

KS3-4

Dyslexia

Supporting neurodiversity

SEND
TOOLKIT



Contents

Introduction	3
What is neurodiversity?	4
Printable resources	5
What is dyslexia?	7
Case studies	9
Classroom strategies	11
Printable resources	14
Memory and verbal processing support	19
Classroom strategies and activity ideas	19
Printable resources	22
Reading support	24
Classroom strategies and activity ideas	24
Printable resources	26
Assistive technology	29
Writing support	33
Printable resources	34
Spelling support	40
Classroom strategies and activity ideas	40
Maths support	44
Classroom strategies and activity ideas	44
Printable resources	47
Dyslexic strengths	48
Classroom strategies	48
Further support	51
Glossary	51
Useful links	53
References	55

Introduction

This toolkit is designed to give you a general overview of neurodiversities, how they affect students, and how to recognise them within students in your classroom. The primary focus is to look at what dyslexia is and how it affects young learners. Dyslexia is a complex and varied condition that impacts various processing skills and consequently students' outcomes.

The first section gives a rundown of current research on dyslexia, and then links to how it can be defined, how it manifests in learners and how it can be identified. There are activities that can help you as a teacher to qualify your professional knowledge of dyslexia in the classroom, and activities that can help learners to articulate their own areas of challenge and learning preferences, as well as presentation resources to help others understand dyslexia and its impacts. The subsequent sections of this guide offer insight into the different areas of processing and attainment that are commonly affected by dyslexia. The effects of dyslexia on students' memory and sequencing, reading, writing, spelling and maths are explained and linked to common classroom behaviours/responses to tasks. Tips and strategies for general classroom teaching are given, with printable materials for use with your students. Additional reading suggestions, alongside links to research articles and organisational websites, are given to signpost you to further sources of information about dyslexia and support for young people in school.

About the author



Dr Helen Ross is a leading voice on dyslexia within UK education. She is an experienced public speaker, international consultant and researcher, and contributor to a wide range of publications; Helen is also dyslexic.

Helen's passion for supporting young people with dyslexia and literacy difficulties started early in her teaching career when she worked in some challenging but invigorating schools in South Yorkshire. Some of Helen's students found literacy, and engaging with the written word, very challenging. Helen's passion for supporting young people who find learning tricky continued, and she now supports families, teachers and organisations to better understand the implications of dyslexia, neurodiversity and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

In this toolkit, Helen draws on her experiences as a classroom teacher, SENDCo and dyslexia expert to help you to understand what dyslexia is, which aspects of learning can be affected by dyslexia and what you can do to support dyslexic learners. Whatever your role in supporting young people with dyslexia, this toolkit will give you understanding, tangible ideas and practical support strategies to enable those young people to flourish.

What is neurodiversity?

by Abigail Hawkins and Helen Ross

The term *neurodiversity* was coined in the early 1990s by journalist Harvey Blume and Australian autism activist Judy Singer. It can be defined as an understanding that neurological differences are to be honoured and respected just like any other human variation, including diversity in race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, and so on (Armstrong, 2017).

When Singer originally coined the phrase, she was looking to move thinking from a medical model to a more social one. She wanted everyone to understand that there is no 'typical' brain or 'normal' mind and that everyone is different as part of regular human variation.

