

“I can’t be dyslexic,
because I can read
and spell!”

Indicators of an Adapted Dyslexic



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About Adapted Dyslexics

Adapted dyslexics are dyslexic individuals who have learned to operate effectively in education, work, leadership and entrepreneurial roles, often without formal identification or support. They typically read, write and communicate well enough to meet expectations and perform at a high level. This is not because the system fits them, but because they have learned to work around it.

Adapted dyslexics rely on a range of cognitive strategies to manage ongoing mismatches between their way of thinking and system demands. At the same time, they often leverage strong capabilities such as problem-solving, pattern recognition, strategic thinking, relational reasoning and innovation.

Many adapted dyslexics do not realise they are dyslexic. Instead, they notice that tasks involving reading, writing, studying or processing information may require more effort and energy than expected. They may observe that others seem to manage these demands more easily, particularly in academic or information-heavy contexts.

All dyslexic thinkers adapt in some way. This booklet focuses on those who have developed strategies to navigate education and workplace systems with greater consistency over time.

What does 'adapted dyslexic' mean?

The term adapted dyslexic is used in this booklet to describe dyslexic individuals who have developed effective strategies to navigate and succeed within systems not designed for dyslexic thinking.

This group is often referred to in research as 'compensated dyslexics', estimated to represent around 25% of the dyslexic population.

The term adapted dyslexic is used here intentionally. It highlights the ongoing adaptation required while also recognising the strengths of dyslexic thinking that make this possible.

About this booklet

This booklet draws on my experience as an accountant, an adapted dyslexic, more than ten years working in the dyslexia and neurodiversity sector, and extensive conversations with other adapted dyslexics.

Not everything in this booklet will reflect your experience. Adapted dyslexics are not a single type. While core dyslexic strengths tend to be consistent, the challenges associated with dyslexic thinking vary widely.

In my experience, this variation is shaped by the adaptive strategies individuals developed over time. These are influenced by factors such as:

- the level of parent or adult support during childhood
- individual executive functioning profiles
- when dyslexia was identified, whether in childhood or later in adulthood.

If this material resonates or challenges your thinking, you are welcome to get in touch and share your perspective.

I hope you find it useful.

Chris
(she/her/dyslexic)



Characteristics of Adapted Dyslexics



Reading, spelling and writing

Reading by 'gist'

- May enjoy reading, especially when the story can be easily grasped and visualised, such as familiar topics, high-interest material, or fiction.
- Overall meaning is constructed quickly and effectively but understanding the precise meaning of each word can require more effort.
- Use general knowledge, visual memory, and problem-solving to understand overall meaning without needing to process every word.
- Read fiction or material on known subjects efficiently, often overlooking unfamiliar words, yet can still understand the overall meaning.
- Find non-fiction and text-heavy material, such as textbooks, reports and industry journals, more demanding, often requiring breaks, shorter reading periods, or multiple attempts to finish.

- May struggle with tasks that require precise understanding of every word, such as exam questions or maths word problems, where the overall meaning is misinterpreted.

Spelling

- Often competent or strong spellers.
- Rely primarily on their strong visual memory for spelling. If they “can see the word in their head, they know how to spell it”. Phonetic strategies (sounding out the word) are less reliable.
- Can recognise that a word looks misspelt without immediately knowing how to correct it.
- Proofread own written work using visual pattern recognition. As a result, may miss incorrect spellings, especially when similar words have similar visual shapes, for example ‘does’ and ‘dose’.
- When proofreading others’ work, errors can jump out more easily.

Writing

- When writing an email, report, or essay, tends to be concise and focused on the key message, often leaving out “fluff”. Fluff refers to extra wording used to complete sentences or convey politeness, such as starting an email with “How are you doing?” before getting to the main point.
- Prefer to write in bullet points as it reduces cognitive load and allows ideas to be structured clearly.
- Writing with bullet points supports getting ideas down quickly before they are lost.
- May need more time to find the words to easily describe their ideas, thoughts or recommendations.
- May use various words interchangeably to describe the same idea, plan or framework. For dyslexics, this occurs because the underlying thought, mental image, or sense of the concept remains consistent, regardless of the specific words they choose to describe it.





Working style

This section describes how adapted dyslexics typically approach tasks, focus, and problem-solving in day-to-day work and study.

