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# Dyslexia in the Workplace: A Guide for Unions

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# Dyslexia in the Workplace: A Guide for Unions

## **Abstract**

[Excerpt] We have written this guide principally for trade union members and their representatives. In it we aim to help foster a fuller understanding of dyslexia and its effects on employees[.]

## **Keywords**

work, disabilities, person, task, workplace, independence, compliance, benefit, policies, equality, law, involvement, intellectual disability, communication, reasonable accommodation, equipment, technology

## **Disciplines**

Human Resources Management

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Dyslexia in the workplace  
A guide for unions  
by Brian Hagan

This booklet was designed in accordance with guidelines published by the British Dyslexia Association.

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Text written by Brian Hagan for the TUC, summer 2004.

The information in Section 5 is from Dr Sylvia Moody's article 'Dyslexia in the Dock', published in 'Dyslexia Review': Vol. 13, No.1  
The contribution of Dr Sylvia Moody and Mary Colley is gratefully acknowledged.

## Introduction

We have written this guide principally for trade union members and their representatives.

In it we aim to help foster a fuller understanding of dyslexia and its effects on employees, as a basis for:

- Promoting the rights of employees with dyslexia; and
- Encouraging the effective working practices that result from putting this understanding into practice in the workplace.

More specifically we provide advice on how to:

- Gain a working knowledge of dyslexia and its major effects;
- Identify whether an employee's workplace difficulties might result from their dyslexia;
- Confirm whether or not they have dyslexia;
- Confirm whether they are protected by the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) (DDA) which requires employers to make 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure dyslexic employees are treated no less favourably than their colleagues;
- Negotiate with employers on the basis of good practice and case law where appropriate.

In Section 5 we consider dyspraxia, a recognised medical condition that shares some of the features of dyslexia and many of the same solutions.

## S.1. What is dyslexia?

The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) estimates that between four and ten per cent of the population is dyslexic, a figure supported by the Government's own research.

This means that up to 2.9 million workers may be affected. The extension of the DDA in October 2004 to cover all employers regardless of size means that most dyslexic employees are now protected by law.

However, a satisfactory understanding of dyslexia is a recent achievement. Considerable numbers of dyslexic employees are undiagnosed, with all the practical and emotional difficulties this will cause them in the workplace and outside it.

From the outset we should note that the term 'dyslexia' covers a broader range of difficulties than simply poor literacy skills.

Leading expert Dr Sylvia Moody writes:

Dyslexia is often regarded simply as a difficulty with reading and writing, but in fact literacy difficulties are no more than surface symptoms of weaknesses in short-term memory, information processing, perceptual, spatial and motor skills. The literacy (and numeracy) difficulties associated with these may be severe and obvious, or they may be more subtle, manifesting themselves in general slowness rather than inaccuracy in tasks involving written English. Other surface symptoms include difficulties in managing, organising and recalling information, and personal organisation and timekeeping. These difficulties are made worse when dyslexic employees are put under pressure.

By the time a dyslexic person reaches adulthood they will probably have been struggling for many years with difficulties that may never have been recognised or understood. The original difficulties are likely to be bound up with a constellation of unpleasant emotions: anger, confusion, embarrassment, anxiety and depression. Confidence and self-esteem may also be low.

But many dyslexic employees have strengths in other areas including:

- Creativity;
- Lateral thinking;
- Problem solving; and
- Visual and spatial thinking; and

- The determination and ability for the hard work necessary to overcome many of their difficulties.

An assessment of dyslexia, and the self-awareness this brings, coupled with the implementation of reasonable adjustments at work, can reveal latent strengths and abilities in dyslexic employees. In turn, employers can be assisted to see dyslexic employees as competent workers with different patterns of strengths and weaknesses, rather than as problems.

It is important that we recognise that most dyslexic employees are not 'stuck' as a result of the difficulties mentioned above. These problems can be effectively resolved through a combination of:

- Recognizing that they have dyslexia;
- Appreciating the full range of potential difficulties this entails;
- Reasonable workplace adjustments; and
- Specialist information technology and training.

