

Dyslexic Dictation

Until we feel what it is like to struggle with processing information quickly, it is difficult to understand how hard it is for dyslexic learners in the classroom. The short-term memory problems associated with dyslexia mean that usually they are unable to store information long enough to process it slowly, so they miss a lot of what is said in long utterances. This activity usually brings out several different responses to the challenge, which are worth discussing as a group afterwards.

- 1) Distribute pieces of coloured paper and simultaneously give out the following instructions, quite rapidly:

Take some paper as it comes round.

If it is blue, turn it round so it is landscape.

Otherwise turn it so it is portrait.

Pick up your pen or pencil.

If you are writing with a black pen stand up.

If you are using a pencil, push your sleeves up.

Now I'm going to read you a short text, and I would like you to write it down.

BUT whenever you want to write an 'e' please write a cross instead, like a plus sign.

Instead of 'a' please write a question mark and instead of 'i' please write an equal sign.

Now listen carefully and write down exactly what I read out.

- 2) Pause here and wait for the complaints to subside. Find out why people are unhappy: too many instructions are hard to remember, especially when there is also something else to concentrate on (getting the paper as it comes round) and when the instructions are unfamiliar, or odd.
- 3) Tell anybody who has stood up that they may sit down now. Reassure the group that the instructions were indeed too many and too fast. Point out that even two or three instructions may be overwhelming for some dyslexic learners. Confirm that you are indeed going to ask them to do a dictation activity.
- 4) Repeat the instructions more slowly from 'Now I'm going to read you a short text...' and make sure that everybody has understood what they have to do. They are going to write down what you say, but change some of the symbols as they write each word:

e → +

a → ?

i → =

- 5) Start to read out the following passage, reading as slowly as you think is appropriate for the group. Repeat each sentence if necessary, but make sure that the participants are continuously writing.

Some people are light or colour sensitive. Bright sunlight or florescent lights may bother them. Black print on shiny white paper may be uncomfortable and whiteboards may be too shiny. Pattern glare may also be a problem. It may be helpful to have:

- **coloured paper for writing,**
- **coloured overlays for reading,**
- **tinted lenses in glasses for both reading and writing.**

The colours and brightness on computer screens can be adjusted to suit individuals.

- 6) As you read, try to observe how people are coping with the task. There are a number of responses that often appear in groups: some people diligently try to keep up and are obviously concentrating hard. Some people simply write normally and periodically go back and change the symbols as required. Some fall behind and start to copy from their neighbours and others simply give up when they realise that the task is extremely difficult to complete.
- 7) When you reach the end of the text, or the majority of the group has given up, which may happen after a couple of sentences, stop reading and elicit feedback. How did they feel doing the task? Why was it so hard? What strategies did they use? Show the group the text they were supposed to be producing (see below) and of course praise any who did manage to do so.

Target text:

*Som+ p+opl+ ?r+ l=ght or colour s+ns=t=v+. Br=ght sunl=ght or
flor+sc+nt l=ghts m?y both+r th+m. Bl?ck pr=nt on sh=ny wh=t+
p?p+r m?y b+ uncomfot?bl+ ?nd wh=t+bo?rds m?y b+ too sh=ny.
P?tt+rn gl?r+ m?y ?lso b+ ? probl+m. =t m?y b+ h+lplful to h?v+:*

- *colour+d p?p+r for wr=t=ng,*
- *colour+d ov+rl?ys for r+?d=ng,*
- *t=nt+d l+ns+s =n gl?ss+s for both r+?d=ng ?nd wr=t=ng.*

*Th+ colours ?nd br=ghtn+ss on comput+r scr++ns c?n b+ ?djust+d
to su=t =nd=v=du?ls.*

- 8) Finally, discuss what could be done to make these kinds of tasks more accessible for dyslexic learners. Is it ever necessary to dictate a lot of information in this way? Could hand-outs be provided or virtual learning environments exploited for sharing information? Each school or college will probably find its own solutions.