communicate your vision.



Visual-spatial dyslexic thinkers

Visual-spatial reasoning is an incredible asset across many fields, from design and architecture to engineering and medicine. Let's take a look at some renowned visual-spatial dyslexic thinkers and their contributions to the world.

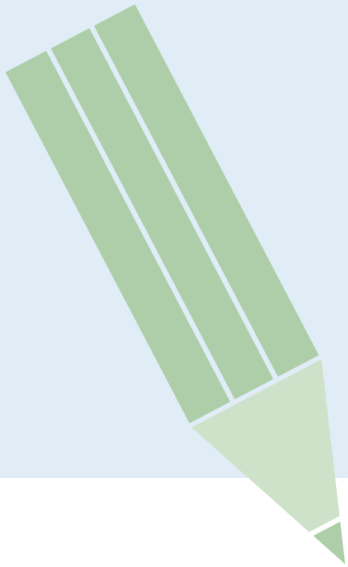
Paul MacCready (1925–2007)



World-renowned aeronautical engineer, named the "Engineer of the Century" by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers. He is best known for developing the first human-powered flight, for which he won the Kremer prize. MacCready attributed some of his success to his ability to first visualize a solution in his mind.

Richard Rogers (1933–2021)

As one of the most celebrated architects of the last two centuries, Rogers was a leading voice in sustainable and high-tech architecture. Landmark projects include The Centre Pompidou (Paris), World Trade Center (New York), Lloyd's Building (London), and The O2 (London).



Steven Spielberg (b. 1946)



World famous award-winning director who uses his incredible visual-spatial reasoning skills to create cinematic masterpieces. Spielberg has admitted that reading a script takes him three times longer than others due to dyslexia, but in the process, he constructs a detailed visual world in his mind, allowing him to edit his movies before filming even begins.

Beryl Benacerraf (1949–2022)

Pioneering radiologist and researcher who made groundbreaking contributions to ultrasound technology, including recognizing an extra fold of skin on a fetus's neck as an early indicator of Down syndrome. Benacerraf credited her ability to notice what others had missed to her dyslexia.

Bethan Laura Wood (b. 1983)

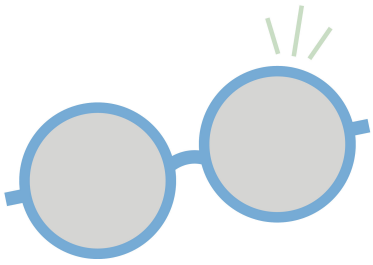


Internationally acclaimed multidisciplinary designer whose work ranges from jewelry and furniture to large-scale installations for major brands. Wood utilizes visual thinking, taking objects from everyday life, such as floor lamps and even toothpaste tubes, and arranging them in a way that creates a rich and colorful visual depth.

Utilizing visual-spatial reasoning

There are near infinite practical applications for visual-spatial reasoning in everyday life. And the more you practice, the better you will get.

We use visual-spatial reasoning all the time without even realizing, from building things and redecorating our homes to packing the car and even deciding what size container to use for leftovers. But like all skills, using it to your advantage takes practice, so let's look at some ways to exercise those visual-spatial brain muscles.



Practicing visual-spatial reasoning

- Picture an object in your head and try turning it over.
- Visualize a space you've been in before and create a three-dimensional model of it in your head.
- Look at an object with multiple parts and visualize taking it apart and putting it back to together again.
- Listen to a story and visualize it, picturing as many details as you can.

Communicating your vision

Visual thinking comes naturally for many people with dyslexia. What we often do need to work on, however, is being able to communicate our vision. You may have an amazing idea in your head and be able to clearly see how all the parts fit together, but can you confidently describe it to someone else?

I want you to think about an idea you've recently had. Maybe you have an incredible idea for rearranging the living room or for a new process at work?

1. **Turn that idea into something tangible:** What format would be best to start with? A sketch on a napkin? A whiteboard session? A drawing on your tablet?
2. **Identify the overall purpose of your idea:** For example, my goal for rearranging the living room is to make the space feel more calming.
3. **Pinpoint the key parts of your process:** Do you need to measure anything? Are there potential pitfalls? Will you need extra hands to move things? Do you need any materials? Write this down clearly and concisely.

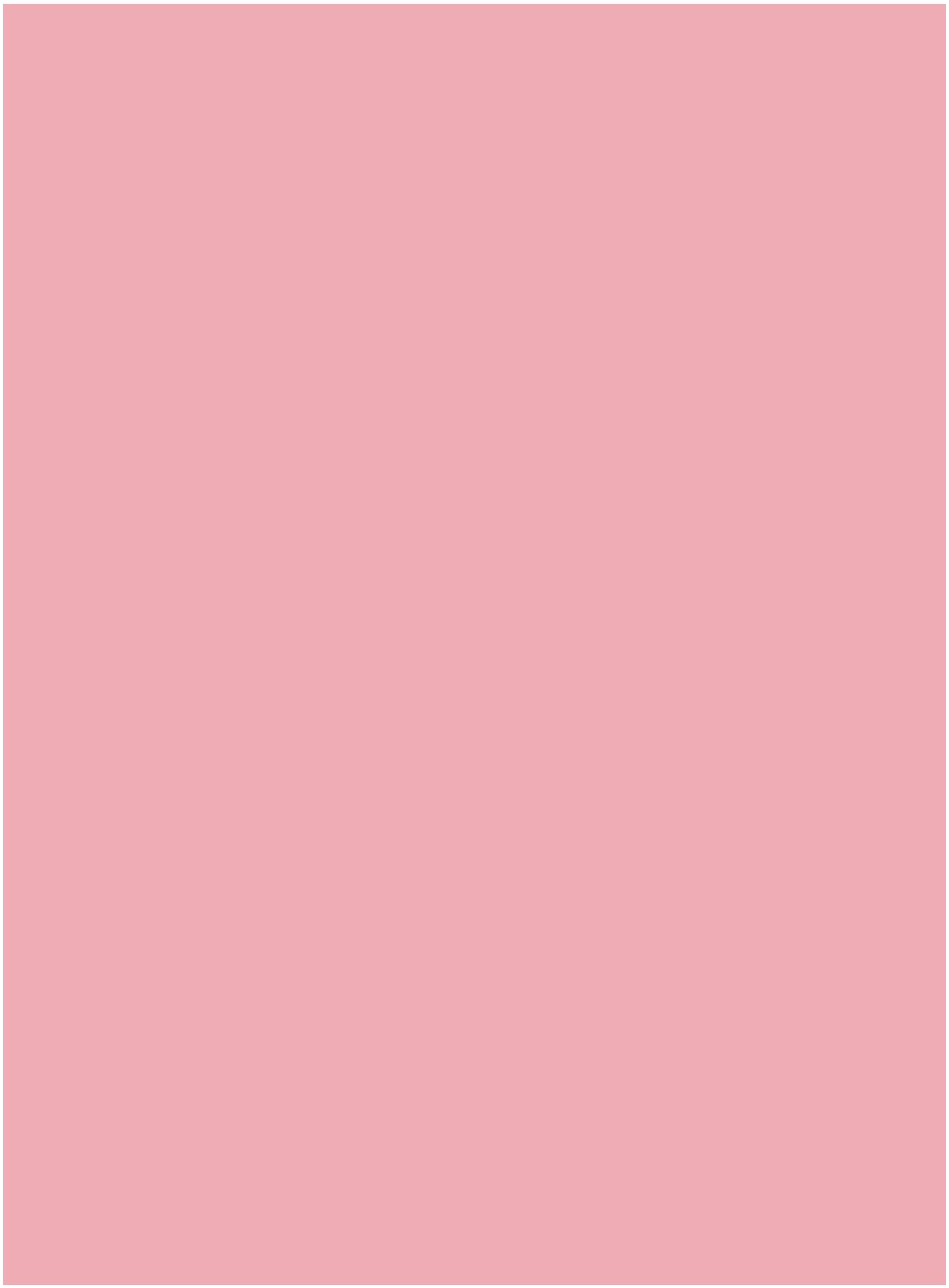
Now that you've clearly defined your vision, it's time to practice communicating it. Articulating your ideas takes work, and it's a skill that can be tremendously helpful for individuals with dyslexia.