Most dyslexic employees are entitled to 'reasonable workplace adjustments' under the DDA, and may receive assistance through the Government's Access to Work Scheme to help implement them.

The role of the union.

Union representatives need to be aware of dyslexia issues and be able to empathise with their members. They should focus on communicating to colleagues and employers:

1. The very real psychological and social reasons behind apparently 'difficult' or withdrawn behaviour.
2. That these difficulties are frequently the result of many years of harsh criticism and discrimination. For many dyslexic employees the recognition that they are dyslexic is the first step on the road to reclaiming their lives.

In this guide we explain:

- What kind of working environment will be difficult for someone with dyslexia;
- What kind of adjustments to negotiate with the employer to put this right; and
- How to call upon the law to protect dyslexic members from unfair treatment if consensus and negotiations fail.

Discrimination suffered by dyslexic employees can be even worse if they are from an ethnic minority. Union representatives will need to be particularly careful to identify and challenge racial stereotyping.

## S.2 Dyslexia in the workplace

Many people with dyslexia are unaware of their condition, and as a result may experience anxiety, frustration and low self-esteem at work. This is particularly likely when they have not received adequate advice on how to manage their job and their best efforts are still seen as unsatisfactory by peers and supervisors.

The case study below shows the potential for unions to achieve satisfactory outcomes through negotiating from an informed position.

### Case Study 1

In the case of Francis, managers ignored the fact that perceived problems with his performance were directly attributable to dyslexia. They initially treated his clerical, spelling and filing errors as a disciplinary and capacity issue. Even when Francis was identified as dyslexic, and Access to Work support secured, managers chose to ignore expert advice and dismiss him for incapacity.

However, specialist assessment had identified Francis's dyslexia as a disability under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Correspondence between the union and the employer showed that managers could have, but failed, to make reasonable adjustments.

This led to the company:

- Withdrawing their tribunal defence of the dismissal;
- Paying significant damages to Francis; and
- Providing a satisfactory reference.

Equally importantly, the trade union intervention helped restore a young employee's sense of worth. Francis recognised that he was not to blame, and that many of his work-place problems were solvable if the employer had followed good practice. He is now thriving – having recently been promoted – with a more dyslexia-aware employer.

Reasonable adjustments for dyslexic workers.

Recruitment and selection procedures must not discriminate against potential dyslexic employees by using methods which treat them less favourably than non-dyslexic candidates.

In general terms they should:

- Assess only the knowledge, skills and experience required for the effective performance of the job;

- Do so in ways which are as close to the circumstances of that job and its performance as possible.
- Ensure that the panel has an understanding of dyslexia based on the information in this booklet – and understand how dyslexia might affect a candidate's interview performance.

For example, it would be reasonable for an employer to waive written tests if writing were not a significant part of the job applied for.

Dyslexic candidates could be allowed more time to complete such tests. Instructions for manual tests could be clearly read aloud to the candidate or tape-recorded to avoid dyslexic candidates being penalised due to problems with short-term memory.

We've also set out some examples of workplace adjustments which might be made for dyslexic employees below:

- Allocating some 'dyslexia-difficult' duties to another person in exchange for tasks where they are more proficient;
- Providing appropriate training or supervision;
- Modifying instructions or reference manuals to make them easier to read or follow;
- Tape-recording important instructions;
- Offering help with prioritising and organising workloads, e.g., providing diagrams and flow charts rather than written procedures;
- Providing or modifying equipment and printed materials to make work easier (e.g., photocopying written material onto pastel-coloured paper);
- Providing text-to-speech software and voice dictation systems; and
- Providing a quieter workspace for tasks requiring prolonged concentration.

Making workplaces dyslexia-friendly.

## Case Study 2

Anne's experiences illustrate how a lack of awareness by an employer can lead to mistaken perceptions of an employee's performance. We show how expert assessment and intervention can prevent

discrimination. We also identify practical measures to help the organisation and the individual.

