

Supporting young learners with dyslexia: A guide for teachers



Pre A1 Starters A1 Movers A2 Flyers

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Who this guide is for

Many teachers have learners with dyslexia in their exam preparation classes. This guide is for you. With lots of practical tips and ideas for lesson plans, it will help you prepare materials to support learners with dyslexia in preparation for our qualifications for young learners – Pre A1 Starters, A1 Movers and A2 Flyers.

About Cambridge English Qualifications

Learning English is about more than just exams and grades. It's about having the confidence to communicate and access a lifetime of enriching experiences and opportunities. Cambridge English Qualifications are designed specifically for school-age learners, giving them regular milestones to keep them motivated.

For more information on each exam see **<u>cambridgeenglish.org/schools</u>** or click on each exam name below:



How to use this guide

- Try the practical ideas in the <u>Activity pages</u> and reflect on how these techniques affect the processes of learning and teaching in your classroom.
- Think about your learners' different learning styles, needs and preferences and consider what approaches are most helpful to them.
- You can navigate the document by using the hyperlinks in the text and the buttons on each spread:

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Key terminology

Dyslexia and language assessment are specialist fields and there is some common terminology which might be unfamiliar to you. Learning to recognise these terms will help you to understand this guide.

Term	Definition
Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD)	A difference or difficulty with particular aspects of learning. The most commonly diagnosed SpLDs are dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyscalculia and dysgraphia. These differences may be overlapping or occur simultaneously.
Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)	A learning difficulty or disability that makes learning a challenge.
Dyslexia	A learning difficulty which primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling.

There are also some other terms in this guide which are more widely used in the field of assessment. When these terms appear in this guide, you'll find an explanation nearby in a glossary box like this:

Key terminology

The **Common European Framework** of **Reference (CEFR)** is an international standard for describing language ability. It uses a six-point scale, from **A1** for beginners up to **C2** for those who have mastered a language. This makes it easy for anyone involved in language teaching and testing, such as teachers or learners, to see the level of different qualifications.



Background to learners with dyslexia

Dyslexia is a type of Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) that is thought to be present at birth and have lifelong effects. Learning difficulties are not related to a person's intelligence, but are caused by differences in the ways the brain processes information, and vary greatly from person to person. Dyslexia mainly affects the development of literacy and language-related skills, and learners with dyslexia are likely to encounter challenges with phonological processing, working memory and processing speed.

Term	Definition
Phonological processing	Using the sounds of one's language (phonemes) to process spoken and written language. Learners with dyslexia may struggle to distinguish between different sounds, and their reading may be slow or imprecise.
Working memory	The amount of information that can be held in mind and used in carrying out tasks. Learners with dyslexia may struggle with remembering information such as instructions, new vocabulary words, or the content of reading or listening texts.
Processing speed	The pace at which we take in information, make sense of it, and begin to respond. Learners with dyslexia may find it difficult to work out rules and patterns of language usage or make sense of information in spoken or written texts.



For more information on dyslexia, please visit the **British Dyslexia Association**.

Teaching learners with dyslexia

Reading in English

While learners with dyslexia frequently have good visual spatial skills, they often struggle with fluent, accurate reading. This can affect their reading comprehension as they may be able to sound out words but struggle with their meaning. This can make learners with dyslexia feel uncomfortable reading aloud and they are likely to misread or mix up common words. So as a teacher, give support for your learners to help distinguish words with similar spellings.





Listening in English

While they tend to have good interpersonal skills, learners with dyslexia may find recalling and following instructions challenging, and they are likely to struggle with phonological awareness, especially at a phonemic level. So you may need to give guidance to help write down what they hear.

Writing in English

Learners with dyslexia often demonstrate strong creative, imaginative and practical skills, but may struggle with copying work from the board, and need support with handwriting, which is likely to be unclear or illegible. Difficulty with spelling and poorly structured or disorganised written work are also typical features of learners with dyslexia, as they may know the words they need, but you will need to support them with spelling and organising ideas.