If you need to present your vision to a group, practice can help increase confidence and improve performance. Create a three to five minute video explaining the concept you have visualized. Return to it a few hours later and assess how well you understand the idea being communicated. Is there anything you could do to make it clearer? Do you use too many word fillers, such as "like"? Are your hand movements distracting? Now, record the video again, addressing what you feel went wrong. Practice this process once a week.

Quick win

Solving 3D puzzles is one of my favorite ways to practice visual-spatial reasoning! Playing with LEGO is also a great option.

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Chapter 13

Creativity

Everyone has their own idea of what creativity is. To me, creativity means always finding another way—encountering a fence that seems impossible to climb and still figuring out how to reach the other side. Living with dyslexia, I've had a lifetime of practice at this, finding new ways of doing things so that they work with my brain and not against it.

Rethinking creativity

Divergent creativity

Creative icons

Rediscovering creativity

Rethinking creativity

When we picture a "creative person," images of painters, musicians, and writers often come to mind. But creativity isn't just about art.

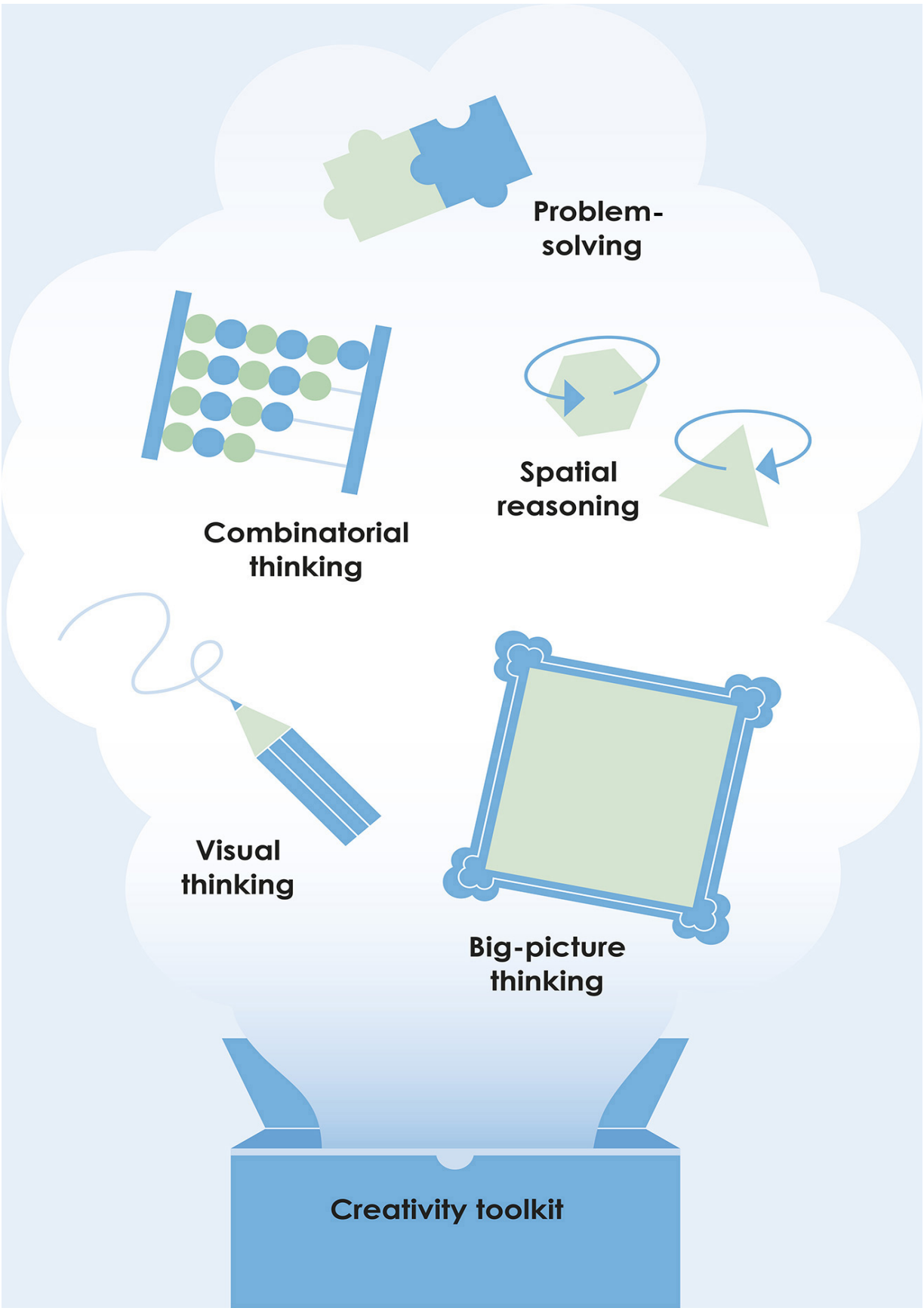
Creativity is about venturing off the beaten path and finding novel ways to approach and understand things. This might look like rearranging a small apartment to fit in more furniture, finding new ways to entertain your children, or maybe even spotting a gap in the market—the possibilities are endless!

Creativity and dyslexia

Creativity comes in all shapes and sizes, so I'm not going to claim that people with dyslexia are more creative than anyone else. What I can say with confidence is that the strengths often associated with dyslexia, including big-picture thinking, problem solving, and visual-spatial reasoning, provide a helpful creativity toolkit. These skills help us make connections others might miss, visualize solutions in new ways, and explore problems from fresh perspectives—foundational skills for creative thinking.

Combinatorial thinking

People with dyslexia often excel at combinatorial thinking, the ability to bring together seemingly unrelated concepts in new ways, which is key to creativity. Research suggests that dyslexic brains rarely recall one idea at a time. Instead, they tend to bring up clusters of related ideas, which may explain our aptitude for thinking creatively. For example, if we're told to think about a car, we may start thinking of a car and then think about memorable trips we've been on, grocery shopping, or maybe even conversations we've had while driving.