We've grouped this advice under three headings:

### 1. The impact of poorly organised work processes.

Anne worked in the finance section of a multinational company, and was managed by an experienced and highly task oriented supervisor. Her work was frequently criticised by her supervisor, as was her attitude and timekeeping. Before her assessment it had been suggested that she was 'slow' and disciplinary proceedings were underway. (In fact Anne's IQ, like that of many people with dyslexia, was significantly higher than her written work suggested - and, as in all the cases summarised here, was above average.)

Anne's work required her to understand and follow several sets of detailed procedures - complicated rather than complex work. This is precisely the sort of work that will cause difficulties to an unrecognised dyslexic who has not received remedial training, and who is operating in a dyslexia-unaware environment. For example, Anne felt that when she had problems with her work, detailed verbal instructions were not always clear or consistent. In addition, the absence of comprehensive written instructions made her difficulties in obtaining clear guidance worse.

### 2. Avoiding interruptions to the dyslexic employee's work.

Anne's department had an 'open door' policy. Any internal client could ask for work in person, at any time, whether or not this interrupted ongoing work. Such an approach is a major problem for staff with dyslexia. Where work requires sustained concentration over a significant period, it is important that employers provide an environment which allows dyslexic employees to focus and concentrate without interruption.

### 3. The impact of avoidable workplace stress.

If an organisation is dyslexia unaware, problems between a task-oriented manager and a member of staff making errors may be seen as a conduct or capacity issue.

Certainly Anne's performance deteriorated after her move from a section where she had worked more effectively with a more informed and empathic supervisor.

The guidance notes to the DDA make the point that some dyslexic employees have 'coping strategies', which may cease to work in certain circumstances. It is very usual that a dyslexic employee's work will deteriorate if, like Anne, they are placed under undue stress, or frequently given work with very tight deadlines.

It is vital to remember that the effects of dyslexia may be evident on some occasions but not on others. Stress levels, task demands and fatigue can all affect dyslexic employees' performance more significantly than they would other employees. The stress present in difficult relations between a task-oriented supervisor and a dyslexic employee is likely to make performance problems worse. This was certainly the case with Anne. The more stressed she became as a result of her supervisor's unsympathetic attitude, the more her work deteriorated - and the more her supervisor engaged in stress-inducing disciplinary responses.

**General performance difficulties and reasonable adjustments**

By law, employers must act reasonably in responding to performance difficulties that may result from a disability. If, for example, an otherwise hardworking employee showed untypical 'carelessness', or other dyslexic behaviours such as those outlined above, it may be unreasonable for the employer to fail to investigate the underlying causes of such behaviour.

After a diagnostic assessment, and before reasonable adjustments have been made, discriminatory supervision like that experienced by Anne is unlikely to be considered reasonable, and is likely to conflict with the requirements of the DDA.

However, if an organisation and the affected employee are unaware of the existence or implications of dyslexia, many issues that should be subject to discussions around reasonable adjustments are likely to be perceived as misconduct or lack of capacity. Dyslexic difficulties can lead to a wide variety of inefficiencies in the workplace.

The problems most often reported by dyslexic employees include:

- Following written and spoken instructions;

- Remembering and recording telephone numbers, messages and the content of meetings;
- Filing and looking up entries in directories;
- Dealing with maps, charts and tables;
- Finding one's way in strange (and even familiar) surroundings;
- Writing memos, letters and reports;
- Presenting written work or figures;
- Keying on a word processor or calculator;
- Formulating one's own thoughts rapidly enough to take part in discussions;
- Keeping track of appointments and meetings;
- Scheduling work and meeting deadlines;
- Concentrating over prolonged periods (one hour or more).

Many of these difficulties can be addressed through reasonable adjustments. Most dyslexic employees are entitled to such adjustments under the DDA, and may also receive assistance through the Government's Access to Work Scheme.

Negotiating solutions in the workplace.

Conflict between undiagnosed employees and managers often arises over apparent poor performance or conduct which is subsequently found to be attributable to dyslexia. An informal 'plan of action' based on a new understanding between the manager and the dyslexic employee, negotiated and monitored with the assistance of the union and the personnel department, may well help to restore acceptable relations. Provided clear objectives and timescales are agreed, such an approach is likely to improve performance.