Speaking in English

While learners with dyslexia tend to have a sophisticated receptive vocabulary, they are typically less sensitive to English phonology, and so you may need to help them with reproducing and discriminating between sounds. They may also speak with lots of pauses as they search for the words to use, so it is good to be aware of this when you are doing pronunciation and speaking activities.

Because the challenges of dyslexia vary from person to person, the focus should be on making the learning environment as **inclusive** and supportive as possible.



Pages 13 to 21 describe comprehensive lesson plans to support learners with dyslexia in preparing for different parts of our qualifications.

Key terminology

Inclusivity

'Inclusion is a sense of belonging: feeling respected, valued for who you are; feeling a level of supportive energy and commitment from others so that you can do your best work.'

Miller and Katz (2002)¹

Developing inclusive learning environments

Create a supportive and collaborative classroom culture by getting to know all of your learners as individuals and encouraging them to get to know each other. This will help learners feel comfortable reflecting on task approaches and asking for support.

Give learners opportunities to work in different groupings and encourage learners to support each other.

Have L-shaped cards available for learners to frame sections of overcrowded textbook pages and help focus their attention. Encourage learners to use a plain piece of paper to cover reading texts and reveal one line at a time as they read. These are useful techniques for all learners when you are teaching reading skills.



Offer learners choices in how they engage with tasks to make learning more meaningful and **inclusive**. For example, learners might 'draw' rather than write notes during a listening task or while preparing for a speaking task. The **Listening activity** helps you practise this.

Encourage learners to reflect on their learning processes and discuss how they approached a task or reached a particular answer.

Allocate time to explicitly teach exam strategies, such as how to approach particular tasks in the exam, and break these down into a series of simple steps.

Top tips

Handouts

- Give any printed handouts to learners on pastelcoloured paper to support learners with visual processing difficulties.
- Make sure written handouts are clear and dyslexic-friendly.
- Try to make sure that sentences don't 'run over' onto the next line.
- Use larger fonts without serifs, double spacing between lines, and with an extra line space between paragraphs.

For example:

- Arial is a font without serifs and is easier to read.
- ✗ Times New Roman has serifs (small, extra lines on letters), so it can be difficult to read.





Assessment and feedback

🛨 Top tips

- Assessment isn't just about correcting mistakes, but is a process which involves gathering information in order to identify where a learner might need additional support or practice.
- Adopting different approaches to feedback is particularly helpful. Hearing the teacher's voice can feel more personal and supportive than receiving written feedback in red pen. You could make a short video or voice recording with your comments.
- **Formative assessment** is about learning from feedback. It's not necessary to identify every mistake a learner makes. This can take a lot of time for you and give your learners the impression that they never do anything right! Just as we don't try to teach every grammar point in one lesson, we shouldn't try to develop every aspect of language every time we give feedback. Be selective about the mistakes you correct, focusing on words that are easily confused and relationships between spelling and phonology.
- In the classroom, assessment isn't the end of the learning process. If you give something back to a learner to correct, remember to check the next version and then give them feedback on this too. The challenges that learners with dyslexia experience in learning often lead to low levels of confidence. Ensure you include positive aspects in feedback to encourage learners and build self-esteem.
- Feedback is very personal. Talk to learners about what feedback they appreciate and work together to find what works best for them.

Key terminology

Formative assessment is when a teacher gives learners feedback on their progress during a course, rather than at the end of it, so that the learners can learn from the feedback.



Planning inclusive lessons

All learners can become overwhelmed by tasks and activities that require them to think about lots of different things at once, and this applies to learners with dyslexia too. You may be familiar with many of these suggestions, as they benefit all learners, but they are especially supportive for learners with dyslexia.

