

# **Dyslexia Unveiled: Dispelling Misconceptions, Defining Terms, Exploring Street Names, and Understanding Manifestations**

By: Lynn Brown, M.  
Ed, CERI Certified Structured Literacy Teacher  
Owner of Willamette Valley Dyslexia Center

I am going to present you with 3 common lies and a truth about Dyslexia. Can you identify which are the lies? The misunderstandings surrounding Dyslexia are deeply embedded in our everyday conversations and popular beliefs, reiterated as if the informer had just consulted an article or had a personal discussion with Dr. Shaywitz herself. Identifying the lies might prove more challenging than anticipated, given their strong roots in the belief systems of many. What's even more upsetting is the resistance encountered when trying to convey the actual truth.

## **First, Dyslexia is developmental.**

### **LIE**

You read that correctly: Children do not outgrow dyslexia, and letter reversals are not the initial indicators of a reading challenge. While Dyslexia and letter reversals can coexist, the latter is a distinct issue not exclusive to Dyslexia. Unfortunately, schools typically do not identify support needs until around ages 8 or 9, coinciding with decoding difficulties. This age aligns with special education referrals and potential learning disability identification. However, this practice proves detrimental to both academic progress and a child's self-esteem. Young children are acutely aware of their challenges, and without support, they may feel inadequate and unworthy of the education provided. This isolation can lead to reluctance in reading, avoiding classroom activities, expressing negative self-images, and exhibiting behaviors that conceal their struggles. Scientifically, Dyslexia is identifiable even before a child begins school, which highlights the need for improved early identification practices in schools.

## **Next, Dyslexia is a vision issue.**

### **LIE**

If your child has an identified vision problem correctable with glasses, vision therapy, or even colored overlays, then it is not Dyslexia. While vision issues can significantly impede fluent reading, Dyslexia itself is not a vision problem. In our practice, we often encounter many children who faced vision difficulties or experienced delayed identification of developmental vision issues, and they also struggled with reading.

Interestingly, we teach these students to read using the same approach as our Dyslexic students. This knowledge is remarkable as it reveals that ALL kids learn to read in the same way! Despite the diverse issues that can impact reading acquisition and ability, we now have a clear understanding of what needs to be done.

### **Kids with Dyslexia can't learn to read!**

#### **LIE**

Refer to the above statement. Scientific evidence has shown us that all children learn to read using the same method! The most effective approach for any individual to learn to read involves mastering 26 letters, 75 basic spelling patterns (graphemes), and the 31 spelling rules that interact with graphemes, influencing word pronunciation and spelling.

Now, consider this data visualized on a traditional bell curve:

- 5 out of 100 students learn to read without much effort.
- 30 out of 100 learn to read easily with any form of formal reading instruction.
- 60 out of 100 find learning to read a challenge.
- 20 out of 100 require intensive help from highly trained educators to develop reading skills.

When up to 60% of children find reading challenging, it prompts the question: should we blame the children, or should we reconsider the structure of their reading instruction? While these 60% of students manage to complete assignments, the quality of their work remains uncertain. They are not reading for pleasure or self-directed learning.

### **Last, I am going to tell you that Dyslexia is REAL!**

#### **TRUTH**

Dyslexia is characterized as an auditory processing disorder that makes it difficult for individuals in discriminating and comprehending the distinct phonemes (sounds) that form words. This difficulty extends to word-related tasks such as isolating the first and last sounds of words or making a rhyme. While people with Dyslexia have strong and robust oral vocabulary, their written ability does not match. It is essential to recognize that these individuals are not lazy but rather wired differently.

Dyslexia is officially defined by several agencies, including the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) and the DSM. The IDA, in 2002, established a comprehensive definition of Dyslexia, which has been widely adopted by federal and state agencies.

"Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often expected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge."

Meanwhile, Dyslexia is defined in the DSM-5, providing specific criteria for measuring and comparing its "symptoms." According to the DSM-5, Dyslexia serves as the umbrella term for a family of Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), including dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia. Described as a type of Neurodevelopmental Disorder that impedes the ability to learn or apply specific academic skills (e.g., reading, writing, or arithmetic), which are the foundations for other academic learning.