Focus

- Can enter a 'focus mode' when the big picture clicks and they can clearly see the connections and the solution to the issue at hand.
- This focus is driven by the ability to process thoughts and ideas in large jumps, often taking in and connecting information in a non-linear way.
- When in 'focus mode', communication can become more direct and concise in both speech and writing.
- When in 'focus mode', interruptions that require explanation or detail can disrupt the flow of thinking, making it difficult to hold onto the original idea.
- When in 'focus mode', there can be a strong drive to express the idea immediately before it disappears. This can lead to interrupting others and give the impression that they are not paying attention.



Thinking differently and at different speeds

- Ideas may not be understood easily or as quickly by other colleagues. When explaining the ideas, it can take time to translate what they are into a format that others can understand easily. The thinking often exists as a visual or sense, making it more effortful to match this to words.
- Have a different way of seeing information, focusing on the big picture in a way that others may not. This enables deeper connections and a natural movement towards more big-picture and conceptual thinking.
- Have a natural inclination towards solution-focused thinking, seeking to improve through efficiency and effectiveness.
- May need support to break big ideas into clear steps. Sequencing these steps can be difficult to hold and organise mentally, often requiring additional time or an external structure.

- Often motivated to contribute to the greater good and improve things for others. Tend to be generous with time and ideas, working to improve systems and processes, and thereby improve people's well-being, often without seeking recognition and compensation.
- Needs to understand the bigger picture and how things connect to fully grasp ideas, concepts, and how to answer questions or complete tasks. Without this understanding, additional time and effort may be spent working it out through research, questions or spending more time on the task. They are likely to keep it hidden as they work independently to understand the big picture.
- Prefers having examples or templates to work from, as this provides clarity on what is required. For instance, a completed form helps to show the level of detail expected. Without this guide, it can be harder to judge how much information to include, sometimes resulting in too little or too much detail.

Workaround strategies

- Has developed effective strategies to manage dyslexic challenges, such as writing things down to support memory, particularly when information is given verbally.
- Often invests more time and effort into written tasks. Ordering and sequencing ideas can require more conscious effort to achieve a logical flow.
- May find they have to reorder sentences to grammatically improve flow and readability.

For example:

- Original: ... ' having to add in additional words to make **correct reading sentences.**'
- Corrected: ... 'having to add in additional words to make **sentences read correctly.**'

Working style traits

This section describes recurring traits and patterns that emerge from the dyslexic working style, including both strength and hidden costs.



Masking

- Masking is an adaptive strategy that often develops during the schooling years, whether or not the dyslexia is recognised. It involves using a range of approaches to maintain performance, such as spending more time and effort than their peers to maintain workload, understanding instructions and rely heavily on strong visual memory to retain and apply information.
- Masking consumes a large amount of energy and mental resources. During periods of transition, where new learning and unfamiliar demands are high, this can increase pressure as the usual strategies are less effective. This may show up as increased effort, fatigue or anxiety. Examples of transitions include starting a new work role, working with a new manager, beginning a new job, experiencing high-stress situations outside of work, or changes in systems.

- Masking is often linked to anxiety, particularly the risk of being exposed or misunderstood. Examples of what can cause anxiety vary for dyslexics but relate to their difficulties, such as pronouncing words or verbally given information like email addresses or phone numbers. In these situations, anxiety spikes and takes the brain offline, impairing cognitive function.
- Sustained masking, alongside the ongoing use of multiple strategies to keep up in the workplace or with expectations, can lead to fatigue and burnout over time.
- There is often a strong drive to contribute to the greater good and improve things for others. When this effort is not recognised or valued over time, it can lead to frustration and a sense of being undervalued, particularly after sustained contribution.

Autonomy

- There is often a preference for autonomy in how work is approached. This can include flexibility in work hours, overseeing a specific area at work, influence over how a project develops, or working independently as a contractor. This autonomy serves as a motivator and does not reduce productivity.

Acceptance of change

- Dyslexic thinking often supports openness to new ideas and different ways of doing things with change seen as an opportunity for innovation and improvement.
- Big picture thinking supports seeing change as part of a larger process rather than an isolated event.

Visual-based strength

- Information is often taken in and retained more effectively when it is visual.
- When giving directions, communication may lean on visual clues and hand gestures rather than directional language. For example, 'go this way' while pointing with their hands or 'when you see the white building with a blue door', instead of using a specific street name or directions such as 'turn right on West Street'.