- Present new language in small and manageable chunks so as not to overload learners, and focus on key and core language from the exam <u>wordlists</u>.
- Regularly check in with your learners by using concept-checking questions to assess their understanding.
- Try to use multisensory input and activities to give learners more than one way to make connections and learn concepts. For example, use flash cards, puppets, story videos and real objects in the classroom. The <u>Speaking</u> <u>activity</u> has a good example of this.

- Rather than just sitting down for every activity, try to encourage learners to use the whole body and to move around for tasks. Create physical gestures or movements to help them learn and remember new language.
- You can also use music and rhythm to highlight and practise pronunciation features such as word and sentence stress.
- Try to use audio recordings, illustrations, pictures or mind maps to accompany written texts, or where appropriate, encourage learners to create their own.
- Offer lots of opportunities for learners to recap and review material, especially from the exam <u>wordlists</u>. Use varied techniques to help learners memorise new words, including drawing, music or rhythm, movement, gesture and visualisation techniques.
- Include explicit explanations of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation features, as these are often more accessible for learners with dyslexia.

Key terminology

Concept-Checking Questions (CCQs) are designed to check or support a learner's understanding of a new word or grammatical item, and offer more reliable insight than just asking 'Do you understand?'. Example CCQs for the adjective *quick* might be: 'What things do you know that are quick?', 'What's the opposite of quick?' or 'Are snails quick?'.

Or you could use pictures of objects or gestures to check understanding. With **multisensory** input and practice, learners use more than one sense at a time and so the brain is stimulated in a variety of ways. Multisensory activities may involve a combination of reading, listening, viewing, touching an object, moving physically around the space, or using gesture.

Activities

Preparing learners with dyslexia for Cambridge English Qualifications

With the need for **inclusivity** in creating a successful learning environment for all learners, here are some lesson plans for helping your learners prepare for Pre A1 Starters, A1 Movers and A2 Flyers.



Note that in the live exam there is an option for learners with dyslexia to have the modified large print (MLP) version of the question paper with drawings removed, to make the page less cluttered and allow larger and standardised fonts in a paper. You can discover more about modified large print and download papers here: **cambridgeenglish.org/help/special-requirements**. It is still a good idea to use images in the classroom to practise vocabulary and generate ideas. The following activities contain ideas which use visuals in class.

Preparing for the Reading and Writing paper

Activity 1: Reading and Writing

Aims

This lesson supports young learners with dyslexia in preparing for the Reading and Writing paper by:

- guiding learners to make connections between the topic of the text and learners' own knowledge
- gradually revealing the text while reading
- encouraging learners to focus on meaning and gist by talking about and drawing what they have read
- supporting learners' decoding of written words with audio support by reading the text aloud
- supporting learners' accuracy in spelling by focusing on <u>letter shapes</u>.

Preparation

Download a sample Reading and Writing paper for the exam from our website.

Pre A1 Starters: Reading and Writing Part 4

A1 Movers: Reading and Writing Part 4

A2 Flyers: Reading and Writing Part 4

Warmer

Place an enlarged version of the picture from the reading and writing task on the board or wall. Engage learners by asking them to look at the picture and discuss what they like and dislike about it.

Pre-reading

To activate learners' vocabulary for the reading and writing task, ask them to call out words connected to the topic of the picture – this might be describing what they can see directly, or what it makes them think of. Ask questions such as:

- What can you see?
- What colours can you see?
- How many things are in the picture?
- How does it make you feel?
- What does it make you think of?

As learners call out words, write them on the board, eliciting the spelling as you go along.

Activity 1: Reading and Writing

Familiarisation with the text

- I. Give each learner a printed copy of the text without the optional answers, and a blank sheet of paper. Explain that learners should cover all but the first line of the text, and that you will read, and they should follow the text. Tell them that as you read, they should lower the paper, gradually revealing each line, and demonstrate this with your own copy. Gradually revealing the text will help to focus learners' attention and support learners with dyslexia by reducing the amount of information they are seeing at any one time.
- 2. Read the text aloud to learners and at this point ask them to just listen and read along silently. This is so that the text can become familiar. For some learners, following a text as you read can be quite challenging. Don't rush through the text. Pause to allow learners to catch up and to get an overall sense of the meaning. Explain that where there are gaps in the text, you will say 'gap', but that they don't need to worry about these at this stage.