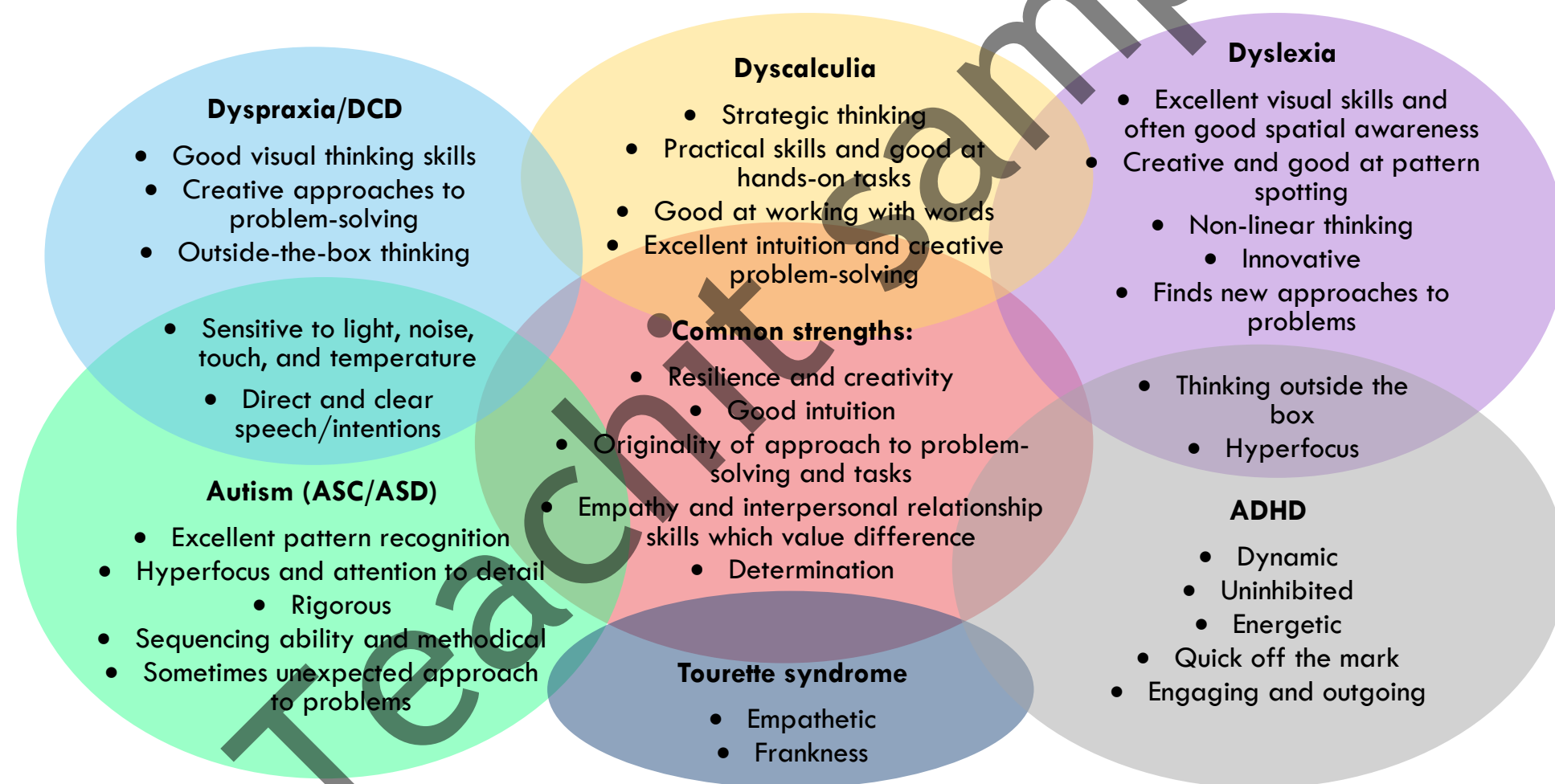
This standpoint has major implications for how we, as teachers, work to support young people in our care. Understanding and accepting that there are young people whose way of processing and engaging with the world is different from our own means that we, as professionals working to support them, need to update our knowledge and practice.

Although the term originated within the autism community, *neurodiversity* is now taken as encompassing a range of medical and educational needs, including ADHD, autistic spectrum condition (ASC) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia / developmental coordination disorder (DCD), dyscalculia and Tourette syndrome. Dysgraphia and specific language impairment or developmental language delay may also be included. These needs are also referred to as *specific learning difficulties* (SpLD) as they affect the way in which information is learned and processed. All neurodiversities are independent of intelligence, are lifelong conditions that are likely to run in families and can vary in degree from one individual to the next.