The objectives of such a plan should include:

- Dyslexia awareness training for all stakeholders, particularly those with direct line management responsibility for dyslexic employees;
- Clear job responsibilities and task procedures to be drawn up by management in conjunction with trade union representatives and the dyslexic employee;
- Workflows to be organised in such a way as to ensure there are no non-urgent interruptions for those engaged in detailed work;
- Specialist one-to-one training for the dyslexic employee in:

- Effective reading and writing strategies;
- Concentration and memory improvement techniques;
- Planning, time management and organisational skills; and
- The use of specialist dyslexia support software.

Consensual solutions make good sense for business and for industrial relations. The time frequently wasted on monitoring a dyslexic employee's 'poor' performance, when redirected, can bring excellent results for all involved. The following summary demonstrates this:

### Case Study 3

Paul was a trainee train driver for a major national railway company. Following an assessment that showed him to be dyslexic, the company agreed to consider reasonable adjustments, and engaged a specialist trainer for advice. The trainer drew up a programme in conjunction with Paul and senior and line managers that included:

1. Specialist tuition in effective reading and writing, memory improvement techniques and exam revision;
  2. Help to enable Paul to understand his learning style and patterns of strengths and weaknesses, and adapt his approach to work to incorporate these. For example, Paul found he learnt 20 pages of detailed training manual instructions through working with his tutor to break them down into manageable chunks. He then visualised these chunks as the actual activities required, and committed the sequence to memory as a 'video' of him doing the tasks as prescribed.
  3. Adapting to driver certification processes to allow periods of rest between exercises. The material was also given in formats (On yellow paper in 12 to 14 point Arial type) that Paul found less tiring to read.
- Despite the initial misgivings of one or two managers, managerial support was consistent and sustained. Paul passed the rigorous operational and health and safety requirements first time and is now a successful main-line train driver.

### S.3 Assessing dyslexia.

A person is likely to be dyslexic (and the DDA would be likely to apply), if they are significantly hindered in daily activities such as:

- Writing cheques;
- Keeping track of bills;
- Reading recipes or bus timetables;
- Reading operating and safety instructions on equipment;
- Dealing with money in shops;
- Using ticket or cash machines;
- Conducting enquiries over the telephone; and
- Organising daily life.

Support for such a finding will normally need to come from a formal diagnostic assessment, and it should be supplemented by:

1. A detailed assessment of everyday difficulties. (The court takes account of these in deciding if a person should be considered disabled for the purposes of the DDA.)
2. A detailed assessment of workplace difficulties and workplace needs. (The court takes account of these in deciding on the issue of reasonable adjustments.)

### Getting an assessment

If you suspect that dyslexia is behind a member's workplace difficulties, you should raise the issue with your employer at the earliest opportunity. Problems may arise where an employer initially refuses to facilitate an assessment. Jobcentre Plus (see [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk) for local offices) and the Disability Rights Commission may be able to help you to resolve the issue of accessing an assessment. This is a crucial issue; diagnostic assessment is a vital step in determining whether an employee is dyslexic and whether they are protected by the DDA.

The appendices at the end of this booklet give simple screening tests which can give a preliminary indication of whether or not an employee is dyslexic. It is important to note that the results of screening tests are only indicative and are not a substitute for a full assessment. But if an employee has 'some difficulty', or 'great difficulty', with several items on the list in Appendix 1, they may well be dyslexic and should seek a full diagnostic assessment.

The DDA states that there is no obligation on employers to make reasonable adjustments where they could not reasonably know of the disability. Therefore it is vital that union representatives:

- Tell the employer if a screening suggests dyslexia;
- Explain its significance in terms of the DDA, and
- Explore all avenues to getting a diagnostic assessment as soon as possible.

Representatives need to ensure that all diagnostic assessments include conclusions and recommendations that:

- Give a definitive diagnosis of whether the individual is dyslexic and the nature, scope and implications of their dyslexia;
- State whether the person's dyslexia is a disability for the purposes of the DDA; and
- Provide guidance on reasonable adjustments and related specialist training for the individual, to enable them to develop strategies and related skills, which may help them compensate for/ overcome many of their dyslexic difficulties.

