

Guide to Assessments for Adults with Dyslexia

by Melanie Jameson

- 1. Why be assessed?**
- 2. Self assessment / routes to formal assessment**
- 3. Tutor assessments**
- 4. Assessment following a Doctor's referral**
- 5. Assessment through Jobcentre Plus**
- 6. Assessment of students**
- 7. A psychological assessment**
- 8. Points to bear in mind**
- 9. Jargon and terminology**

1. WHY BE ASSESSED?

We recommend getting an assessment since it identifies your strengths and dyslexic weaknesses and is needed to get help through official channels, in particular for students eligible for assistance through the Disabled Students Allowance. In the case of those who are employed or ready for work, it will help to identify the types of support that would be helpful in the workplace (such as a dictaphone) or any further training in preparation for work.

Although you may have been assessed as a child or teenager, an up-to-date assessment is generally required. However a copy of any earlier assessments are sometimes useful as proof of dyslexia.

2. SELF ASSESSMENT and ROUTES TO FORMAL ASSESSMENT

There is no definitive 'dyslexia test' but there are checklists and screening tests which can indicate a likelihood of dyslexia. For the reasons mentioned in Section 1, it is advisable to have a formal assessment.

In some instances a screening test will be arranged - this is to determine (at low cost) whether there are dyslexic problems which necessitate a full assessment.

Assessments can be carried out by psychologists or appropriately qualified and experienced tutors. You must always check that the psychologist you approach is experienced in assessing adults with dyslexia. The majority of Educational Psychologists are more accustomed to doing children's assessments.

ROUTES TO ASSESSMENT FOR THE EMPLOYED or UNEMPLOYED

Through Human Resources or the Disability Employment Adviser at Jobcentre Plus

ROUTES TO ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENTS

Through Student Services or privately.

Student support services may have negotiated a special rate or, in the case of HE, you may be able to use the Access Fund. Ensure the assessor has a Practising Certificate if you. You may be eligible for the Disabled Students Allowances (See Section 6)

Some private institutions may have bursaries (funds set aside for people who are unable to pay).

Assessments by Tutors may be available at Adult Education Centres - these will usually be free.

In some areas it is possible to get an assessment through a hospital clinic.

3. TUTOR ASSESSMENT

Suitably qualified teachers* can carry out assessments which focus on the learning needs of the individual; these will combine an interview with short tests of literacy, memory, information processing and (sometimes) numeracy skills. Tutor assessments may be available at adult education colleges / centres or through organisations such as the British Dyslexia Association (www.bdadyslexia.org.uk) and Dyslexia Action (www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk).

**Acceptable qualifications include the OCR Diploma in Specific Learning Difficulties, appropriate MA or MEd modules, and specific courses such as those run by the Helen Arkell centre. Tutors will generally have AMBDA after their name]*

4. ASSESSMENT FOLLOWING A DOCTOR'S REFERRAL

Unfortunately, many doctors are unable to advise on dyslexia. However it is possible to be referred to an Educational Psychologist by your GP. Assessments by Chartered Psychologists can sometimes be paid for through BUPA (private medical insurance). In some areas of the country a hospital or medical centre may carry out assessments. Sometimes dyslexic people approach their doctor because they are suffering from anxiety or depression. In this case, they might be referred to a Clinical Psychologist who may carry out an assessment for dyslexia (see Section 8) and offer counselling alongside medical treatment. Reports will be forwarded to your doctor rather than to you so it is important to discuss how you can have access to the dyslexia assessment information in a useful form.

It is important to be referred to a Psychologist who specialises in **adult developmental dyslexia** - the medical profession is more clued up about **acquired dyslexia** which is a different condition.

5. ASSESSMENT THROUGH JOBCENTRE PLUS

If you have difficulty finding work or problems in work which you believe may be due to dyslexia, speak to your local Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) at Jobcentre Plus. After an interview with the DEA you may be referred to the Works Psychologist for an assessment which focuses on employment potential and difficulties. Help may be available through either the Access to Work programme (in which a partnership between the employer and Jobcentre Plus provides necessary equipment / training) or a work preparation programme. **It is important that any literacy training is delivered by a dyslexia specialist.** Some Works Psychologists are being directed not to diagnose dyslexia but simply refer to 'dyslexic tendencies' and it seems to be getting harder to receive training that focuses on remediating dyslexic difficulties.

6. ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS

Dyslexic students require a recent assessment to determine whether they need on-course support and special examination arrangements, such as extra time or the use of a word processor. Because of the cost involved, a screening test may initially be carried out.

Some students encounter great difficulty in getting assessments because of cost and availability of suitably qualified and experienced experts. Financial help may be accessible through access funds or the student hardship fund. The first port of call should be Student Services or the Learning Support Service who should advise on the accepted route for the particular institution.

Previously, assessments establishing the existence of dyslexia (diagnostic assessments) were generally carried out by educational psychologists. However it is now increasingly common for assessments to be carried out by suitably qualified tutors with a Diploma in Specific Learning Difficulties, or appropriate MA qualification. (They will often use the letters AMBDA after their name)

In the case of Higher Education, if Student Finance England is satisfied that diagnostic assessment indicates the individual's disability is judged to impede study, it will authorise and pay for an assessment of needs - this is usually divided into a learning needs

assessment and an assessment of technology needs to decide on appropriate equipment. The latter may be carried out at an Access Centre.

Many dyslexic students are able to claim the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA). This can cover (1) equipment, such as a computer, (2) specialist tuition and (3) certain further costs. The DSA is available for dyslexic students on full and part-time Higher Education courses and some post-graduate courses. Following a review in 2014, DSA funding is likely to be reduced.

7. A PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Finding a suitable Psychologist is not always easy. Local dyslexia associations can sometimes make recommendations. If you contact a branch of the Dyslexia Action make sure that you are being referred to someone with experience of adults. Another option is contacting educational establishments for advice.

Psychologists will generally have specialised in one of the following areas: Educational Psychology, Clinical Psychology, Occupational Psychology (and be known as Works Psychologists) or Neuropsychology. They may well be registered as Chartered Psychologists.

It is most important to check the following:

- the psychologist you approach is experienced in assessing adults with developmental dyslexia;
- you inform him or her why you require the assessment;
- you clarify the price in advance;
- you request a full test summary with subtest scores;
- you discuss the option of access to the psychologist after the assessment to deal with any questions you might have.

Psychologists generally use the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scales in order to assess strengths and weaknesses in a range of areas.

8. POINTS TO BEAR IN MIND WHEN UNDERTAKING AN ASSESSMENT:

- the assessment is designed to sample your areas of strength and weakness in order to observe how you approach certain tasks;
- do not regard this as a school test where low scores imply lack of effort or stupidity;
- before your visit, think about the ways dyslexia seems to affect you and jot a few notes down to remind you to mention these things;
- if you are a student, provide information on your course and be sure to discuss anticipated difficulties with examinations;
- if you are an employee, take the opportunity to bring up problems at work;
- do tell the assessor if you become exhausted or "over-loaded" - you may need to take a break;
- if you have difficulty understanding the report because of jargon or feel the need of counselling and support, contact the psychologist or ADO.

9. JARGON / TERMINOLOGY

- ◆ **acquired dyslexia:** dyslexia as a consequence of head injury, a stroke or encephalitis (brain inflammation).

- ◆ **auditory** or **aural** concern listening
 - ◆ **(per)centile**: your ranking out of 100 people of the same age eg 20th percentile for spelling means that if 100 people of your age were tested for spelling, you would rank 20th with 80 people above you and 19 below.
 - ◆ **chronological age** means your actual age (this can sometimes be compared with a reading/spelling age but these measures should not be used for adults)
 - ◆ **cognitive**: to do with thinking.
 - ◆ **developmental dyslexia**: dyslexia you are born with; this is a widespread condition, affecting 4% of the population severely.
 - ◆ **IQ** stands for Intelligence Quotient. 100 is regarded as the average.
 - ◆ **neurological**: to do with the physical structure of the brain.
 - ◆ **motor skills** these subdivides into:
 - 1) **fine motor skills**: required for handwriting, dressing, fiddly jobs such as changing a plug.
 - 2) **gross motor skills**: required for balance, ball games, swimming etc
 - ◆ **oral** concerns spoken language
(the words “oral” and “aural” are often pronounced the same).
 - ◆ **sequential** means in (the correct) order.
 - ◆ **short-term memory** this is memory for what has just been heard or read as opposed to long-term memory for past events.
- standardised score** 100 is the midpoint and the average range is regarded as between 85 and 115. About one person in 50 scores below 70 and one in 50 scores above 130