Neurodiverse students may need some accommodations in school so that they can engage meaningfully in the curriculum and in wider social life. These accommodations may include wearing headphones to minimise sensory overload or having a coloured overlay when reading to reduce visual discomfort and imbalance. In school, some young people may need fidget toys or wobble cushions as an outlet for their need to move associated with ADHD, whilst others may need to have access to quiet spaces to reset because of ASD and other sensory needs. Those with dyslexia may need to have support in accessing the written word, whilst individuals with dyscalculia might find that having concrete objects to support them whilst engaging with maths problems transforms their ability to share their knowledge and understanding of those challenges they face.

Whilst there are challenges associated with neurodiversities, there are also many strengths linked to the different ways in which neurodiverse individuals process and engage with information about the world around them. Those strengths are shown here in a re-envisioned, updated version of the diagram:

Neurodiversity: strengths and gifts



Identifying dyslexia

Dyslexia is a relatively common phenomenon, affecting roughly one in 10 people (NHS, 2018), which means that in any class of 30 students, there are likely to be three students who have dyslexia.

Fairly commonly known signs of dyslexia are that young people experience difficulties in literacy acquisition. Whilst there is a lot of information given in the definition above, sometimes a more practical, tangible understanding of what it looks like in a classroom setting is needed so that we, as educators, know how to support our students. This toolkit is largely focused on addressing the challenges that students with dyslexia have, but we will also talk about the strengths associated with dyslexia; knowing these can empower our students and help us to help them. Here, a broad overview of different elements of dyslexia is given, then, briefly, pathways for identification of dyslexia are discussed – these do differ according to local authority in England and other countries/jurisdictions, so it is not possible within this toolkit to give specific guidance.

Dyslexia can affect spelling, reading, writing and general engagement with the written word. Often, educators and those working to support young people with dyslexia / literacy difficulties are aware of the vulnerabilities in literacy acquisition associated with dyslexia. However, they may not know what underpins those challenges and how those challenges can manifest in other elements of students' attainment and their wider experience of school. Memory can often be affected so that young people may not look as if they are paying full attention in class or may appear just 'forgetful'. Where memory is implicated, maths and sequencing of information may be impacted, so that young people find processing questions and facts tricky. Difficulties in sequencing information can have wider implications for students too; they may not always follow conversations fully or may miss things when talking to their peers. This can have a huge impact on their wellbeing as well as academic outcomes (Sainio *et al.*, 2021). Phonological awareness is a key feature of dyslexia, and vulnerabilities in this element of cognitive processing differentiate dyslexia from other neurodiversities (Colley, undated). Phonological awareness can be defined concisely as 'the ability to analyse the sound structure of oral language' (Krajewski and Schneider, 2009) and is fundamental in the development of literacy skills. Where students experience challenges in processing and manipulating sounds in words, there is often an impact on their reading, spelling and writing. They are likely to need support in developing their phonological awareness and learning other approaches to literacy that draw on their strengths to help them to decode and make sense of the written word. Below, general support strategies for young people with dyslexia are given, followed by strategies directly connected to each area of difficulty linked to dyslexia, building on their dyslexic strengths.

Printable resources

Memory support – task map

This sheet is for using with students who may have support from a TA so that they can chunk down a task they have to do. It will help them to know what they are doing in a task and what is expected. Their TA can help them to break it down into stages. They also have a 'now' and 'next' space so they know what is coming up. You may want to tweak the headings, depending on what your students are working on in their lessons.

Task title:

Type of task: Creative story writing / science report / poem / book report / fact file

Success criteria

1.
.....
2.
.....
3.
.....

Equipment needed

Now

Next

Task stages

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

For example, a completed sheet might look like this:

Subject/topic	New word(s)	Meaning
Geography	Antarctica	The continent around the South Pole
Geography	Tributary	A smaller river that flows into a larger river

Formal spelling (draw lines between syllables)

Ant | arc | tic | a

Looks like (draw a picture to represent each syllable as you hear it and extend the lines down)

