



Does my student have reading difficulties?

Your guide to understanding student reading progress

This guide was published in 2022 by Learning Links
Suite 3, Level 1, 140 Bourke Rd
PO Box 6282
Alexandria NSW 2015
mail@learninglinks.org.au
www.learninglinks.org.au

© Learning Links, 2022

Introduction

About This Resource

Children and adolescents will learn to read at different speeds.

It is natural to make mistakes when learning something new.

But at some point, you might start to worry about the speed of learning to read, or the number of mistakes.

Here's our guide to help you identify when you should (or shouldn't) be worried about reading progress, or signs of Dyslexia.

About Learning Links

Learning Links is a not-for-profit charitable organisation with over 50 years of practice helping children and young people with learning difficulties. Our mission of providing all children and young people with the very best opportunity to learn and live a full, rewarding life, unlimited by circumstance. We've been working with children and families since 1972 to provide services and family support to unlock children's unique talents, foster individual strengths, ignite a passion for learning and support children to fulfil the dreams they have for themselves.

Professional Development

Our professionals have been providing high quality professional learning through our range of webinars, workshops and online courses since 1992. We work in close collaboration with schools, teachers, early childhood settings and allied health professionals to provide practical, relevant and evidence-informed resources and strategies to help professionals to build their capacity in their own inclusive practice to empower even more children with the social, academic and life skills they need to thrive.



Is it Dyslexia?

Dyslexia describes persistent challenges with reading and spelling accuracy and fluency that are responding slowly to evidence-based support. These challenges with reading and spelling accuracy and fluency are greater than other areas of learning, including comprehension, writing and mathematics. It is a formal label diagnosed after a comprehensive assessment by an Educational Psychologist.

However, many children and adolescents will be challenged in reading and spelling without the formal label of Dyslexia. They will still benefit from (and need) screening assessments, increased frequency of intensity of intervention and technology supports.

This guide is a way to focus your attention on the things that matter in reading and spelling and to most importantly provide assistance to children and adolescents when they demonstrate any of these risk factors.



Before School

Formal reading instruction doesn't begin until formal schools starts, however there are some indicators that this might be more challenging for some children than others.

There is no known family history of learning difficulties or Dyslexia

YES ☐ NO ☐

The young child's speech is clear to others outside of the family

YES ☐ NO ☐

The young child recognises some letters in the environment (M in McDonalds, letter in own name)

YES ☐ NO ☐

All yes? Great start.

Being able to speak clearly and recognise some letter symbols in the familiar environment is a good start for reading. Additionally, knowing there is no known or persistent history of familial learning difficulties means we can allow the young child to continue to develop an interest in reading independently, without specific early intervention.

Did you tick some no's?

That's okay – there's plenty of time yet. It is the flag to put some things in place. A known family history is helpful to know – early formal instruction in hearing and saying sounds will be a wonderful way to mitigate this in preparing for school.

Difficulties with articulation or pronunciation are common for many young children, a speech screener to identify which sounds are problematic and strategies to help in the years before school will provide a child with the best start possible for reading. Young children who aren't yet recognising familiar sounds can be encouraged to do this in preparation for formal schooling.

Beginning and Early School

As formal schooling starts, learning to read is a huge focus. There is much to learn, and it is expected children will make mistakes when recognising sounds and reading words. It is when these mistakes persist, despite correction, and when early frustrations appear that we need to take a bit of a closer look.

The child is learning to hear and say the individual sounds for reading at a similar pace with peers

YES ☐ NO ☐

The child is learning to blend individual sounds to read short words most of the time

YES ☐ NO ☐

The child is learning to write sounds and some words independently

YES ☐ NO ☐

All yes? This is Great.

There is a lot to learn to read, but it all begins with learning that our 26 letter symbols (graphemes) are combined to represent the 44 sounds (phonemes) for reading. Without knowing this, reading and spelling is impossible (albeit there are many more ways to spell words, 200+). If a child is learning this, they are on their way for successful reading and spelling.

