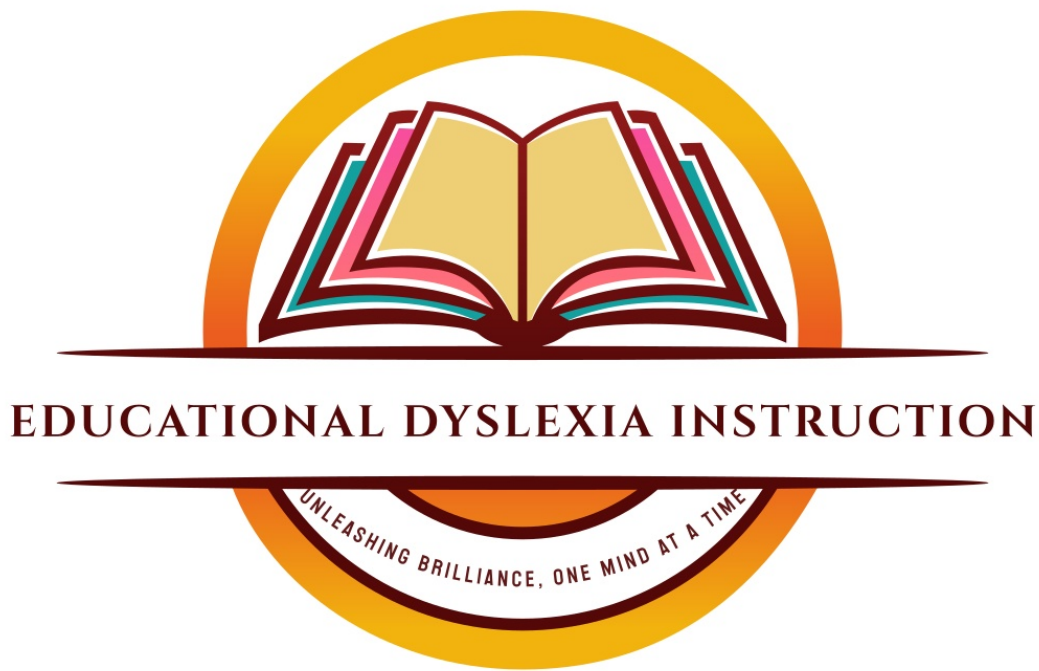




EDUCATIONAL DYSLEXIA INSTRUCTION

UNDERSTANDING DYSLEXIA

Profiles, Severity & Individual Differences

**Dyslexia does not look exactly the same in every person.
Reading and spelling difficulties can differ in their pattern, intensity, and impact.
Understanding the individual profile is more useful than trying to place someone into a
single “type.”**

A current evidence-based perspective:

Dyslexia occurs along a **continuum of severity**. Phonological and morphological processing difficulties are common, but they are **not universal**. The most useful approach is to understand the individual's pattern of literacy strengths and difficulties.

UNLEASHING BRILLIANCE, ONE MIND AT A TIME

Dyslexia Does Not Come in Just One “Type”

You may hear terms such as “phonological dyslexia,” “surface dyslexia,” or “double-deficit dyslexia.” These can describe patterns seen in research or assessment, but they should not be treated as rigid, separate diagnoses. Modern evidence supports identifying the **specific skills that are difficult for an individual** and how those skills interact.

Common Literacy Profiles

Phonological Processing	Difficulty noticing, storing, retrieving, or manipulating the sounds in spoken language. This can affect sound-symbol learning, blending, segmenting, and decoding.
Word Reading & Decoding	Difficulty accurately and efficiently reading individual words, especially unfamiliar or multisyllabic words. Guessing or relying on partial cues may occur.
Fluency & Automaticity	Reading may be accurate but unusually slow and effortful because word recognition has not become automatic. Rapid naming speed can contribute to fluency.
Spelling & Orthographic Processing	Persistent difficulty learning, storing, and retrieving spelling patterns. A person may know a word orally but struggle to represent it consistently in writing.
Morphological Processing	Difficulty working with meaningful word parts such as prefixes, suffixes, roots, and grammatical endings. This can affect reading, spelling, and vocabulary.
Mixed / Multiple-Weakness Profile	Some individuals have difficulties across several areas, such as phonological processing plus naming speed, or decoding plus spelling.
There is no single “dyslexic brain profile.” Two people can both have dyslexia and still have different strengths, weaknesses, reading patterns, and responses to instruction.	

