

# What is the appropriate reading instruction for a child with dyslexia?



Parents often ask “What type of instruction does my dyslexic child need in order to learn to read?” Almost ALL children with dyslexia can be taught to read if they are given specific, comprehensive, and intensive instruction. This structured approach to reading should be delivered by a highly trained teacher in a method that is direct, explicit, systematic, and multisensory.

## *Does my child’s school have a teacher qualified to teach reading to children with dyslexia?*

It depends, but the odds are slim. Unfortunately, most colleges of education, including departments of special education, literacy, and reading, have not prepared teachers to adequately meet the needs of students with dyslexia. Holding a graduate degree, a teaching license, or even a state reading endorsement does not necessarily mean that a teacher is a highly qualified reading teacher as many of these credentials are easy to come by and lack rigor. Reading teachers must have a deep background in the structure of the language that underlies reading. While there are good reading teachers scattered across the country in our schools today, many of these teachers have sought their training apart from a college degree or the requirements of state education departments and school systems.

## *Who is qualified to deliver this type of reading instruction?*

The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) has published a document that defines what teachers of reading need to know, [IDA Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading](#). In an effort to promote these standards, IDA has begun to review and accredit programs at colleges and universities across the country that are aligned with the IDA Knowledge and Practice Standards. To date, 17 programs have been accredited. The complete list of these programs can be found [here](#). IDA also has conducted reviews of independent teacher training programs and has accredited the National Institute of Learning Development and the International Multisensory Structured Language Education Council (IMSLEC) and the training courses it has accredited. As IDA conducts accreditation reviews of additional programs, they will be posted on its website.

Parents need to know that a highly trained teacher, NOT a curriculum, teaches a child to read. According to a wise pioneer in the field of dyslexia, “A teacher who knows what to teach and how to teach it could use a stick in the sand to teach a dyslexic child to read.” A good curriculum just makes the process even better!

## *What needs to be included in a remediation lesson for a child with dyslexia?*

While lesson components vary somewhat from curriculum to curriculum, certain components are critical for the child with dyslexia. Below is a list of lesson components that should be included in dyslexia remediation.

### **History of the Language**

Introduce the history of the English language. This provides a meaningful platform for children to understand the origins of our language. Ultimately, it will allow children to understand the most basic layers and influences on our language – Anglo-Saxon, Latin, and Greek – and how this affects both reading and spelling rules.



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## **Alphabet**

Make certain that the child is secure in his knowledge of the letters of the alphabet. The alphabet is the cornerstone for all reading and spelling. Many students with dyslexia may be able to “sing” or “chant” the alphabet, yet they cannot touch and name nor recognize each of the individual letters of the alphabet.

## **Phonemic Awareness**

Include phonemic awareness activities in each lesson. For example, the word *cat* is made up of three phonemes, /k/ /a/ /t/, and the word *ship* is made up of three phonemes, /sh/ /i/ /p/. Phonemic awareness deficits are the underlying cause of dyslexia, and it is critical that children develop these skills. Practice must be independent of working with letters and must focus specifically on learning the phonemes, or sounds.

## **Phonics**

Instruction should be based upon the most reliable patterns in reading and spelling, starting with the most common and progressing to the most complex. Components should include direct instruction of graphemes, syllable types, syllable division procedures, and morphemes (the smallest meaningful units of language, such as *-ing*). Children should be given the skills necessary to “break the code.”

## **Fluency**

Fluency practice should begin at the word level and include common patterns of syllables, syllable division patterns, and morphemes. Students with dyslexia also need to tackle Instant Words, those common words in English that don’t “play by the rules” yet are the most common words in the English language, as well as the first words beginning readers encounter. As students become accurate at the word level, fluency instruction must include practice at the phrase, sentence, and – ultimately – passage level. Students need direct instruction and modeling in prosody (expressiveness). The goal of fluency practice is NOT speed, but the ability to read with comprehension.

## **Comprehension**

Comprehension, the ultimate goal of reading, should not be assumed to be a by-product of decoding. Children with dyslexia need explicit instruction in comprehension. Comprehension skills should include strengthening vocabulary, reasoning, grammar, analysis, and listening skills. Children should gain exposure to these skills through both narrative and expository texts.

## **Spelling**

Spelling is perhaps the single most difficult skill for dyslexics to master. Spelling instruction should be delivered through a highly systematic approach beginning with the most common and reliable patterns and rules in the English language. Spelling instruction should reinforce skills being taught in reading.

## **Handwriting**

Dyslexic students benefit from instruction in cursive handwriting. This instruction should focus on approach strokes, proportion, and directionality, and reinforce a multisensory approach to reading and spelling.



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### **Study Skills and Learning Strategies**

Children with dyslexia need guidance in developing effective and efficient study habits. Organizational skills are often a weakness for children with dyslexia and they need guidance with time, space, and materials as well as an approach to the task at hand. This should include a variety of skills and strategies to help the student develop metacognition, or thinking about thinking.

#### *How often should my child be seen for reading remediation?*

Children need repeated practice until they master the skills described above. For most children, the highest success rates come when children receive daily practice for 45 minutes to one hour, 4-5 days per week.

#### *What else can I do to help my child with dyslexia?*

Read to your child and help develop listening skills. Take advantage of recorded audio books such as those from Bookshare and Learning Ally. Help your child develop a love of listening as well as a love of good literature. And share this experience!

Seek an evaluation from a qualified professional to determine your child's specific profile of dyslexia.

Be cautious of false claims of "cures" for dyslexia. They are abundant and expensive, and appeal to parents as they offer a "quick fix." Some of these include colored lenses or overlays, vision therapy, and brain training. [See Learning Disabilities, Dyslexia, and Vision. American Pediatric Journal, Vol. 127 No. 3, March 1, 2011]

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