Did you tick some no's?

This is the perfect time to have found this out. During the initial learning of this vital information errors will be made, but if you're observing many errors when identifying sounds, difficulties in blending these together to read words and spelling that doesn't really represent the sounds, this is the time to drop everything and provide intensive intervention.

Conduct a quick screener to determine which sounds and letters are known – then teach the rest again!

Listen to how the child blends and segments and practice this – for as long as they need! Don't rush ahead – stop now and repeat the process.

Throughout Primary School

It is in these years of primary school where reading is the skill children need to learn information so that they can speak or write about it. Formal reading lessons may not be happening in the classroom, for children who still need this they begin to fall behind their peers significantly.

The child reads paragraphs with good accuracy and fluency most of the time

YES ☐ NO ☐

The child spells a variety of words with good accuracy and fluency

YES ☐ NO ☐

The child independently engages in reading activities

YES ☐ NO ☐

All yes? Terrific!

When you observe children to be reading to learn new things or enjoy a story and then represent this in writing with generally correct spelling, they are now able to read and spell. There will probably be more complex spelling rules to learn, but these skills that enable and demonstrate learning are evident. Phew!

Did you tick some no's?

When reading and spelling continues to be effortful and lacks accuracy throughout primary school, there's simply no time to waste. Increase the intensity of your systematic synthetic phonics interventions. Consider an assessment to ascertain if there are other explanations for these persistent reading difficulties. Begin to consider and introduce technology supports for reading and spelling to maintain learning and motivation to keep learning to read and spell. Keep going.

In High School

Starting high school without the necessary skills in reading and spelling is an incredible, and sometimes debilitating disadvantage. On top of this is the emotional stigma of repeated experiences of failure. This takes some clever and collaborative supports for the adolescent – but you have to identify them first.

The adolescent will read aloud in class activities

YES ☐ NO ☐

The adolescent reads passages in the allotted or expected time.

YES ☐ NO ☐

The adolescents' writing can be read in terms of mainly correct spelling.

YES ☐ NO ☐

All yes? Super!

Adolescents don't have to love reading and spelling (although it is a huge bonus if they do), but they need to be able to do it and to do it in a timely manner to keep up with the curriculum demands of high school. If you're not observing significant time constraints when reading and the written work can be read, get on with the job of teaching.

Did you tick some no's?

Begin with a case history, find out if they have previously had any assessments or supports. Engage with them to find out that they want to do, what has worked for them previously and how are they feeling about this ... The only way to learn to read and spell is to be taught to read and spell! If there's a way to do this in the school environment (before school, at lunch, after school, in place of another class) and the adolescent is willing to do this, do it! But, if this isn't possible, technology supports are essential – speech to text and text to speech. Learning must be able to occur, even when reading and spelling is hard. Assessments may inform or enable special provisions or help with planning beyond schooling years.

How Learning Links Can Help

Speech and Language Screeners

Learning Links' Speech Pathologists offer a 30-minute screening test to assess a child's communication skills. Screening tests provide a quick and effective way of identifying preschool aged children who may be at risk of literacy difficulties.

Assessments

Learning Links' Psychologists offer comprehensive academic assessments to identify a child's academic skill level in specific areas and to diagnose specific learning disorders such as Dyslexia and Dyscalculia.

Specialist Tutoring

Learning Links' specialist teachers have extensive experience tailoring literacy and numeracy interventions for children with learning difficulties such as Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, ADHD and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Level 1.

Professional Development

Learning Links' Specialist Teachers, Early Childhood Educators, Psychologists and Speech Pathologists deliver a range of webinars and courses that provide evidence-based, practical strategies to support a range of difficulties in reading, writing, spelling, maths, organisation and communication.





Alexandria - Support Office
Suite 3, Level 1 140 Bourke Rd, Alexandria NSW 2015

www.learninglinks.org.au