Representatives should cover the following issues in any discussion with employers:

- Who has responsibility for arranging and paying for assessments;
- What will happen where a dispute over the need for such an assessment occurs;
- What happens in the workplace while assessments are pending;
- How assessments are used and interpreted; and
- Who ultimately gets to see and keep them.

The Disability Rights Commission advises that the responsibility for obtaining the report should fall on the employer. An employer who refuses to do so might be in breach of their duty to make a reasonable adjustment. It may also be necessary to negotiate arrangements to safeguard the position of the worker while the assessment is pending, as this may take some months.

Assessments should be treated as confidential documents, akin to medical reports. They should only be available to the employee and their representative, a senior line manager and a designated HR liaison officer, to be agreed on a case-by-case basis.

Getting guidance on reasonable adjustments

The Government's Access to Work scheme may be able to provide funding for

- A workplace assessment; and
- The implementation of reasonable adjustments.

Advice on diagnostic assessments, workplace needs assessments, reasonable adjustments and related specialist training for the individual may be obtained from:

Dyslexia Advice and Training Services,  
33 South Grove House, London N6 6LR. Contact: Brian Hagan,  
bhdyslexia@yahoo.co.uk; Tel: 020 8348 7110

Dyslexia Tuition for Adults,  
20A Pymmes Green Rd., London N11 1BY.  
Tel: 020 8368 3634

The Dyslexia Assessment Service,  
22 Wray Crescent, London N4 3LP.  
Tel: 020 7272 6429

The British Dyslexia Association,  
[www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk), Tel: 01189 668 271

The Dyslexia Institute,  
133 Gresham Rd., Staines TW 18 2AJ.

It is also worth visiting:

[www.dyslexia-adults.com](http://www.dyslexia-adults.com) and [www.dysf.fsnet.co.uk](http://www.dysf.fsnet.co.uk) for more general awareness information.

## S.4 Dyslexia and disability law

There have been a number of cases in which workers with dyslexia have sought the protection of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA). In this section, we will look at the steps the DDA requires a claimant to take to establish that they can call on the law.

To succeed in a claim under the DDA, an employee must:

- Establish that their dyslexia constitutes a disability within the meaning of the Act;
- Show that they have been less favourably treated for a reason relating to that disability; or
- Show that the employer failed to make reasonable adjustments to the arrangements that place the employee at a substantial disadvantage.

Even then, the employer may still be able to justify less favourable treatment, although they now cannot justify direct discrimination against disabled employees.

Is dyslexia a disability?

According to the DDA:

'A person has a disability for the purposes of this Act if he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.'

The following sections show how the law is being interpreted for each of these criteria.

Physical or mental impairment

Dyslexia is clearly recognised as a mental impairment under the DDA.

- It is included in the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Diseases; and
- It is referred to several times in the Government's Code of Practice on Disability Discrimination issued in 1996.

The adverse effect must be substantial

The law states that the disability must have a 'substantial effect', which is one that is 'more than minor or trivial'. In determining this, the effect of any special 'measures... taken to treat or correct' the impairment should be disregarded.

The question then arises: can the 'coping strategies' which employees with dyslexia use to mitigate the effects of their condition be regarded

as 'measures' in this sense? Should they be disregarded in assessing the level of impairment? Or are coping strategies a form of behaviour that a person might reasonably be expected to adopt so that the impairment ceases to have a substantial adverse effect? In this latter case, the person would not be classified as disabled.

It is important to understand that employers would be wrong to automatically assume that a person who appears to have effective coping strategies will not be considered disabled under the DDA. This is because coping strategies for dyslexia may break down when a person is under stress.

The three case studies in the text box above [below in this large print version] illustrate how this distinction has fared in tribunal.