Reading comprehension

- Ask learners what the text is about to check their general comprehension. Elicit two or three sentences describing what the text is about, e.g. for this text from <u>Pre</u> <u>A1 Starters</u>, learners might say the text:
- is about lizards
- is about what colour lizards are and what they like to eat
- tells us about the lizards' bodies, where they live, and what they like doing.



- 2. Put learners into pairs or small groups of mixed abilities to look at the text together. To help build confidence, ask learners to underline or highlight all the words that they know, no matter how small, as they read. This will promote confidence.
- 3. Give learners pens and paper and ask them to draw a picture about what they have read. Allowing learners to draw what they have understood makes the task more meaningful and inclusive.

Activity 1: Reading and Writing

Exam task

- I. Ask learners in pairs or small groups to look at the first gap, and try to guess what word might go in the gap. For A1 Movers and A2 Flyers, ask what type of word should go in the gap (e.g. noun/adjective/verb, etc.).
- Next, show learners the list of possible answers (with pictures for the Pre Al Starters paper). Give each learner a copy of the list, and read each item aloud. Use <u>concept-checking</u> <u>questions</u> to make sure learners understand the meaning of each word.
- 3. Tell learners that you are going to read the text again, line by line, and that you will all try to fill in the blanks together. Go through one example yourself, by reading until you come to the first blank. Go through each word option in that line to see if it fits. Again, use questioning techniques to help learners develop confidence in selecting the right word. For example:
- Are we looking for a noun, verb or adjective here? Why?
- Is there a word that definitely doesn't work? Why?
- Are there words before or after the gap that go together with any of the options?

Writing

I. When you're happy that all learners understand which answer is correct, write the answer in a separate space on the board, between two lines. For example:



Explain that the letters that go above the line (d, in this example), have 'heads', and that letters that go below the line (p, in this example), have 'tails'. Ask learners to tell you which other letters in the alphabet have heads/tails. Give learners lined paper, and ask them to practise writing the answer neatly between the lines. Give learners plenty of practice and support in writing the letters, making sure they don't feel under time pressure.

- 2. Monitor closely to support with writing and spelling, and to see if there are any answers which you will need to correct or explain. Persistent difficulty with spelling is a typical feature of learners with dyslexia, and some words can be especially challenging. **Mnemonics** can be a helpful way for all learners to remember difficult spellings.
- 3. When everyone has completed the task, go through the answer together as a group, reading the text aloud as learners follow it and inviting learners to give the answer when you come to each gap.

★ Top tip

To help learners feel more comfortable asking for support from the teacher, cut out circles of green, yellow and red card for each member of the class. Explain to learners that they should keep their circles on their desk. Explain the meaning of the different colour circles, and that learners should keep their circles in a pile with the relevant colour on top:

- **RED** I need help with this task and I can't do any more without help.
- **YELLOW** I need help but I can do a different part of the task while I wait.
- **GREEN** I'm OK and I don't need help with the task.

Key terminology

A **mnemonic** is a short poem, phrase or word used to help a person remember something.

In spelling the word *because*, the mnemonic '**B**ig **E**lephants **C**an **A**lways **U**nderstand **S**mall **E**lephants' helps learners remember the spelling.



Preparing for the Listening paper

Activity 2: Listening

Aims

This lesson supports young learners with dyslexia in preparing for the Listening paper by:

- giving learners choices over how to make notes
- activating language that learners might hear in the listening task, and focusing their attention on key words in the multiple-choice question
- integrating activities to support phonological processing and help learners distinguish between similar sounds.

