



A Most Specific Learning Disability: Dyslexia Part I

Over the past several years, there has been an increased awareness and movement to improve outcomes for students with Dyslexia and Specific Learning Disabilities in the area of Reading in Virginia and across the nation. As of January 2019, 90% of U.S. states, including Virginia, have laws designed to ensure students with Dyslexia and/or Specific Learning Disabilities in Reading have access to effective interventions ([Nessy, 2019](#)). In 2016, the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation ([House Bill 842](#)) that requires every person seeking initial licensure or renewal of licensure to receive awareness training on Dyslexia and requires each school division to identify at least 1 Reading Specialist who will have expertise in identification and instruction of students with Dyslexia (Virginia Department of Education, Division of Special Education and Student Services, 2017). The current and most prevailing definition of Dyslexia, paraphrased below, was adopted by the board of directors of the [International Dyslexia Association](#) (IDA) in 2002.

Dyslexia is:

- A specific learning disability
- Neurobiological in origin
- Characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition, poor spelling and decoding
- Typically results from a deficit in the phonological component of language
- Deficits are often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction
- Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge

Get Ready to discover and understand the characteristics of Dyslexia, by exploring these resources and websites:

- [International Dyslexia Association](#)
- [Virginia Department of Education's webpage dedicated to Dyslexia](#)
- National Center for Learning Disabilities [Video on Dyslexia](#)
- [Dyslexia Help](#), a website sponsored by The University of Michigan

Get Set to improve your students' outcomes by familiarizing yourself with tenants of multisensory structured literacy reading instruction, such as the Orton-Gillingham method of reading instruction. There is no universally effective method of teaching reading and it is understood that no single reading method will be effective for all students with learning disabilities. Individualized instruction should be based on the principles or components that research supports (Learning Disabilities Association of America, n.d.). The Virginia Department of Education recommends that students with characteristics of Dyslexia will benefit from "evidence-based instruction that targets the development of basic reading and spelling skills." (2017). Such basic reading and spelling skills include phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, morphemes, syntax at the sentence level, and discourse at the paragraph level. In addition, the IDA recommends students with Dyslexia receive structured literacy instruction that is:

- Multisensory
- Systematic/Cumulative
- Sequential
- Direct/Explicit
- Diagnostic

Go forth and explore the following resources! Share with colleagues, families and students to support reading development for all!

Online Resources

[Decoding Dyslexia](#)- A parent-led grassroots movement for Dyslexia

[Explanation of Structured Literacy, and a Comparison to Balanced Literacy](#)- An article featured by the Iowa Reading Research Center

[IDA's Knowledge & Practice Standards](#)- Describes the critical skills and knowledge for teachers who teach reading to children with Dyslexia

[Virginia Department of Education's Specific Learning Disability Supplementary Guide, Dyslexia: Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Printed Resources

Birsh, J. and Carreker, S. (Eds.) (2018). Multi-sensory teaching of basic language skills. 4th Ed. Baltimore, MD; Brookes Publishing.

Ehri, L.C. (2014). Orthographic mapping in the acquisition of sight word reading, spelling memory, and vocabulary learning. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, January, 2014 18(1).

Kilpatrick, D. A. (2015). *Essentials of assessing, preventing, and overcoming reading difficulties*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. **Available at the Kellar Library!**

Seidenberg, M.S. (2017). *Language at the speed of sight: How we read, why so many can't and what can be done about it*. New York, New York: Basic Books.

Spear-Swerling, L. (2015). Common types of reading problems and how to help children who have them. *The Reading Teacher*, 69(5), 513-522.

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International Dyslexia Association. (2012). *Definition of Dyslexia*. Retrieved January 6, 2020. <https://dyslexiaida.org/definition-of-dyslexia/>

Learning Disabilities Association of America. (n.d.) *Reading Methods for Student with LD*. Retrieved January 6, 2020. <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/reading-methods-students-ld>

Virginia Department of Education, Division of Special Education and Student Services. (2017).
Specific Learning Disability Supplementary Guide. Dyslexia: Frequently Asked Questions.
http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/disabilities/learning_disability/sld-dyslexia-guide.pdf

This news brief is a collaborative effort of the Virginia Department of Education Training and Technical Assistance Centers at George Mason University and James Madison University. This issue was prepared by the staff at the VDOE TTAC at George Mason University. For questions about content, please contact Judith Fontana (jfontan1@gmu.edu) or Meaghan Sekinger (msekinge@gmu.edu).

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