#### Case Study 4

*Holmes vs. Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council* (December 1998). H., who had dyslexia, worked for the council as a residential social worker. He had complained of less favourable treatment. His employers felt that, although H. had dyslexia, he was not disabled within the meaning of the Act, as there was no evidence that his difficulties were affecting his competence at work. However, the tribunal decided it would be wrong to consider 'normal day-to-day activities' only in the context of H.'s job. Many ordinary, day-to-day tasks such as shopping, banking and reading simple instructions require literacy skills. Since H. had a difficulty with such tasks that was more than 'trivial', he was considered disabled for the purposes of the Act.

#### Case Study 5

*Korotana vs. Kurt Geiger Ltd* (October 1999).

K. was a salesman in a shoe shop and he often forgot the shoe size or colour requested by customers. He would therefore make reminder notes to counteract his poor memory. He had no difficulty understanding speech or written communication. The tribunal considered that K.'s difficulties were no more than might be experienced by many people and that he was able to employ an adequate strategy for dealing with them. He was therefore not considered as disabled for the purposes of the Act.

## Case Study 6

Cook vs. Thorne House Services for Autism (February 1999).

C. was employed as a residential social worker. Her written work was always good but this was due at least in part to the fact that she was very conscientious and often took work home. The tribunal, in finding that she was disabled, took account of the fact that:

- Her coping mechanisms were likely to break down under stress; and
- Her employers had failed to take account of the fact that she was conscientious and took extra time and care over her work.

## Long-term effects

This will not usually be a contentious issue for dyslexia, which is generally present from an early age even if it is not diagnosed until later in life.

## Adverse effect on normal day-to-day activities

Adverse effects include problems with memory and the ability to concentrate, learn or understand. For the DDA, normal day-to-day activities are not intended to be job-specific. Normal day-to-day activities are those that most people do on a frequent or fairly regular basis.

The following case illustrates how this guidance has been applied.

## Case Study 7

Redding vs. Profile Microfilming (Kent) Ltd. (March 1998)

R.'s job involved sorting information records into order and her employers became aware that she made an unacceptably high number of errors. Although R.'s dyslexia did amount to an impairment, the tribunal found that she did not experience any day-to-day problems other than in her job, where spelling was a particular problem. She was not therefore entitled to the protection of the Act and the employer was not bound to consider the issue of reasonable adjustments.

Less favourable treatment and 'reasonable adjustments'.

If an employee is, for a reason related to their disability, treated less favourably than a person to whom that reason does not apply, they have a claim under the DDA. In other words, a dyslexic employee who is dismissed for being too slow must show that they have been

treated less favourably than an employee who is not slow (not another disabled employee who is also slow).

The adjustments employers might make include:

- Altering physical features of the workplace (e.g. modifying the office layout to provide quiet space for an employee with dyslexia to do work requiring high levels of concentration);
- Offering the employee a different job, or changing their duties;
- Assigning another employee to help with certain duties; or
- Offering training or other support.

These approaches are considered in more detail in Section 2 (p.4–7).

Justification.

From October 2004 employers will no longer be able to justify failing to make reasonable adjustments. But in some cases employers can still justify less favourable treatment under the terms of the DDA.

However, they have to be able to prove that their reason is 'substantial' and that it is based on the circumstances of the particular case. Tribunals then have to balance the reasonable needs of the employer against the effect of the discrimination on the employee.

Knowledge of disability.

A potential problem is that dyslexic difficulties may not be obvious. In some cases even the employee may not be aware of their condition. A dyslexic employee does not have to prove that their employer knew of the disability in order to establish discrimination. However, an employer has no duty to make reasonable adjustments if they do not know of the disability, or could not reasonably be expected to know of it.

## S.5 Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia, also known as Developmental Co-ordination Disorder, is a recognised medical disorder that impairs the organisation of movement. It is also associated with problems of language, perception and thought. It affects about 10 per cent of the population - two to four per cent of them seriously.

Dyspraxia and dyslexia overlap and often co-exist in the same person. The pattern of difficulties experienced by a person with dyspraxia may vary widely, as with dyslexia. Dyspraxia often overlaps with other neuro-developmental conditions, such as Asperger's Syndrome and Attention -Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

In fact, there are very few 'pure' dyspraxic people. Most also have one or more of the above conditions.