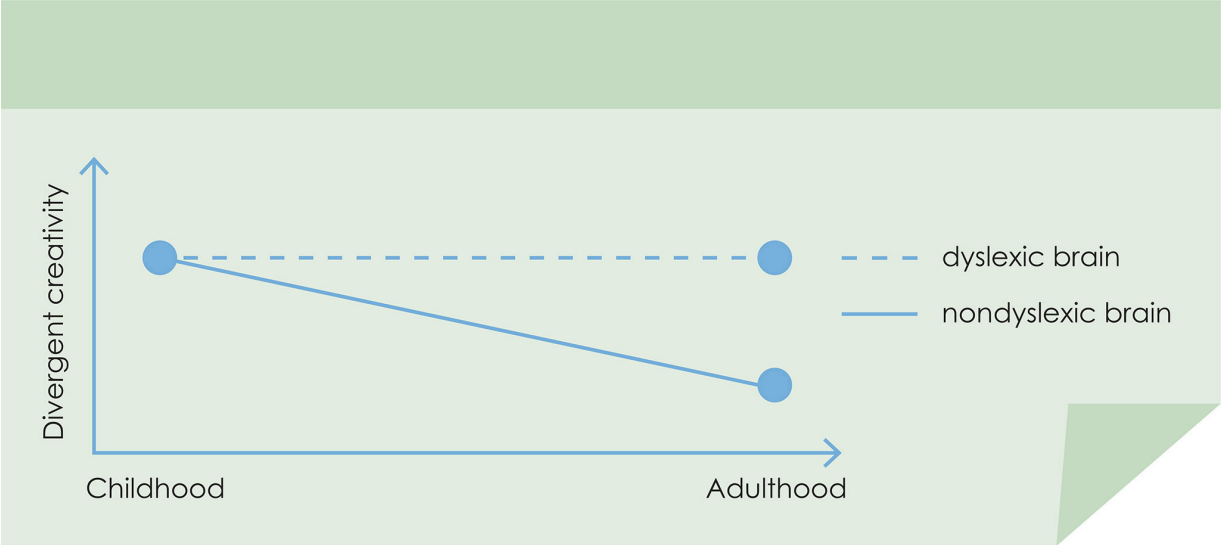

Problem-solving
Spatial reasoning
Combinatorial thinking
Visual thinking
Big-picture thinking
Creativity toolkit

Divergent creativity

People with dyslexia often excel at divergent thinking, which helps us look beyond the obvious to come up with innovative ideas and solutions.

Divergent thinking is about expanding possibilities and letting creativity flow. Your brain's default mode network (DMN) is activated during divergent creativity—a set of connected brain areas involved in exploratory and associative thinking. If a screw were stuck in the wall, divergent thinking would involve coming up with every possible solution to get it out, such as breaking it, drilling it out, or using a magnet.

A 2016 study found that people with dyslexia generally performed better on tasks involving divergent creativity than those without dyslexia. This mirrors an earlier study, which compared divergent creativity in dyslexic and nondyslexic individuals and found that dyslexic participants consistently produced more original and novel solutions. A 2021 meta-analysis also found that while all children tend to exhibit divergent creativity, as we mature, dyslexic adults often seem to hold onto it more.



Jazz, dyslexia, and creativity

Producing good jazz requires letting go of the script and embracing a fluid, exploratory approach, making it an excellent example of divergent creativity. Interestingly, research shows that jazz musicians often engage some of the same brain structures as dyslexic individuals during the creative process. I'm not saying that being dyslexic means you'll be the next world-famous jazz musician (although you might). But what I am saying is that, like jazz musicians, you have the ability to find new ways of doing things that may never have been tried before!

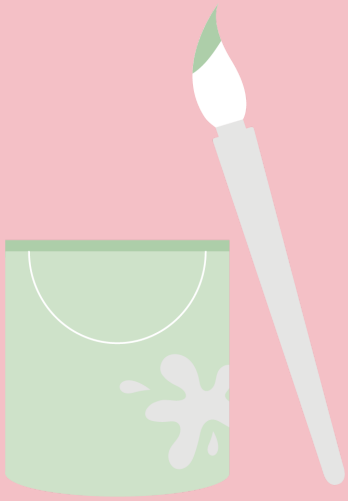
Exploratory bias

See section a strengths-based approach to dyslexia, we spoke about Dr. Helen Taylor, a dyslexic researcher, who found that people with dyslexia often default to "exploration" rather than "exploitation." This means we are more likely to lean into new or novel possibilities (exploration) rather than focus on refining or building on things we already know (exploitation). Exploratory thinking goes hand in hand with divergent creativity because it involves seeing beyond what is obvious to us and discovering new possibilities.

Creative icons

Finding dyslexic creatives to add to this list wasn't hard at all. The real challenge was choosing from the thousands of brilliant people who could have been included.

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)



World-famous artist and the inventor of Cubism, a style of painting that relies on visualizing an object from multiple perspectives simultaneously. Despite struggling with literacy at school, Picasso used his ability to see things from a unique perspective to became one of the most famous artists of the 20th century.

Agatha Christie (1890–1976)



English crime novelist and one of the best-selling authors of all time. She sold over four billion copies worldwide and created extraordinarily complex narratives that captivated her readers. Christie is widely believed to have had dyslexia and described herself as a "terrible speller" and "slow writer." She famously used a dictaphone and transcriber to write many of her books.

Jørn Utzon (1918–2008)

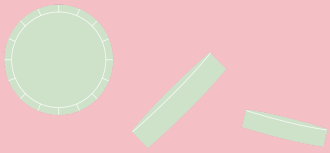
Award-winning Danish architect who designed one of the most recognizable buildings in the world—the Sydney Opera House. His design is a fantastic example of combinatorial creativity, drawing from different ideas and blending them together in a unique way. For the Opera House, he drew inspiration from the shape of orange slices.

Dave Brubeck (1920–2012)



A pioneering figure in jazz music and composer of the first instrumental jazz album to sell over one million copies. He often credited his talent to his dyslexia, which also made him unable to read sheet music, even after earning a degree in music. Brubeck described experiencing music as a combination of rhythm and shapes.

Barbara Corcoran (b. 1949)



Entrepreneur, best known for appearing as an investor on US television show Shark Tank. Corcoran leveraged big-picture thinking and a keen eye for hidden opportunities to build a five-billion-dollar real estate empire. She has been very vocal about struggling with dyslexia and how it has served as a source of creativity, which has contributed to her success.

Rediscovering creativity

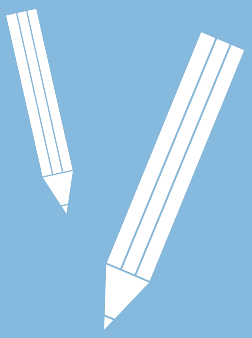
If you really want to unlock your creativity, look to children—they are the ultimate creatives.

With age, our view of the world often narrows and we become fixed in particular ways of being. The pressures of life become obstacles to our creativity, we forget about the importance of play, and our natural curiosity wanes. So, how do we connect with our inner child and rediscover our creativity?

