

The chart below lists both the possible strengths and the possible challenges typical of students with dyslexia at different stages in their education. It is normal for any student to exhibit some of these challenges for short periods of time, but a student with dyslexia may exhibit several of these challenges over time. These challenges are “often **unexpected** in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction” (Adapted from International Dyslexia Association, 2002). Students with dyslexia typically have weaknesses in written language development, and some students have language impairments that impact oral language development as well. These weaknesses can be surrounded by a “sea of strengths” (Shaywitz, 2003). Over time, students learn to apply compensatory strategies that may their mask difficulties in reading, spelling, and language. Taken together, these lists of possible strengths and challenges can provide clues about the characteristics of dyslexia.

	POSSIBLE STRENGTHS	POSSIBLE CHALLENGES
Pre K to Grade 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Curiosity ➤ A great imagination ➤ Creative ➤ Eager to embrace new ideas ➤ Maturity beyond their years 	<p>General</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Has a family history of reading/spelling difficulties ➤ Confuses left and right; delay in hand dominance ➤ Has trouble reciting the alphabet, numbers, days of the week, or other sequences ➤ Has trouble learning common nursery rhymes such as “Jack and Jill” ➤ Has difficulty recognizing rhyming patterns (<i>cat, bat, rat</i>) <p>Speaking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Is late learning to talk ➤ Mispronounces words by mixing up sounds (<i>mawn lower</i>) ➤ Has trouble naming letters, matching letters to sounds, or blending sounds ➤ Confuses names or pronunciations of letters with similar sounds (<i>p/b; z/s; v/f; d/t</i>)
Grades 1 to 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The ability to solve practical problems ➤ Strong listening comprehension ➤ Easily understands new concepts ➤ Large oral vocabulary for his/her age ➤ Enjoyment in solving puzzles ➤ Talent at building models 	<p>General</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lacks fast, effortless recognition of numbers and simple math facts <p>Speaking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mispronounces words by mixing up sounds (<i>cinnamon</i> for <i>synonym</i>) ➤ Has difficulty breaking spoken words apart into sounds or syllables <p>Reading/Spelling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Has difficulty sounding out simple words (<i>cat, map, nap</i>) ➤ Complains about how hard reading or spelling is, or avoids reading ➤ Has trouble reading/spelling sounds in sequence (<i>left</i> for <i>felt</i>) ➤ Reading is inaccurate, slow, and/or is not automatic ➤ Spells words incorrectly, even common high frequency words (<i>was, were, then</i>) ➤ Relies on pictures or memorization when reading ➤ Confuses similar-looking letters and words (<i>b/d, p/q, was/saw</i>)

	POSSIBLE STRENGTHS	POSSIBLE CHALLENGES
Grades 3 to 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Large vocabulary for his/her age ➤ Strong comprehension of stories read/told to him ➤ Strong thinking skills: conceptualization, reasoning, imagination, abstraction ➤ Ability to get the “big picture” 	<p>General</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Has trouble recalling dates, names, telephone numbers, random lists, math facts ➤ Has low self-esteem or anxiety <p>Speaking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Confuses words that sound alike (<i>tornado</i> for <i>volcano</i>, <i>lotion</i> for <i>ocean</i>) ➤ Uses imprecise language (<i>stuff</i>, <i>things</i>) ➤ Oral language abilities much higher than writing skills <p>Reading/Spelling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reading is slow, inaccurate, or halting/choppy ➤ Has trouble reading unfamiliar words; difficulty sounding out multisyllabic words ➤ Lacks strategies for sounding out new words ➤ Avoids reading aloud ➤ Has poor spelling and/or handwriting ➤ Spells words the way they sound, rather than the way they look ➤ Avoids reading and writing tasks; strongly prefers word processing
Grades 6 to 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A high level of understanding of what is read aloud ➤ A sophisticated spoken vocabulary ➤ Strong in areas not dependent on reading, such as math, computers, and visual arts ➤ Strong in conceptual subjects, such as philosophy, science, social studies, and creative writing ➤ Exceptional empathy and warmth, emotional intelligence 	<p>General</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Has trouble finishing tests on time ➤ Has difficulty learning a foreign language or reading music ➤ Has low self-esteem or anxiety ➤ Has to study more than peers <p>Speaking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Pauses or hesitates when speaking, using <i>um</i> and <i>like</i> repeatedly ➤ Mispronounces multisyllabic, unfamiliar, or complicated words ➤ Uses imprecise language, for example, <i>stuff</i>, <i>things</i> ➤ Seems to need extra time to respond to questions ➤ Oral language abilities much higher than writing skills <p>Reading/spelling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reading and writing are slower than peers ➤ Needs to reread for meaning ➤ May answer higher-level questions about text but miss easier, literal questions ➤ Avoids writing; compositions are brief and simplistic ➤ Poor spelling and/or handwriting ➤ Suffers fatigue when reading; avoids reading

POSSIBLE STRENGTHS

- Successful when focused on a highly specialized content area
- Excellence in writing if content is the focus and spelling is not important
- Exceptional empathy and warmth, emotional intelligence
- Success in areas not dependent on rote memory
- Talent for high-level conceptualization and original insights
- Big-picture thinking
- Inclination to think outside of the box
- Noticeable resilience and ability to adapt

POSSIBLE CHALLENGES

General

- Has low self-esteem or anxiety
- Knowledge not reflected in standardized test scores
- Has to study more than peers

Speaking

- Not fluent, often anxious while speaking
- Pauses or hesitates when speaking, using *um* and *like* repeatedly
- Uses imprecise language, for example, *stuff*, *things*
- Struggles to retrieve words (“tip of my tongue” moments)
- Often pronounces names incorrectly; trips over parts of words; avoids saying words that might be mispronounced
- Has difficulty remembering names of people and places; confuses names that sound alike
- Struggles when put on the spot in conversations or writing
- Spoken vocabulary is smaller than listening vocabulary

Reading/spelling

- Reading requires great effort and at a slow pace
- Rarely reads for pleasure
- Avoids reading aloud
- Avoids writing; handwritten compositions are brief and simplistic
- Word processed compositions can be disorganized and lack cohesion
- Has poor spelling and/or handwriting
- Has difficulty determining the correct spelling of words, even when using a spell checker while word processing