Ant | arc | tic | a



Formal spelling (draw lines between syllables)

trib | u | ta | ry

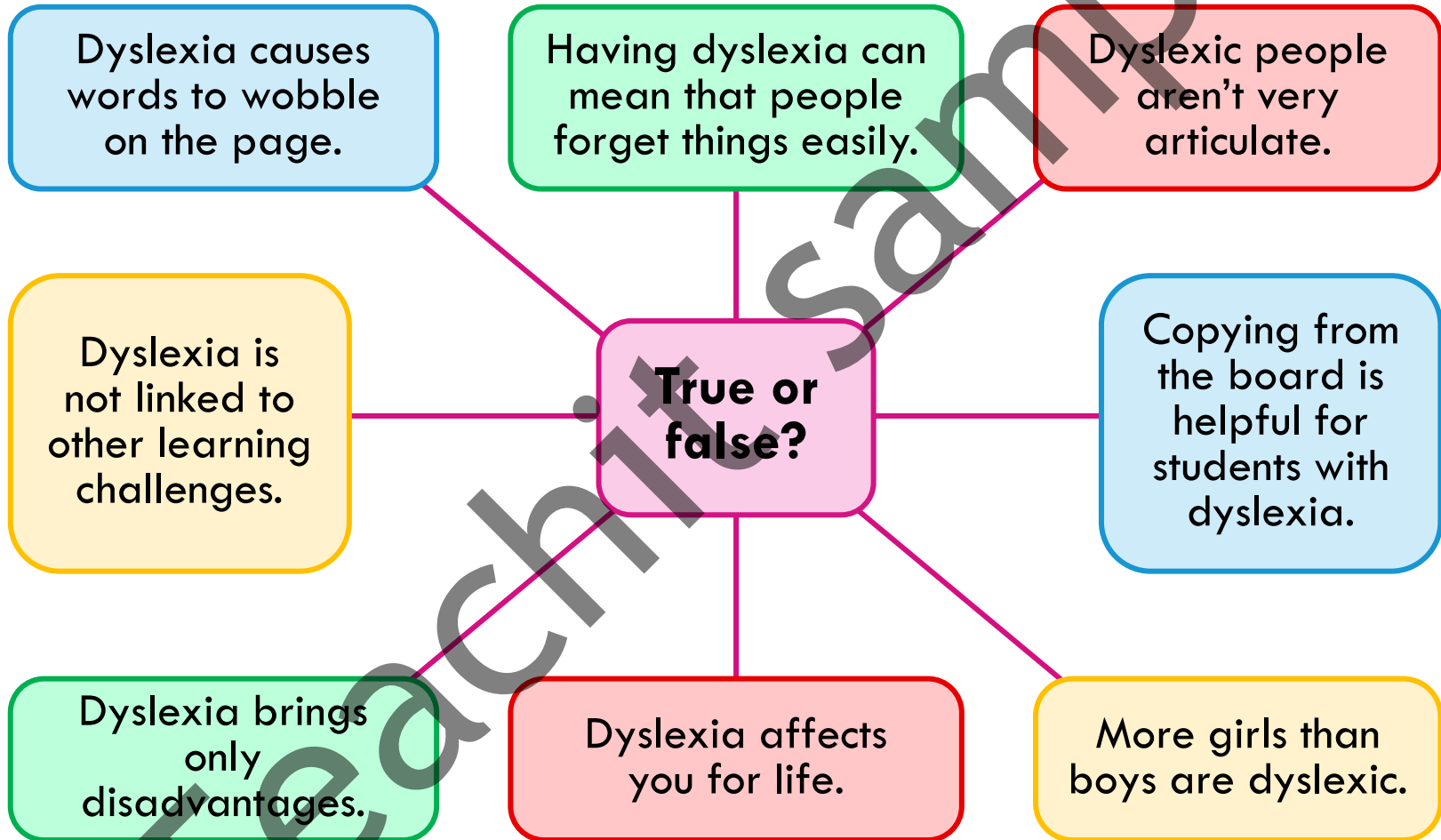
Sounds like (write what the syllables sound like and extend the lines down)

Looks like four syllables; sounds like three syllables:

trib | u | tary

trib | you | tree

What is dyslexia and how can we support our students?



Task 1 – What does dyslexia feel like?

A missing letter: finding ways round things

Describe an activity that you undertake regularly – something like:

- going to school
- your morning routine
- how to make a cake.

However, you are not allowed to use the sound /s/.

Discuss:

What does this illustrate about how dyslexic people may feel?

