

Am I Dyslexic?

Do I need a diagnosis?

If you are considering this question then you already feel like something isn't quite right. If this is effecting your wellbeing or ability to do your job then an assessment is important.

- You might not know what is wrong, but you have a sense that other people don't have the difficulties you do.
- You might be struggling at work despite feeling like you should be capable.
- You might be coping by avoiding certain tasks, or working harder to keep up.
- You might recognise yourself in descriptions of dyslexia.

A diagnostic assessment is an opportunity to understand your strengths and weaknesses. It will help you gain control of the situation.

Will it help?

Many adults are confused about their abilities and frustrated by repeated failure. Diagnosis often marks a new beginning, understanding that your difficulties are not a moral weakness, are not caused by a lack of effort or intelligence on your part, and are not your fault. Many adults with dyslexia have grown up believing themselves stupid or lazy and to blame for the failure.

What happens if I'm not dyslexic? What if I'm just stupid?

A lot of adults come to an assessment with this worry. Most of the time they are right in their suspicions; they are dyslexic. Many are relieved to finally understand the reason they struggle with day-to-day tasks in spite of all their efforts to succeed.

How much does it cost?

Assessments can be expensive. You can get help to cover some or all of the cost from your employer (or Access To Work if you are unemployed). Universities will usually refund the cost once you have a diagnosis. Dyslexia charities and some professional memberships (unions, benevolent funds, etc) offer bursaries to assist with the cost of diagnosis.

Dyslexia can be diagnosed by:

- an Educational, Occupational, or Chartered, psychologist who specialises in assessing Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD)
- a Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor

There is no difference in their ability to diagnose dyslexia, though some institutions and workplaces may have a preference. The most important thing is that you find someone who has *workplace experience*.

Someone who specialises in adult dyslexia will have a much better understanding of the environment you are working in. They will be able to connect their diagnostic findings to specific ways to help you in your role.

What happens at an assessment?

There is no single test that can diagnose dyslexia. You will be asked to do verbal, visual, and abstract reasoning tasks, some reading and writing. The assessor isn't simply ticking off right and wrong answers, but looking at:

- Your approach to the task: many adult dyslexics have excellent coping strategies that mask how difficult certain tasks are for them.
- Your response: how stressful the task is for you.
- If you seem to understand more than you can demonstrate: it's quite common for a dyslexic person to understand a task they struggle to execute; this is an important diagnostic distinction.
- Your perspective: how your strengths and weaknesses have influenced your choices and behaviours growing up and in the workplace, what support you've had (if any), and what worries you. There are common themes in the experiences of dyslexic people.

The assessor is looking for a particular pattern of strengths and weaknesses in your abilities, and it is the relative difference between them, not the absolute value, that is important. This is because dyslexia is not about intelligence. Many people are surprised to find out just how intelligent they are, after a lifetime of disappointing performance.

- You should get verbal feedback on the day, explaining the big-picture of your results.
- You should get a report within two weeks that explains your results in detail.
- You should be able to talk to your assessor over the phone once you've seen your report, to ask questions.

Things to remember:

- The assessor is probably the first person you meet who will really *get* you and see past the confusing nature of your strengths and weaknesses.
- The assessor understands how difficult the tasks can be mentally and emotionally. For many adults, the shame and anxiety surrounding their difficulties is as big an obstacle as the dyslexia itself. You can ask for a break at any time during the assessment.
- You should expect to feel exhausted after the assessment. Plan the rest of your day with that in mind.

Am I dyslexic?

Sometimes the language of the report can leave you wondering. It might say:

- you experience dyslexic tendencies
- Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) of a dyslexic nature
- Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) with signs of dyslexia
- working memory deficit

In practice these all mean you are dyslexic, and most workplaces and institutions won't make a distinction.

There may also be a recommendation for further assessment or referral to other professionals.

You can't fail this test...or fake it.

Sometimes it's hard to replace the old view of you with the new perspective from the assessment. You might doubt some of the results because they seem so different to who you thought you were. You might worry what people will expect of you now, or fear that you can't live up to these higher expectations. You were always this person, but it can take time to incorporate the new information into your identity and feel comfortable with it.

Can it be fixed?

Dyslexia is not something that goes away or can be cured, but effective tools and strategies can make a big difference.

It's important to remember that dyslexia is a particular pattern of *strengths* and weaknesses. It can be easy to assume your strengths are just who you are or what you like, and not also a part of your dyslexic profile.

Should I tell anyone?

You don't have to disclose your diagnosis if you don't want to, but there are situations in which it is helpful to:

- You need to tell your employer if you want reasonable adjustments. This includes job applications and interviews with prospective employers.
- Your colleagues may be much more accommodating if they understand the reason for your difficulties, or know how best to work with you.
- Being open about dyslexia can be powerful for others within the organisation, particularly if you are in a visible or senior position. People will follow the lead you take, so by communicating it in a positive way—being able to say *I am bad at some things, but that doesn't make me a bad person*—people will be less likely to see it as a problem.

Dyslexia is a different way of thinking

There are many situations where this is advantageous, where the strengths associated with dyslexia can shine:

- seeing connections
- big-picture thinking
- approaching tasks in different or creative ways
- problem-solving
- communication or interpersonal skills
- dexterity or manual skills
- visual and spatial skills

This list is not exhaustive, and each person with dyslexia has their own pattern of strengths. There are competent and successful dyslexics in every walk of life and all types of careers. With the right support and strategies, dyslexia is not be a barrier to achievement.

Further help and advice can be found at:

www.patoss-dyslexia.org/SupportAdvice/TutorAssessorIndex

PATOSS is the professional body for dyslexia support specialists. Their webpages provides a gateway to information, resources, advice, diagnosis, training, and consultancy services.