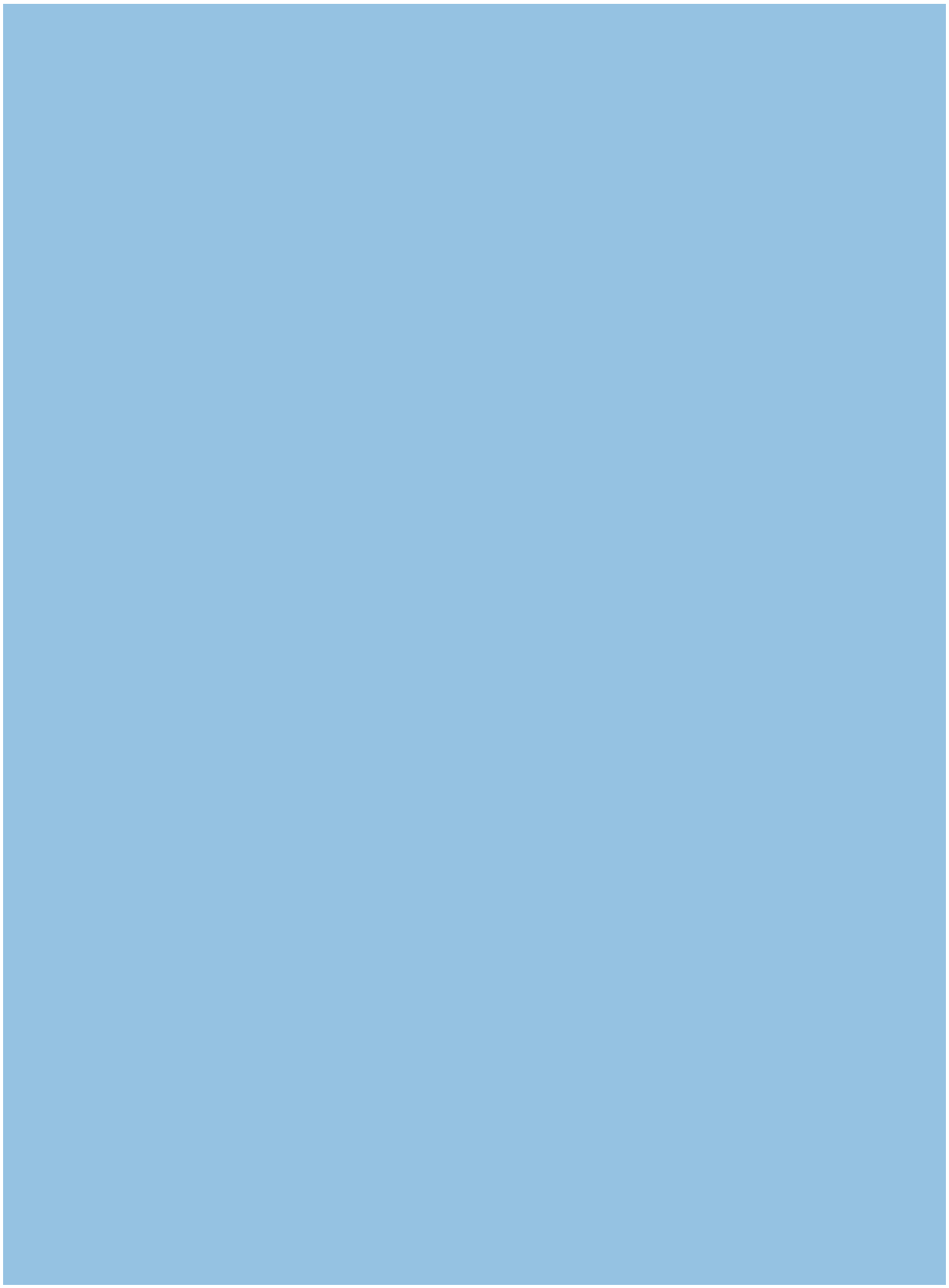
- **See things from a different point of view:** When you're feeling stuck, uninspired, or maybe even bored with life, imagine yourself experiencing the world as a child, seeing everything for the first time. What is it like?
- **Get unserious:** Life is full of loss, pain, and fear, but sometimes we need rainbows, butterflies, and cotton candy. Next time stress is holding you back from having fun, ask yourself, "If I were a little more playful in this moment, would anything go wrong?" The answer might surprise you.
- **Try new things:** Especially those you've never attempted because you're worried that they might make you look silly. The more diverse experiences you have, the more material you'll have to fuel your creativity.
- **Make fun a priority:** Have a dance party with your family. Build a blanket fort. Paint or draw a picture. Find something that fills your heart with lightness and puts a smile on your face.
- **Let your mind roam free:** Our greatest creative moments happen when we stop pressuring ourselves to churn out ideas. Stare blankly out the window and embrace the simple joy of letting your mind wander.

Quick win

Keep a list of things that get your creative juices flowing to draw on when you get stuck. One of the things on my list is listening to books. When I was feeling stuck writing this chapter, I decided to pull out an audiobook I've been enjoying, and shortly after I was able to return to writing full of energy and ideas.



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Chapter 14

Embracing *you*

You've made it to the final chapter. I hope that by now you've gained a deeper understanding of yourself and greater confidence in the tools and strategies that will help you succeed. We're going to do things a bit differently in this chapter, focusing on accepting yourself fully—instead of what you can change—and letting the incredible person you are shine.

Masking

Identity and language

The power of self-compassion

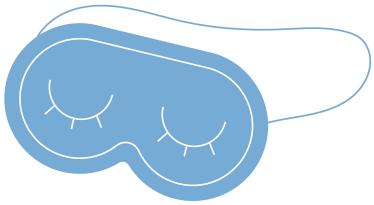
Radical acceptance

Growth mindset

Masking

Have you ever found yourself acting in ways that don't feel true to who you are because you're worried others won't accept you as you are?

We touched on masking see Self-advocacy—it's when we hide parts of ourselves out of fear of judgment. People with dyslexia often do this, because many of us have been shamed or made to feel different throughout our lives. It can lead to exhaustion, isolation, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Masking can show up in small ways, such as swapping a word we can't spell or pronounce for one we can. But at times, it can feel like pretending to be someone else entirely.



Examples of masking with dyslexia

- Humor or being the "class clown"
- Saying "I agree" when you're completely lost
- Memorizing words instead of reading them
- Making excuses ("I forgot my glasses")
- Overworking
- Overexplaining
- Triple and quadruple checking
- Avoiding roles or even promotions
- Mirroring what others say to hide word retrieval challenges

Unmasking *you*

Showing the parts of yourself that you've previously hidden can feel like walking out the door without your pants on—it's an extremely vulnerable experience. That's why unmasking should always be a personal choice and not something forced on you. It's a change that often takes time and intentionality. When you feel ready, here are some things that might help you on your journey toward embracing your authentic self.

- **Identify the ways you mask:** Many of us have been masking for so long we don't even realize we're doing it. Ask yourself, "In what areas of my life am I hiding parts of myself?", "When do I feel like I'm hiding?", and "What activities or situations leave me exhausted, even though they don't seem like they should?"
- **Practice self-acceptance:** Accept and embrace who you are and how you function. Dyslexia is a difference—not a deficit. For strategies to help with this, turn to The power of self-compassion.

- **Explore small ways to unmask:** Focus on the subtler ways you tend to mask and reflect on how you could adjust those behaviors so they feel more aligned with who you are. For example, you could ask a clarifying question next time you feel lost, instead of saying "I agree," or voice your concerns when you're given an unreasonable deadline, rather than overworking to meet it.
- **Find your safe spaces:** Choose relationships, personal or professional, where you feel safe to practice unmasking. You might say, "I've been doing this in a way that doesn't work well for how my brain functions, so I'm going to try and do it differently." Or you might choose to just make the change and see what happens—you don't owe anyone an explanation. Don't give up immediately if someone responds poorly. They might just need to adjust to your new way of doing things.

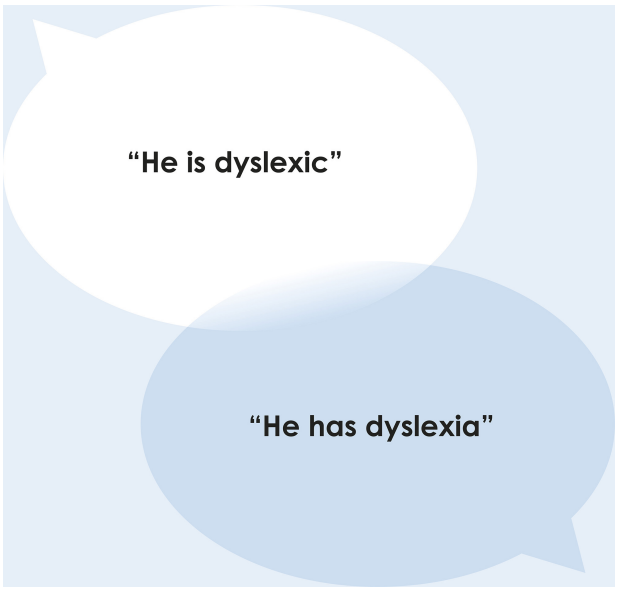
Identity and language

The use of person-first versus identity-first language is widely debated in the neurodivergent community. Let's take a closer look.