Why Can Two People With Dyslexia Look So Different?

Reading depends on coordinating speech sounds, letters, spelling patterns, word recognition, language, memory, and automaticity. Different learners can experience difficulty in different parts of this system.

The “Double-Deficit” Pattern

One research-supported pattern involves difficulty with both **phonological processing** and **rapid automatic naming (RAN)**. RAN is the speed with which a person can name familiar visual information such as letters, numbers, colors, or objects. When both areas are weak, reading difficulties may be more significant.

Important: “Double deficit” describes a pattern of underlying skills. It is **not a separate diagnosis** and it does not mean that every person with dyslexia has both weaknesses.

Dyslexia Exists Along a Continuum

Current guidance describes dyslexia along a continuum rather than as a simple yes/no category. The DSM-5 framework for Specific Learning Disorder uses **mild, moderate, and severe** severity specifiers. These describe functional impact and support needs—not intelligence or potential.

LESS SIGNIFICANT	MODERATE IMPACT	MORE SIGNIFICANT
Some learners experience milder functional effects and may compensate with targeted support.	Some learners need more consistent specialized instruction and accommodations.	Some learners need intensive, ongoing specialized instruction and substantial support.

Severity is not determined by one test score. Professionals consider the pattern, persistence, response to instruction, academic impact, and supports required.

What Does Mild, Moderate, or Severe Mean?

Severity labels describe the **impact of the learning difficulty and the level of support needed**. They do not describe intelligence, motivation, creativity, or potential.

1

MILD

Some difficulties are present in one or more academic skills. The individual may compensate with appropriate accommodations, targeted instruction, extra time, or other supports.

2

MODERATE

Significant difficulties affect learning and efficiency. The individual generally needs specialized, explicit instruction and may need ongoing accommodations or support.

3

SEVERE

Difficulties are substantial and may affect multiple academic demands. The individual may require intensive, ongoing specialized instruction and continued support.

What about “profound”?

“Profound” is sometimes used informally, but it is **not one of the DSM-5 severity specifiers for Specific Learning Disorder**. For professional materials, mild, moderate, and severe are the more defensible terms.

Severity Is Not the Same as Intelligence

A person can have significant reading difficulty and still have significant intellectual strengths.

A student may struggle to read a simple sentence independently while understanding sophisticated ideas when information is presented orally.

Reading ability is not a measure of human potential.

The Most Important Question: What Does This Learner Need?

A profile is useful when it helps us understand how a person learns and what instruction will be most effective. The goal is not to put a learner into a box—it is to identify the skills that need explicit teaching and the strengths that can be leveraged.

A Comprehensive Look May Include

- Phonological and phonemic awareness — awareness and manipulation of speech sounds
- Phonological/language-based memory — remembering and retrieving sounds, syllables, and words
- Rapid automatic naming — speed of naming familiar letters, numbers, colors, or objects
- Phonics and decoding — connecting written symbols with sounds and reading unfamiliar words
- Word reading accuracy — accurately reading words in and out of context
- Oral reading fluency — accuracy, rate, and ease of connected-text reading
- Spelling/encoding — representing spoken words in written form
- Oral language and comprehension — understanding and expressing language
- Writing and written expression — getting ideas onto paper clearly and efficiently

What This Means for Instruction

Effective support should be based on the learner's actual needs rather than a label alone. A student who primarily needs help with phonemic awareness may need a different instructional emphasis from a student whose primary challenge is fluency or spelling. Many learners need support across several areas.

**There is no “one-size-fits-all” dyslexia.
There should also be no one-size-fits-all response. Good instruction is explicit, systematic, cumulative, responsive to data, and adjusted as the learner develops.**

Evidence-Based Sources & Further Reading

International Dyslexia Association — 2026 Definition of Dyslexia: current definition describing difficulties in word reading and/or spelling involving accuracy, speed, or both, along a continuum of severity.

International Dyslexia Association — Testing and Evaluation: comprehensive evaluation including phonological processing, memory, rapid naming, decoding, fluency, spelling, and oral language.

International Dyslexia Association — 2025 Definition Explanation: research basis for the continuum of severity and variability among individuals.

American Psychiatric Association — Specific Learning Disorder: DSM-5 framework and mild/moderate/severe severity specifiers.

This guide is educational information and is not a diagnostic evaluation. Dyslexia presents differently from person to person. Formal identification should be based on a comprehensive evaluation by appropriately qualified professionals.

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