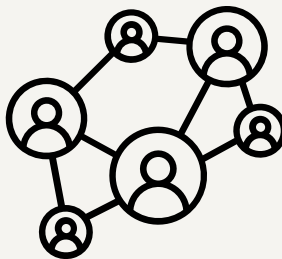
Communication

Intuitive communication style

- Strong ability to read people and instinctively understand group dynamics supporting cohesion within teams or groups and increasing engagement in workshops or meetings.
- Under stress or when masking is high, this intuitive awareness can increase sensitivity to perceived negative communication from others.
- Clear and explicit communication and instructions are often preferred, reducing the need to interpret or decipher meaning. Verbal information can become harder to process when body language contradicts spoken words or when communication is too wordy.

Simplification of information

- Strong ability to take large amounts of seemingly unconnected information and simplify it into clear, easy to understand forms, often using diagrams, stories or verbal explanation.
- Uses a range of internal mental frameworks to organise ideas and concepts, allowing new information to integrate easily and quickly. When the full picture is not yet clear, additional information is often sought or researched to strengthen and complete these mental frameworks.



Definition of dyslexic thinking

Strengths

These strengths reflect natural tendencies and default ways of thinking. They often work intuitively and without conscious effort.

Big picture thinker: Excel at seeing the overall concept or idea rather than getting lost in detail.

Solution focused and problem solver: Approach challenges with a focus on finding solutions, often thinking creatively and outside the box.

Visual based learner: Learn most effectively through visual input and hands-on experiences, using images and spatial skills to understand and retain information.

Deep insight into others and empathy: Strong ability to read people, understand different perspectives and respond in ways that build deep connections.

Connection to greater good: Often have a strong sense of purpose and motivated to contribute positively to society, wanting to make meaningful impacts and promote social change.

Curiosity: Naturally inclined to explore new ideas and seek knowledge.

Definition of dyslexic thinking

Higher Effort Zones

These reflect areas that require more cognitive effort or time, rather than limitations in ability.

More effort to easily learn to read, write and spell:

Typically need more time and effort to master these skills due to differences with language processing.

Difficulty with ordering and sequencing information:

Organising information into a logical sequence can require more effort, affecting tasks such as following instructions or expressing ideas coherently.

Short-term memory challenges (visual and/or auditory):

Holding visual or auditory information over short periods can be less reliable, which can impact learning and daily tasks.

Increased effort to process auditory information:

Processing spoken language quickly and accurately can require more effort affecting listening comprehension.

Risk of anxiety and low self-esteem: When dyslexia is unsupported or unrecognised, ongoing effort and misunderstanding can contribute to anxiety and reduced confidence in specific situations. Access to appropriate support and strategies is important.

Dyslexic thinking advantages in the workplace

Thinking style that leads to innovation:

- Seeing the larger context of a problem or project without being caught in detail.
- Approaching problems in unconventional ways.
- Generating original solutions that others may not consider.

Ability to influence:

- Building, supporting and empowering teams, colleagues, and clients.
- Demonstrating leadership through the ability to connect with and influence others.

Communication style:

- Simplifying complex information and explaining it in a clear, accessible way.

Adaptability:

- Showing curiosity and exploring new ideas and concepts.
- Sees change as an opportunity for innovation and improvement.

Adapted dyslexia checklist

(Not all items may apply.)

- Enjoys reading.
- Reads by gist (works out the overall meaning without needing to understand every word).
- Finds reading text-heavy books or articles requires more effort.
- Can spell well and relies on visual memory for spelling.
- Prefers writing in bullet points, without adding extra words.
- Communication can become more direct and to the point when focusing on an idea or task.
- Invests more time and effort into written tasks.
- Thinks differently from colleagues.
- Grasps ideas and concepts quickly, often ahead of others.
- May need more time to clearly articulate ideas and thoughts (especially in group settings).

- Has a natural inclination to improve processes, focusing on effectiveness and efficiency.
- Needs to understand the big picture of a task or project before knowing how to begin.
- Retains information easier when it is visual.
- Masks any struggles with retaining information, not understanding the big picture, writing, or reading tasks.
- Has an intuitive communication style.
- Prefers clear and explicit communication to reduce the need to interpret meaning.
- Has a strong ability to simplify complex concepts and information.
- Often has a strong sense of justice and fairness.
- Skilled at identifying patterns and connections within the environment, among individuals and with information.
- Prefers autonomy in the workplace.

If any of this resonates, the next step
is to explore what it looks like
in your context.

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