### **That involves a lot of science, so what does it all mean?**

Learning to read is not inherently natural or easy for most children. People were born to speak. However, becoming proficient readers involves a meticulous process where individuals subconsciously analyze the letters in each word.

It is reasonable to expect a child to learn to read, given proper reading instruction. We know all children learn to read the same way despite the complexities of the necessary systems working together to achieve decoding fluency. An effective reading teacher has established a deep understanding of these systems and is executing some of the most tedious work in education. (L. Moats Ed. D, 2022).

The ability to sound out words is a major undertaking that allows rapid recognition of words. (This recognition is so fast that some people mistakenly believe it is happening "by sight").

**I am going to end with this "user-friendly" definition, that you can tuck in your back pocket.**

Use this as needed, in your practice, whether addressing reluctant readers, attending conferences, or attending IEP meetings. Consider this...

Dys-lex-i-a: a word that at its core means “difficulty with language” or “difficulty with words”, rooted in Greek morphemes "dys" and "lex."

Dyslexia is the unexpected disconnection between verbal ability (expressive and receptive language) and written ability (decoding and encoding). It is crucial to emphasize that Dyslexia is not a result of laziness or lack of intelligence.

Instead, Dyslexia is a neurobiological disorder manifested by a difficulty in the learning of reading, writing, or spelling, despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence, and sociocultural opportunities. Moreover, IQ is not a determining factor for achieving fluent decoding; many individuals with "low IQ" can and do learn to read with comprehension. Food for thought, socio-economics is not a determinant of literacy ability BUT, literacy ability can be a determinant of socio-economics.

Further, recognize literacy as a social justice issue.

- Dyslexia is a leading cause of reading failure and school dropouts in the nation.
- Reading failure is the most common shared characteristic among juvenile justice offenders, and early intervention is crucial for this population.
- Shockingly, 70% of incarcerated adults are unable to read above a 4th-grade level.

These insights underscore the urgency of addressing Dyslexia and promoting literacy for a more equitable society.

### **So, what do WE do about it?**

We know that ALL kids learn to read in the same way. We also know that the most effective route to decoding fluency, as stated above involves acquiring knowledge of 26 letters, 75 basic spelling patterns (graphemes), and 31 spelling rules. This comprehensive approach is known as Structured Literacy.

Rooted in the Orton-Gilligham Methodology, and considered to be the Gold Standard for Decoding/ Phonics instruction for kids. This is a crucial bridge between spoken and written language, more appropriately known as Alphabetic Principle. The Alphabetic Principle is the link to decoding fluency. Building the bridge between spoken language

and written language is tedious work, but it needs to be done and it needs to be done well.

First, giving sounds a symbol, and then sequentially teaching easy and predictable skills before graduating to complex and variable skills (think homophones), we are systematically teaching kids the building blocks of our language, unlocking a world of life long, independent learning.

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Stay tuned for the next installment where we will talk about Literacy Development in children, the Reading Rope, and how it feeds the lesson plan.

### **About the Author:**

Lynn Brown is a former Special Education Teacher turned Dyslexia Tutor! After a decade of chasing the "how to" of teaching reading, her breakthrough came when she discovered the Science of Reading. She had no idea at the time what this new learning in The Orton-Gillingham methodology was actually going to do for her students or her teaching practice.

With a focus on training both tutors and teachers, Lynn now runs a thriving tutoring center in the Willamette Valley. She imparts the expertise of implementing the Orton-Gillingham lesson plan with fidelity, and with great results! Collectively, her tutoring center has successfully taught over 1,000 students to read!

Lynn is a CERI Certified Structured Literacy Teacher, she holds an M.Ed. in Educational Leadership from Arizona State University. She also has thousands of hours dedicated to teaching, tutoring, and mentoring in the Orton-Gillingham methodology, and also has a Dyslexic child.

Now, she is eager to share the "magic" of her approach with you.