Identity-first language describes a specific part of an individual's identity *first* and the person *second*. An identity-first way to introduce me would be, "This is my dyslexic friend, Jacob." This approach recognizes learning differences and disabilities as part of a person's identity, so dyslexia is not something I *have*, but something I *am*. Whereas person-first language, as you might expect, emphasizes the person first, "This is Jacob, my friend who has dyslexia." This approach frames dyslexia as something I *have* rather than something I *am*.

The debate

Over the past 50 years, people have advocated for person-first language to humanize those who have previously been dehumanized by their labels. Person-first language can be empowering for some, but for others it can be shaming. Identity-first language is often preferred within neurodivergent communities because it recognizes being neurodivergent as a natural part of who we are, rather than as something wrong with us. For some, this can also create a sense of pride and belonging. But everyone's different, so it's always a good idea to ask an individual what their preference is.



You’ve got this!

There is no “right” way to use these labels besides respecting people’s preferences. If someone you’re interacting with uses language that feels disrespectful or dishonoring to you, you are allowed to graciously ask that they use your preferred approach, even if it feels a little intimidating to do this.

The power of self-compassion

Practicing self-compassion is one of the best things you can do to improve your well-being when dyslexia gets tough, which is why I keep coming back to it throughout this book.

When you criticize or shame yourself, you can trigger a fight-or-flight response, flooding your brain with stress hormones such as cortisol. When this repeatedly happens, it can disrupt your sleep, energy levels, and relationships, and make you more susceptible to depression and anxiety.

Self-criticism and shame can also impair the brain's capacity to think creatively, develop, and learn. So practicing self-compassion isn't just being nice to yourself—it's reducing anxiety and expanding your brain's capacity for growth.

Self-compassion reminders

You are not your struggles: When we define ourselves by our struggles, our self-worth can take a hit.

You are not alone: Remember that there are other dyslexic individuals out there.

You are enough: Appreciate your unique self and don't judge yourself by others' standards.

Your needs matter: Put boundaries in place and advocate for the things you need.

Self-compassion pause

Practicing self-compassion doesn't have to be complicated. When I notice self-criticism and shame creeping in, the self-compassion pause is my favorite way to respond. It may feel a little awkward at first, but the more you practice, the easier it becomes to use when you need it.



Read detailed description

Radical acceptance

Dyslexia won't just go away, it's rooted in the way our brains are wired. While we can adopt tools to improve how we do things, we will always be dyslexic. That's why self-acceptance is so important.

Allow me to introduce you to a practice called "radical acceptance." It's used in dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT) and is based on seeing and accepting reality without judgment. When we make a conscious choice to view dyslexia as something that will always be part of us, we can focus our energy on adapting to its challenges and honing our strengths.

It's important to acknowledge that accepting we will face struggles doesn't mean we enjoy them. I certainly don't enjoy it when tasks take me longer or I make mistakes, but I do my best to accept that this is part of being dyslexic. I'm not always perfect at accepting dyslexia's challenges, but when I do, their negative impact is much smaller.

Let's practice radically accepting dyslexia with a simple exercise. Work through the steps, repeating the statements out loud. Feel free to make them your own words, the examples given are just a starting point.

1

Acknowledge the dyslexic reality. This means observing without judgment. Repeat:

- "I'm dyslexic and I can't change that."
- "My dyslexia is showing up right now."
- "I'm really struggling with this task because of my dyslexia."

2

Verbally name and sit with hard feelings instead of trying to fix or push them away. Repeat:

- "I'm frustrated about being dyslexic."
- "This feels exhausting right now."
- "I feel angry about being dyslexic right now."

3

Explore your options. Active acceptance is about acknowledging that there are things we can't change and exploring what we can. Reflect on:

- Would asking a friend/coworker for support help?
- Do I need to advocate for more time?
- Do I need to take a break for a bit?



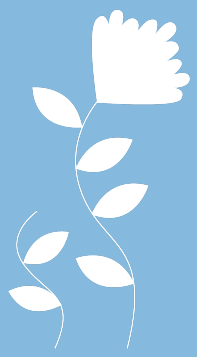
Growth mindset

From the day I was born until the day I die, one thing I never want to change about myself is my desire to grow—never seeing myself as a finished product and always as someone willing to learn.

A growth mindset is the belief that change is possible. It's the opposite of a fixed mindset, which assumes that who we are and what we are capable of cannot change. Embracing a growth mindset is so important, especially if you have dyslexia. A growth mindset tells us that *we can,* when everyone else tells us that *we can't*. It reminds us that when we combine the things that make us uniquely us—our creativity, our ability to innovate, our empathy—with hard work and dedication, we can rise to the challenge and succeed.

Quick win

Celebrate your effort, not just the finished result. As humans we have a lot more control over the effort we put in than we do over producing a perfect result. By celebrating our effort, we foster resilience and boost our motivation to learn and grow.





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A final word

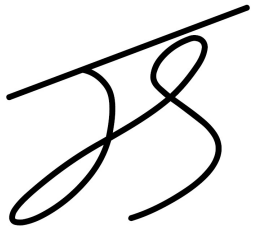
You've made it to the end of this book. I know firsthand that reading a book when you have dyslexia can take a lot of effort, so thank you for choosing to spend this time with me.

My hope is that you now have a deeper understanding of dyslexia—one that captures both the challenges and strengths it can bring.

If you're dyslexic, I hope you've come to know yourself a little better and feel able to move forward with self-compassion, and with confidence in the tools and strategies that can support you. Your journey won't always be easy; there will be days where self-acceptance comes easily and others where it feels impossible. The goal is to learn how to meet yourself where you are and treat yourself with kindness and compassion—even on the harder days.

If you're a loved one of a dyslexic person, thank you for everything you do to support and care for them. Every single one of us has an important role to play in making the world a kinder place, and one of the best ways to do that is learning about one another, so never stop being curious and exploring.

This book wouldn't exist without all of you who have supported me, and for that I'm extremely grateful. You can find me on social media at @drjacobsanthouse.