Preparation

I. Download a sample Listening paper for the exam from our website.

<u>Pre A1 Starters:</u> Listening Part 3 <u>A1 Movers:</u> Listening Part 4 <u>A2 Flyers:</u> Listening Part 4
2. Print and enlarge the three pictures from the first question of the listening task.

Pre-listening

- Display the pictures around the room, or on the board. If possible, invite learners to walk around the room in pairs and look at the three pictures, describing what they can see. Moving physically around the space makes the activity multisensory, and helps to maintain engagement, especially for learners who might be easily distracted.
- 2. Focus the attention of the class on the first picture. Ask learners to notice similarities and differences between the three pictures by asking 'What things are the same?' and 'What things are different?'.
- 3. Next, elicit words or phrases they might use to describe the picture. As learners answer, write their words on individual sticky notes and invite them to stick the notes next to the picture.
- 4. Ask learners to return to their seats and give each learner a printed copy of the following questions, then read them aloud for learners to follow:
- What does it mean?

- Can you think of another word that sounds similar?
- How many words are there?
- Which sounds are different?
- How many syllables/sounds are there?
- 5. Read out each word on the sticky notes from Step 3. Go through each of the questions above, eliciting answers from the class.

Understanding pronunciation

Encourage learners to practise the sounds of words/phrases. Make the activity multisensory by drawing learners' attention to the shape of the mouth as they sound out the words. This will also help them with listening comprehension, by linking the meaning of the word with the sounds.

Activity 2: Listening

6. Now give each pair of learners a printed copy of all three pictures. This time include the listening question written at the top of the paper. Focus learners' attention on the question, reading it aloud slowly several times. Ask learners what words they might What was Grandma's favourite job?



hear in the listening that connect to the question. For example, in this question from the A2 Flyers paper, *What was Grandma's favourite job*?, words connected to the question might be: *work*, *enjoy*, *happy*.

Listening

- I. Play the audio from the first dialogue and ask learners to listen for words they previously predicted. Elicit which picture they think was being described, and which words or phrases made them think this. Don't tell them the correct answer at this stage.
- 2. Play the first dialogue again and ask learners to try to understand the general meaning. Tell them that if they want to, they can use a variety of note-making techniques, such as quick doodles, mind maps, circles and arrows to make the task more inclusive.
- 3. Repeat the above two steps with the other dialogues.
- 4. Finally, play the whole recording, pausing and replaying sections of the dialogue that learners found challenging, or reading short sections aloud. This will give learners plenty of opportunity to understand what is being said, and help them to make the connection between meaning and sounds.
- 5. If there are words that might be easily confused with other words, such as **minimal pairs**, draw learners' attention to these and allow them time to practise saying and differentiating between the different sounds. Where possible, try to have a picture for each of the two words, so that the words and sounds are presented together with their meanings.

Key terminology

A **minimal pair** is a pair of words which have different meanings and only one sound (phoneme) that is different. Examples are *pear* and *bear*, or *pin* and *bin*.

Activities to help learners differentiate between minimal pairs include:

- reading a list of words aloud and asking learners to say which picture each word belongs to
- reading pairs of words aloud and asking learners to say whether they are the same or different.

Preparing for the Speaking paper

Activity 3: Speaking

Aims

This lesson supports learners with dyslexia in preparing for the Speaking paper by:

- using visual organisers to review words and grammatical structures
- offering supported practice with time for learners to prepare what they want to say before having to say it, and time to reflect on the task afterwards
- giving extra attention to pronunciation features of language.

Preparation

I. Choose a selection of questions from Part 4 of the Speaking paper from our website.

Pre A1 Starters: Speaking Part 4 <u>A1 Movers:</u> Speaking Part 4 <u>A2 Flyers:</u> Speaking Part 4

2. Prepare an example chatterbox, with different questions behind each number.

Warmer

Choose a question from Part 4 of the Speaking paper and give each pair of learners a printed copy of the question (e.g. What's your favourite food?). Read the question aloud slowly, and ask learners to draw a picture of their answer to make the task multisensory. Allow learners time to think about their own individual answers to the question.