Issues at work.

Some adults who have dyspraxia do not experience severe problems in the workplace and have developed their own strategies for working effectively. They are often determined, persistent, hard working and highly motivated. As with dyslexic adults, they are often creative and original thinkers as well as strategic problem solvers. However, many people with dyspraxia find it hard to achieve their true potential and need extra support at work.

Dyspraxic workers experience many of the same problems at work that dyslexic workers do. They can also have:

- Poor short-term memory;
- Difficulty with concentration;
- Problems with reading and writing; and
- Poor organisational skills.

Over and above this, they have problems with:

- Co-ordination;
- Manual dexterity; and
- Social skills.

People with dyspraxia also tend to be under- or over-sensitive to sound, light, temperature and other stimuli -- which makes them very susceptible to distraction.

The particular work problems experienced by dyspraxic workers include the difficulties for dyslexic workers described in Section 3.

However, workers with dyspraxia have greater difficulty with:

- Presenting written work or figures;
- Keying on a word-processor or calculator; and
- Inter-personal communication.

In addition, they have difficulty with:

- Handwriting;
- Using office equipment such as photocopiers and staplers; and
- Practical or manual work.

Their lack of social skills can cause workers with dyspraxia severe difficulty. They have problems with speech, and may speak too loudly or softly, or have difficulty pronouncing some words. They often take things literally, or are too abrupt or direct, which can lead to conflict with work colleagues and bosses.

Remedies and reasonable adjustments.

The remedies and reasonable adjustments needed for dyspraxic workers are largely the same as those for dyslexic workers discussed in Section 2. In addition to these, dyspraxic workers might need:

- A great deal of help with using and modifying equipment (e.g. ergonomic keyboards, changing or slowing down the mouse);
- Clear, detailed written procedures for operating office machinery such as photocopiers and fax machines;
- Methods to reduce outside distraction, such as having their own room, partitions around their desk, being allowed to wear earphones, or being allowed to come in early or stay late;
- Social skills classes, relaxation exercises and assertiveness training;
- Understanding by colleagues and bosses that their poor social skills and lack of co-ordination are symptoms of dyspraxia.

## S.6 Promoting awareness

Dyslexia is often described as the 'hidden disability' but it affects up to 2.9 million workers in the UK today.

Managers who do not appreciate the link between dyslexia and commonly related performance problems can judge dyslexic employees adversely and unfairly. Far from being wilful misconduct, apparent problems in performance are all too often the consequence of a dyslexia-unfriendly supervisory style in a dyslexia-unfriendly work environment.

This guide promotes a greater understanding of dyslexia issues and discrimination law, and shows how individuals can be helped to manage their dyslexia through:

- Reasonable adjustments to work policies and practices;
- Reasonable adjustments in management and supervisory styles and methods; and
- Specialist training and information technology.

It will help union reps and their members to:

- Resolve issues before they become problems;
- Negotiate with employers on an informed basis; and
- Stand up to discriminatory treatment where it occurs, enabling dyslexic employees to release their potential as successful and valued members of the workforce.

## S.7 Further information

The following organisations can provide advice and information on dyslexia and dyspraxia, including assessment and reasonable adjustments:

Adult Dyslexia Organisation  
336 Brixton Rd  
London SW9 7AA  
Helpline: 020 7924 9559

British Dyslexia Association  
Tel: 01189 668 271  
[www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk)

Disability Rights Commission  
Helpline: 08457 622633  
[enquiry@drc-gb.org](mailto:enquiry@drc-gb.org)  
[www.drc-gb.org](http://www.drc-gb.org)

Dyslexia Advice and Training Services  
33 South Grove House  
London N6 6LR  
Tel: 020 8348 7110  
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Dyslexia Assessment Service  
22 Wray Crescent  
London N4 3LP  
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Dyslexia Tuition for Adults  
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London N11 1BY  
Tel: 020 8368 3634

## DANDA

(Developmental Adult Neuro-Diversity Association for adults with dyspraxia, dyslexia and related conditions)

Tel: 020 7435 7891

Dyspraxia Foundation

Tel: 01462 454 986

(Monday to Friday 10am-2pm)

## Appendices

Appendix 1 is a checklist of everyday activities. Appendix 2 is a workplace dyslexia checklist which complements the everyday activities list. These Appendices are included to help members, and their representatives, begin the process of determining whether or not they are dyslexic.