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Resources

Organizations

International

International Dyslexia Association
dyslexiaida.org

European Dyslexia Association
eda-info.eu

UK

British Dyslexia Association
bdadyslexia.org.uk

The Dyslexia Association
dyslexia.uk.net

US

The Dyslexia Foundation
dyslexiafoundation.org

Australia

Australian Dyslexia Association
dyslexiaassociation.org.au

Dyslexia Australia
dyslexiaaustralia.com

Canada

Centre for Dyslexia
centrefordyslexia.ca

Dyslexia Canada
dyslexiacanada.org

Dyslexia Resources Canada
dyslexia.ca

Ireland

Adult Dyslexia Hub
adultdyslexiahub.ie

Dyslexia Ireland
dyslexia.ie

New Zealand

SPELD NZ
speld.org.nz

Web Resources

Made by Dyslexia
madebydyslexia.org
The Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity
dyslexia.yale.edu
Understood
understood.org
Blue J Coaching
bluejcoaching.com/dyslexia-resources
Dyslexia in Adults
dyslexia-in-adults.com

Suggested Reading

Natalie Brooks, *Dyslexia Unlocked* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2026)

Brock L. Eide, M.D., and Fernette F. Eide, M.D., *The Dyslexic Advantage* (Plume, 2023)

Sally Shaywitz, M.D. and Jonathan Shaywitz, M.D., *Overcoming Dyslexia* (Knopf, 2020)

Ben Foss, J.D., M.B.A., *The Dyslexia Empowerment Plan* (Ballantine Books, 2016)

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About the author

Dr. Jacob Santhouse is a dyslexic licensed counselor and content creator. His work explores the experience of being dyslexic and the impact it has on daily functioning and emotional well-being. Jacob runs both a counseling and coaching practice focused on supporting dyslexic individuals in better understanding their dyslexia, navigating its emotional impact, and moving toward self-acceptance. Through his social media, he creates educational content about dyslexia, revealing how its impact extends far beyond reading and writing.

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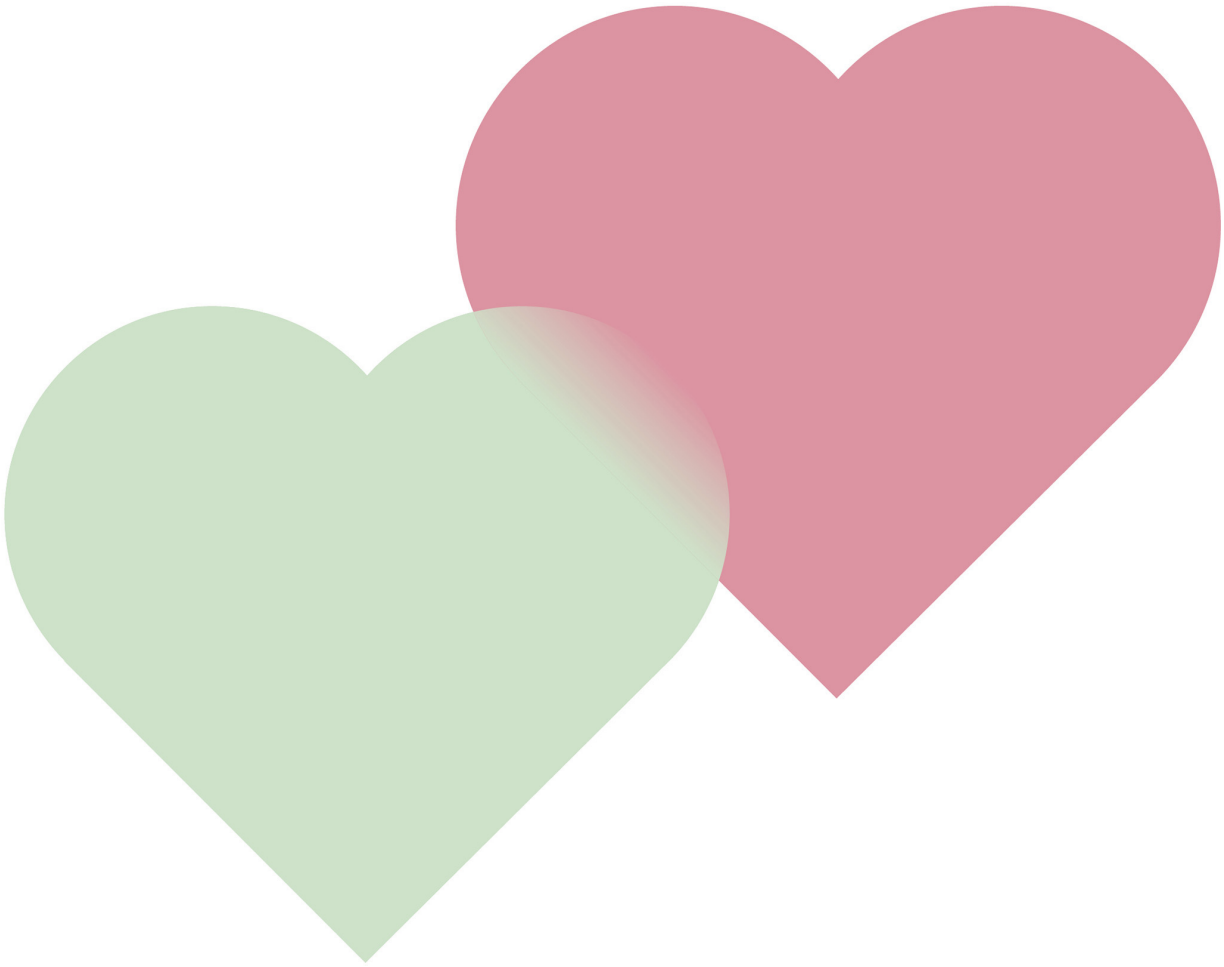
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IMAGE DESCRIPTIONS

A table outlining some of the most common diagnoses that show up alongside dyslexia.

Dysgraphia.

Prevalence in dyslexic individuals: 30 to 50 per cent.

Definition: A learning difficulty that affects writing and fine motor skills.

Common struggles: Spelling, grammar, handwriting, and other parts of the writing process.

Dyscalculia.

Prevalence in dyslexic individuals: 40 to 60 per cent.

Definition: A learning difficulty that affects how the brain interacts with numbers.

Common struggles: Understanding maths concepts, learning times tables, counting without

losing track, solving mathematical problems.

Dyspraxia.

Prevalence in dyslexic individuals: 25 to 40 per cent.

Definition: A disorder that affects fine and gross motor skills.

Common struggles: Planning and performing physical tasks, coordination and balance, learning new skills.

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Prevalence in dyslexic individuals: 25 to 40 per cent.

Definition: A disorder that affects attention regulation, impulse control, and executive functioning.

Common struggles: Holding information in your head, prioritising or planning, focusing, impulsivity, and more.

Auditory Processing Disorder (APD).

Prevalence in dyslexic individuals: 25 to 43 per cent.

Definition: A disorder that affects how the brain processes sounds.

Common struggles: Telling sounds apart and focusing on a conversation in a noisy environment, asking people to repeat themselves, delays in processing what you hear.

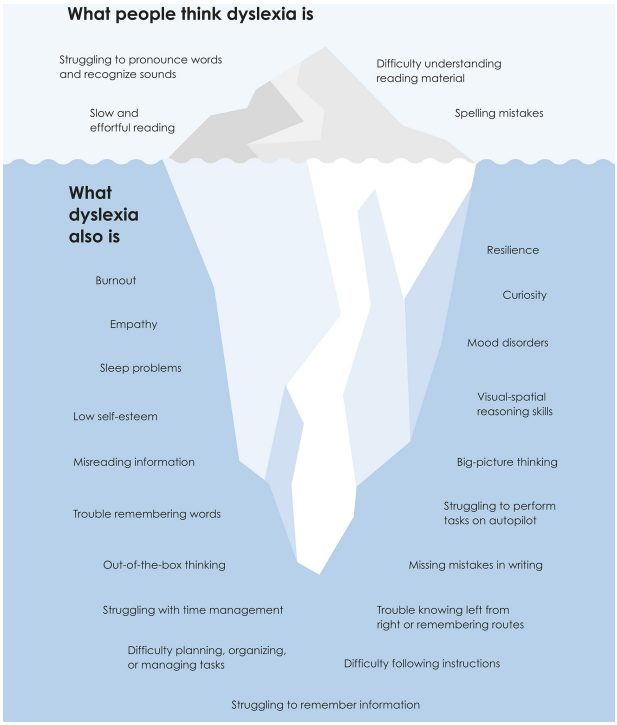
Visual stress.

