

Writing with Dyslexia

Most strategies recommended for students with dyslexia are based on general best practices for any writer.

Like other writing strategies, studies advise to start out working on short excerpts and to break ideas down into small units, before tackling larger, complex structures.

However, in order to better serve the needs of students with dyslexia, studies highlight how oral and aural elements can help improve writing and reading skills.

For example, many strategies involve either reading your own text aloud or having others read it aloud, and providing oral rather than written feedback.

In addition, you may privilege clarity in the connections between ideas over meticulously correct spelling and grammar in the initial stages of the writing process.

WRITING STRATEGIES:

1. PRE-WRITING EXERCISES:

- Outlines: use **key-words** rather than full sentences.
- **Tell someone** else about the topic. They can write down the structure, read it to you, and give feedback (alternatively, you can record yourself).
- Work with **short prompts**. Break down complicated ideas into sets of **smaller questions**.
- Use **models of argumentative writing** or a **checklist of questions**. For example:
 - o What is your **claim**?
 - o What are the **grounds** or **data** (scientific or documentary) for your claim?
 - o How are the grounds or data **linked** to the claim?
 - o Is there additional **support** or **backing** for the claim and data?
 - o Does the claim need to be **qualified**?
 - o Are there **counter-arguments** or **rebuttals** that need to be addressed?

2. COMPOSING A DRAFT:

- When getting stuck writing, **record yourself** explaining ideas.
- **Start in the middle**, with the story-telling material/details of an argument (introductions and conclusions are easier to write at the end).

2 stepwise methods:

OSWALD (James Madison University's Special Education Program):

Outline major points

Say the outline out loud, think about the connections between the points and which are the most important

Write paragraphs about the most important ideas first

Add connections between the paragraphs

Look at the connections by re-reading your paper

Draft a conclusion reframing the initial important points

WRITE (2007 study by Harris, Graham, Mason, Friedlander & Reid):

Work from a plan to develop thesis statement, start with an attention getter

Remember your goals (vocabulary, organization, varied sentence types, maintain topic control)

Include a transition word for every paragraph

Try to use different words and kinds of sentences

Exciting, interesting words to draw attention to the main idea or materials

3. REVISING AND EDITING:

- Use a **Revision checklist**. Go from the larger towards more detailed concerns. Consider addressing some of the following items, **utilizing the technologies** below for additional help when appropriate.
 - What is the **principal thesis/idea** of the paper?
Is it clearly expressed in the introduction and conclusion?
 - What is the **governing idea of every paragraph**?
Is it this clearly explained in the paragraph's topic sentence?
Is it clear how this idea relates to the principal thesis/idea of the paper?
 - Is the **idea in every sentence** clearly expressed?
 - Are the **connections between sentences** clear?
 - Are all sentences **complete, grammatically correct** constructions?
 - Is the **correct and consistent terminology** used?
 - Is a **diverse vocabulary** used?
Are the relationships between sentences and words clear when synonyms are used?
 - **Citations**
 - **Capitals and Italics**
 - **Punctuation & Spelling**

- Editing: **Focus on one thing** at the time (e.g. you can use different colors for different kinds of edits).
- Use **peer editing** or advanced spell-checking programs.
- **Have someone read** paragraphs, thesis statements, etc. aloud to you.
- **Editing checklist: SCOPE** (James Madison University's Special Education Program):
 - Spelling
 - Capitalization
 - Order of words
 - Punctuation
 - Express complete thoughts in each sentence

TECHNOLOGY THAT CAN HELP

Naturalreader: Offers free Text-To-Speech. You can paste text or import documents into the tool, which the program will read aloud. <https://www.naturalreaders.com/index.html>

OnlineOCR: Converts text in image files into digital text that can be read by a computer. <https://www.onlineocr.net/>

Talktyper: Online dictation tool that types out what you are saying. <https://talktyper.com/>

SELECTED READINGS ON DYSLEXIA:

Claudia Gonzalez, "The Dyslexic PhD Experience" (2016) <http://phdtalk.blogspot.com/2016/03/the-dyslexic-phd-experience.html>

Amy Benson Brown, "Is Dislexia or ADHD Affecting Your Writing Process?" (2014) <https://www.academiccoachingandwriting.org/academic-writing/academic-writing-blog/viii-is-adhd-or-dyslexia-affecting-your-writing-process>

Judith Williams, "The Dyslexic Lecturer: Making Mistakes Shows my Human Side" (2013) <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2013/oct/18/dyslexic-university-lecturer-judith-williams>

Sandra F. Rief and Judith M. Stern, *The Dyslexia Checklist: A Practical Reference for Parents and Teachers* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2010). [Google Books: <https://books.google.com/books?id=yEgxjLGIZXAC>]

Joanna Nijakowska, *Dyslexia in the Foreign Language Classroom* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2010). [Yale online: <http://search.library.yale.edu/catalog/11719493?counter=2>]

David McLoughlin, *The Dislexic Adult: Interventions and Outcomes: An Evidence Based Approach* (Hoboken: Blackwell, 2013). [Yale online: <http://search.library.yale.edu/catalog/11843116>]