A screening test of this type does not provide conclusive evidence of dyslexia. However, it is an important first step in determining whether a member may be dyslexic, and whether difficulties in workplace performance are wholly or partially caused by dyslexia.

The tests can be completed by an individual member before discussion with their representative. They can also be completed together, before being considered alongside any apparently related workplace performance issues. Anyone ticking several items in column 1 (great difficulty), and column 2 (some difficulty), may well be dyslexic. Follow this up with preliminary discussions with one of the organisations specialising in assessment mentioned in Section 4. Members ticking mostly column 3 (little or no difficulty) in Appendix 1 are less likely to be dyslexic, but dyslexia should not be ruled out if several items in Appendix 2 cause difficulty. If there is ambiguity, but several of the activities in Appendices 1 and 2 seem to cause difficulty, raise the possibility of dyslexia being behind a member's performance difficulties with line managers and/or your human resources department. In this way, the matter can be explored before a disciplinary or capacity-based approach to performance is initiated.

Appendix 1: Everyday activities checklist.

Please indicate on the scale provided whether the following activities cause you:

	Great Difficulty	Some difficulty	Little/no difficulty
Reading letters	2	1	0
Reading a newspaper	2	1	0
Reading official documents	2	1	0
Reading recipes	2	1	0
Reading bus or train timetables	2	1	0
Using ticket or cash machines	2	1	0
Understanding operating or safety instructions on household gadgets	2	1	0
Writing letters	2	1	0
Writing a cheque	2	1	0
Filling in forms	2	1	0
Making shopping lists	2	1	0
Dealing with money in shops	2	1	0
Checking bank statements	2	1	0
Keeping track of outstanding bills	2	1	0
Explaining things clearly to others	2	1	0
Placing orders over the telephone	2	1	0
Conducting enquiries over the Telephone	2	1	0
Following spoken instructions	2	1	0
Remembering telephone numbers Correctly	2	1	0
Remembering messages	2	1	0
Remembering appointments	2	1	0
Remembering where things have been put	2	1	0
Concentrating for longer than an hour	2	1	0
Looking up telephone numbers in directories	2	1	0
Organising daily life	2	1	0
Reading maps	2	1	0
Following left-right instructions	2	1	0

Reading signposts	2	1	0
Orienting oneself in a strange place or complex environment, e.g., tube station	2	1	0

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## Appendix 2: Workplace dyslexia checklist

Please tick the items which you feel cause difficulty.

### Reading

Following written instructions

Following technical manuals

Quickly getting the gist of letters  
or reports (etc.)

Recalling what you have read

### Writing

Reversible letters, e.g., b, d

Sequencing letters (which - wihch)

### Spelling

Grammar

Punctuation

Handwriting

Filling in forms

Expressing ideas clearly in writing

Writing memos or letters

Writing reports

Taking notes or Minutes

Numerical data

Copying numbers

Tabulating numbers

Doing arithmetical calculations

Speech and comprehension

Following a conversation or discussion

Contributing to a discussion

Presenting thoughts succinctly

Memory and Concentration

Following oral instructions

Remembering telephone numbers

Remembering messages

Remembering appointments

Concentrating for long periods

Visuo-motor skills

Inputting data on a computer or calculator

Analysing complex visual arrays, e.g., maps, graphs

Getting your bearings in large or complex buildings

Sequencing  
Filing  
Retrieving files  
Looking up entries in dictionaries or directories  
Organisation  
Planning work schedules  
Meeting deadlines  
Keeping papers in order  
Working efficiently

Please ring any of the following words or phrases which you feel describe the emotions associated with the above difficulties:

frustrated      angry      confused      lacking in confidence  
anxious  
low in self-esteem      defensive      aggressive      embarrassed  
withdrawn

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