Prevalence in dyslexic individuals: 30 to 46 per cent.

Definition: A visual difficulty that affects reading.

Common struggles: Focusing on a word (letters might look blurry or like they are moving), eye strain, headaches, light sensitivity, concentrating on reading.

BACK TO ARTICLE



What people think dyslexia is.

Struggling to pronounce words and recognise sounds.

Difficulty understanding reading material.

Slow and effortful reading.

Spelling mistakes.

What dyslexia also is.

Burnout, empathy, and sleep problems.

Low self-esteem.

Misreading information.

Trouble remembering words.

Out-of-the-box thinking.

Struggling with time management.

Difficulty planning, organising, or managing tasks.

Resilience, curiosity, and mood disorders.

Visual-spatial reasoning skills.

Big-picture thinking.

Struggling to perform tasks on autopilot.

Missing mistakes in writing.

Trouble knowing left from right or remembering routes.

Difficulty following instructions.

Struggling to remember information.

BACK TO ARTICLE

A table outlining the challenges faced by people with dyslexia in school and adulthood.

Challenge: Reading fluency.

School: Falling behind because it’s harder to learn information presented in written form.

Adult life: Struggling to understand information presented in written form, such as emails and training materials, which can be extremely time-consuming.

Challenge: Reading aloud.

School: Experiencing high levels of shame and anxiety when having to read to the class.

Adult life: Avoiding activities that involve reading aloud, from giving presentations in the workplace to reading to your children.

Challenge: Tasks take more time to complete.

School: Losing focus in the classroom, feeling mentally exhausted, and missing out on social activities that peers have time for.

Adult life: Falling behind on work or needing to catch up outside of work, which can lead to mental exhaustion and impact home life.

Challenge: Spelling.

School: Achieving lower grades and avoiding volunteering for written tasks, which can mean missing out on key developmental opportunities.

Adult life: Avoiding written tasks, such as writing on the board at work or jotting something down while playing a game with friends, and missing out on opportunities that could have a positive personal or professional impact.

Challenge: Memorising information and processes.

School: Struggling to remember new information, such as times tables, formulas, and grammar rules.

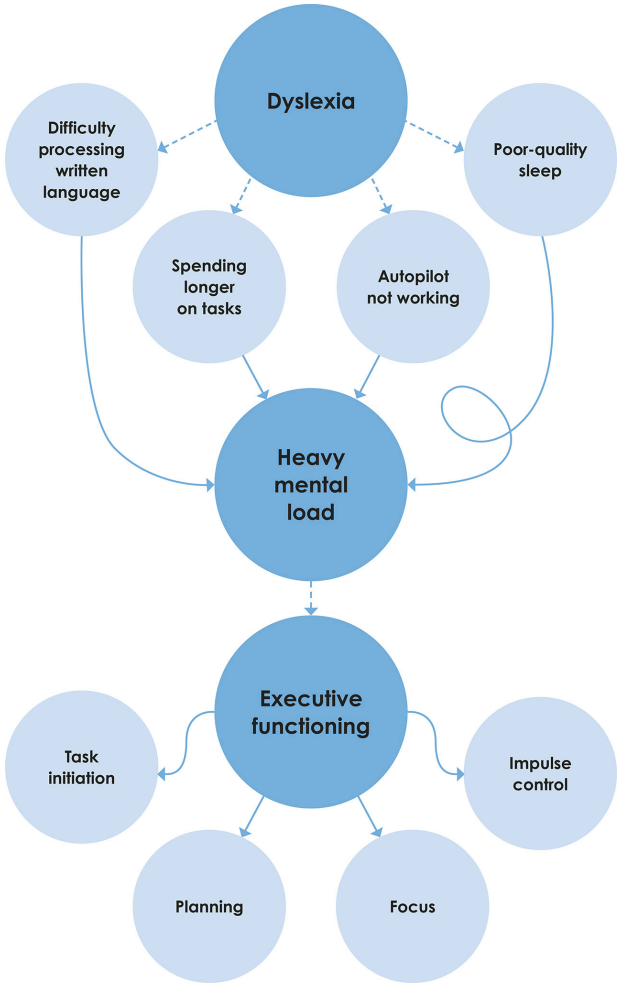
Adult life: Finding it hard to learn new work systems, forgetting your partner’s preferences, and keeping track of school routines as a parent, all of which can result in frustration towards yourself and from others.

Challenge: Spiky profiles.

School: Being top of the class in some subjects and bottom in others, usually those involving language, spelling, and grammar, which often leads to criticism from peers.

Adult life: Excelling in some areas of life while struggling in others, which can create uncertainty for colleagues or family members who may be unsure of what they can reliably expect from you.

BACK TO ARTICLE



Dyslexia.

Difficulty processing written language.

Spending longer on tasks.

Autopilot not working.

Poor-quality sleep.

These contribute to a heavy mental load, which affects executive functioning.

Executive functioning includes task initiation, planning, focus, and impulse control.

BACK TO ARTICLE

A table summarising workplace challenges and how to communicate them to colleagues.

Challenge: Asking colleagues to repeat things multiple times.

You could say: “Could you please send me important information by email, so I don’t forget it?”

Challenge: Struggling to hold on to a thought when interrupted.

You could say: “I can lose my train of thought when I'm interrupted. When that happens, do you mind if I talk over you so I can finish letting it out?”

Challenge: Relying on others without feeling like a burden.

You could say: “I would be happy to look over your project for ways to identify big-picture changes, if you could quickly scan this for spelling mistakes?”

Challenge: Managing expectations.

You could say: “My brain doesn't always catch typos” or “Writing takes me longer, so I may need a little more time than others.”

Challenge: Explaining that you're dyslexic.

You could say: “I'm dyslexic, which means that my brain processes information differently. It can make tasks involving spelling and reading more difficult, but it also makes me very good at tasks involving problem solving or understanding how things fit together. If you have any questions, you can always ask!”

Challenge: Mistakes can seem careless.

You could say: “My brain tends to focus more on content than grammar, so it doesn't always catch things like typos, even after I have carefully proofread my work.”

Challenge: Delayed response time.

You could say: “I may need some extra time to respond to questions or emails because of how my brain processes information.”

BACK TO ARTICLE

A table showing how to trade tasks fairly to reduce the mental load for people with dyslexia.

Filling out forms, applications, or paperwork can be traded with, and vice versa, making phone calls and talking to customer service.

Breaking down dense instructions can be traded with, and vice versa, carrying out instructions.

Managing the calendar can be traded with, and vice versa, handling the logistics of following the calendar (for example, getting everyone ready to leave on time).

Proofreading important written communications can be traded with, and vice versa, completing hands-on tasks from dishes to repairs.

Explaining an email that left you confused can be traded with, and vice versa, taking on any related tasks.

BACK TO ARTICLE



Shame experienced by individuals with dyslexia often contributes to significant emotional

challenges, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.

Shame is frequently reinforced by negative remarks such as,

Are you stupid?

You're just making up excuses.

You're not trying hard enough.

You are so slow.

Why can't you just read?

Other students don't have this problem.

You're just lazy.

You should know this by now.

BACK TO ARTICLE



Self-esteem.

How I perceive myself.

Praise others have given.