Preparing for speaking

- Invite one of your more confident learners to come to the front and show you their picture. Read the question aloud again and ask the learner to describe what's in their picture. Repeat with another one or two learners, then put learners into small groups and tell them to take it in turns to ask and answer the question. Repeat with a different question if you have time.
- 2. Give learners a printed copy of eight typical questions from Part 4 of the Speaking test. Read each question aloud slowly. Now tell learners that you are going to give them your own answer to one of the questions, and they should guess which question the answer matches, e.g. 'I live in London' matches 'Where do you live?'. Then let learners, in pairs, ask and match other questions and answers.

Extra challenge

To add challenge, children can write some or all of their own questions. You could write *Wh*- question words on the board and elicit some examples.

📄 Activity 3: Speaking

Chatterboxes

- Explain to the class that you're going to make 'chatterboxes', and show the example you've made and/or a picture. This activity is multisensory and stimulates the brain in different ways as learners engage with making and using a physical object to support their speaking practice.
- Full instructions and a link to a sample video can be found in this <u>full lesson plan for asking</u> <u>personal questions</u> and you can search online for demonstrations.



- 3. After learners have folded their chatterbox and added colours and numbers, ask them to write the questions from Step 2 **Preparing for speaking** under the flaps. Support learners while they copy the questions. Alternatively, provide learners with stickers with the questions already on them to stick under the flaps on their chatterbox rather than having to write them. Once learners have made their chatterboxes, go through each of the questions aloud, modelling the pronunciation and asking learners to repeat them.
- 4. Demonstrate how the chatterbox works. Ask learners to choose a colour. Spell out the colour they choose, moving the chatterbox as you say each letter. Ask them to choose a number and unfold your chatterbox. Ask one of the learners the question. Repeat a couple of times, and encourage children to choose different numbers, for different questions.

Speaking

Put learners into pairs and ask them to take it in turns asking and answering questions, using their chatterboxes the same way you showed them. Monitor and support with answers, encouraging learners to give answers that are true for them. Give plenty of time to practise, swapping pairs so learners can repeat the activity with a different partner if there is time.

Learners with a disability or special requirements

We have a number of ways to help people taking our exams who need special arrangements due to temporary or long-term difficulties or conditions. For example, special arrangements might be available for learners who have a specific learning difficulty, such as dyslexia.

Special Requirements – guidance notes for teachers

Guidance Notes for Special Requirements give teachers useful information about the different Special Requirements versions available for Cambridge English Qualifications. They contain a description of how materials are adapted for different special requirement needs, along with examples demonstrating what materials might look like, useful information about special arrangements for taking the exams, and FAQs. We can also provide a range of modified materials for learners with special requirements.

For more information on how we can help learners with special requirements, visit **cambridgeenglish.org/help/special-requirements**.



Extra resources

Lesson plans and resources for teachers

- Free resources for preparing learners for Cambridge English Qualifications.
- <u>A style guide</u> from the British Dyslexia Association can help ensure that written material considers the difficulties experienced by some dyslexic people and allows for the use of text to speech to facilitate ease of reading.

Blog posts related to dyslexia, SpLDs and inclusivity

- Supporting students with specific learning difficulties in language learning.
- **<u>Supporting learners</u>** with Specific Learning Difficulties.
- **Ten top approaches** to inclusive teaching and learning.

Learn more about research into second language learning

Cambridge University Press has published over <u>20 free and easy-to-read research</u> <u>papers</u> about second language learning and teaching. Some papers which are especially relevant to this guide are:

- Specific Learning Difficulties in ELT
- Giving feedback to language learners
- <u>Creating a Safe Speaking Environment</u>
- Motivational aspects of using near peers as role models

References

I. Miller, F A and Katz, J H (2002) *The inclusion breakthrough: Unleashing the real power of diversity.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

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