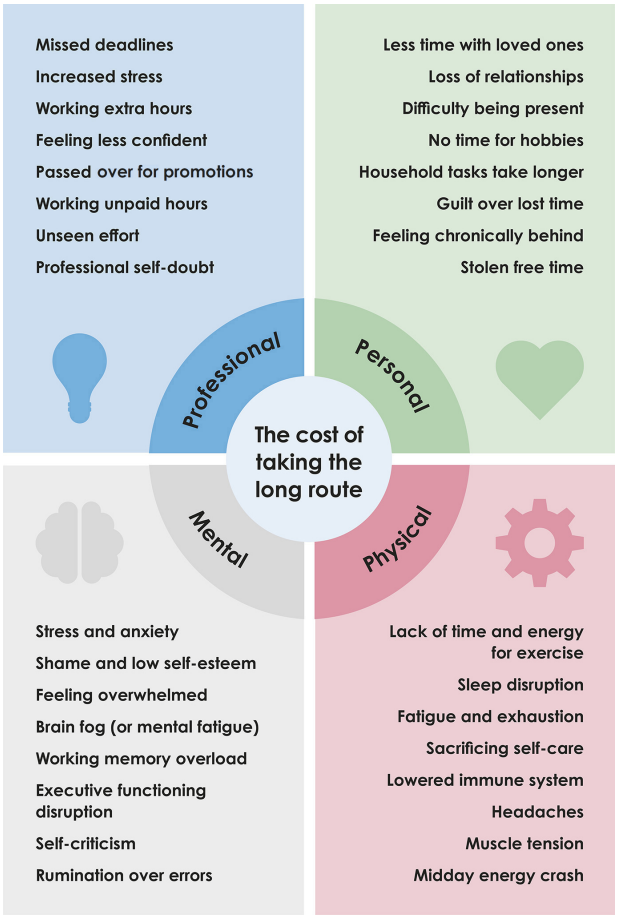
Criticism from others.

How I talk to myself about myself.

My experiences.

How I think others perceive me.

BACK TO ARTICLE



The cost of taking the long route.

Professional.

Missed deadlines.

Increased stress.

Working extra hours.

Feeling less confident.

Passed by for promotions.

Working unpaid hours.

Unseen effort.

Professional self-doubt.

Personal.

Less time with loved ones.

Loss of relationships.

Difficulty being present.

No time for hobbies.

Household tasks take longer.

Guilt over lost time.

Feeling chronically behind.

Stolen free time.

Mental.

Stress and anxiety.

Shame and low self-esteem.

Feeling overwhelmed.

Brain fog (or mental fatigue).

Working memory overload.

Executive functioning disruption.

Self-criticism.

Rumination over errors.

Physical.

Lack of time and energy for exercise.

Sleep disruption.

Fatigue and exhaustion.

Sacrificing self-care.

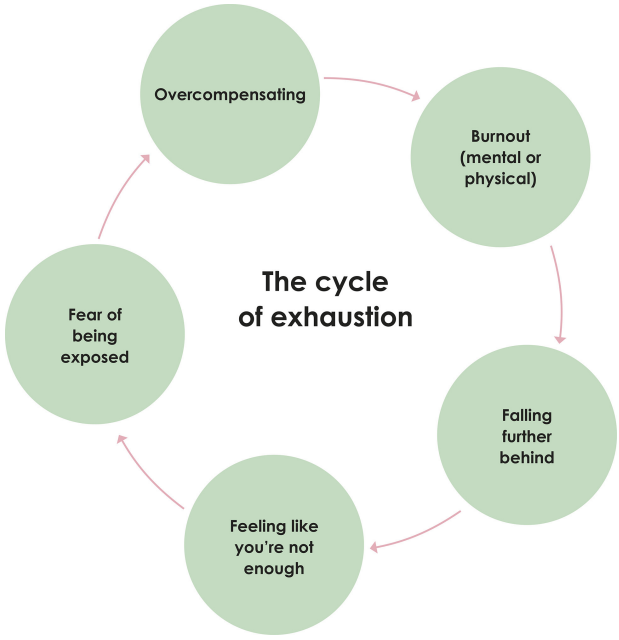
Lowered immune system.

Headaches.

Muscle tension.

Midday energy crash.

BACK TO ARTICLE



The cycle of exhaustion.

Overcompensating.

Burnout (mental or physical).

Falling further behind.

Feeling like you're not enough.

Fear of being exposed.

BACK TO ARTICLE



Self-compassion pause.

Mindfully acknowledge the moment: Notice any difficult feelings without judging or avoiding them.

“I'm struggling with this.”

“This is stressful.”

“This is really hard.”

Normalise your struggle: Remember that you're not the only one. You belong to a community of millions of dyslexic people around the world who can relate to your experiences.

“I'm not alone in this.”

“This is part of being dyslexic.”

“Other people experience similar things.”

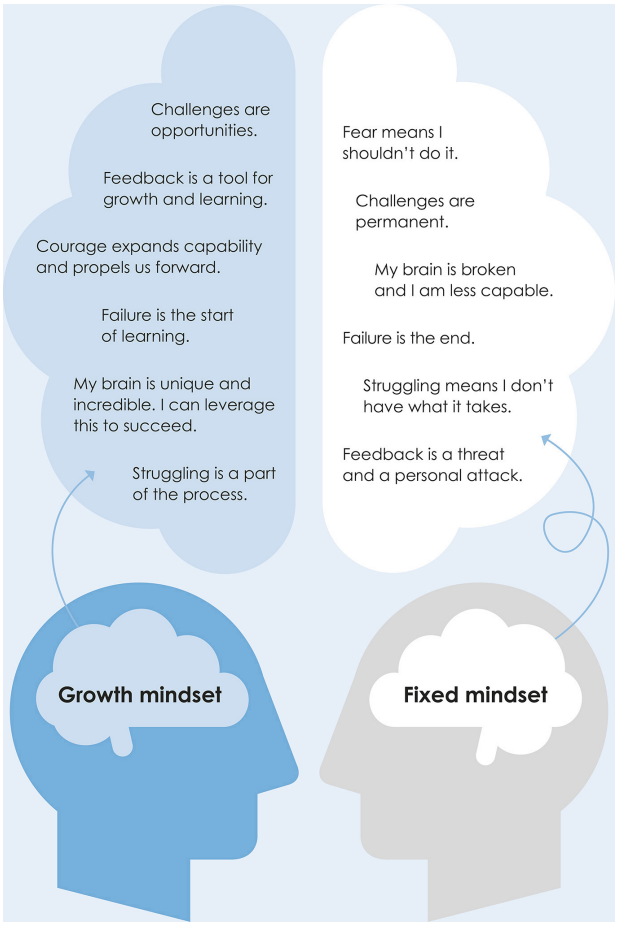
Offer yourself kindness: Give yourself the same warmth and patience that you might give to a friend. Take some slow deep breaths and give yourself a gentle hug.

“I'm doing the best I can.”

“May I be patient right now.”

“May I be strong right now.”

BACK TO ARTICLE



Growth mindset.

Challenges are opportunities.

Feedback is a tool for growth and learning.

Courage expands capability and propels us forward.

Failure is the start of learning.

My brain is unique and incredible, I can leverage this to succeed.

Struggling is a part of the process.

Fixed mindset.

Fear means I shouldn’t do it.

Challenges are permanent.

My brain is broken and I am less capable.

Failure is the end.

Struggling means I don’t have what it takes.

Feedback is a threat and a personal attack.

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